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Kindle-ing discussion about learning



By Judy O'Connell

Amazon has launched a third-generation Kindle ebook reader that is now available outside the United States for the first time since its launch in November 2007. From October 19, the 'U.S. and International Wireless' Kindle began shipping to more than 100 countries, including Australia. The Kindle can store up to 1500 books, weighs 289.2 grams, features a six-inch electronic paper display, and can run for up to four days without charging with wireless turned on, or over a week with wireless turned off. For regular operation there are no monthly fees or subscriptions required to use the Kindle, besides the cost of books you purchase from Amazon.

The Kindle has a monochrome 'electronic paper' screen rather than the pervasive LCD screens found on laptops, iPhones and BlackBerries. Also known as epaper or eink, the electronic paper screen comes a lot closer to replicating the appearance of traditional printed paper. Although the contrast is not quite as high as print (the background is not quite white and the text is a little grey), reading on the Kindle is very comfortable. Better still, the quality does not degrade in strong sunlight as is often the case for LCD screens. The Kindle comes only with a USB cable to charge – but use an appropriate adaptor (Mac plug) for charging as well.

My Kindle arrived last Thursday – as my followers on Twitter soon found out. It **was** exciting, as it had been a long time before an international version of the Kindle was made available to us 'downunder'.

There were many at school who had not heard of the Kindle. This to me is all the more reason to get one into your hands, and show it around – simply because such devices as the iPhone, the Kindle, and other handheld ebook readers are trumpeting the arrival of the **eGutenberg** era.

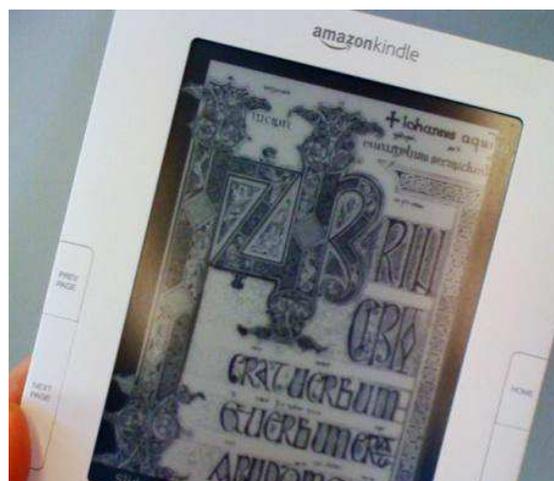
The Kindle has a strong place alongside regular books, providing functionality, portability, and enhanced engagement with text.

I love the Kindle for this. Not (as a colleague thought) because I am touting a commodity in a closed-loop system, but rather because it

needs to be explored and deployed to see how it affects the learning opportunities for our students. After all, Mac and PC have been at it for years with different platforms etc, but that hasn't stopped us getting on with it and making learning happen! The Kindle is new to us here in Australia, so let's talk about it.

OK – so what are my many and varied observations after a few days' play?

The Amazon Kindle is revolutionary. Yes, there are going to be other great ebook readers to arrive (can't wait to see what Apple do) but the Amazon Kindle demonstrates what's possible in a number of ways. The Kindle has a strong place alongside regular books, providing functionality, portability, and enhanced engagement with text. Yes, there are limitations in the international version – and many will tell you about these. But I prefer to look closely at what I can do with a



Kindle for now.

What the Kindle can offer me and my students

Kindle eink <http://www.eink.com/> is easy on the eyes and, once you've got the hang of it, is definitely the most book-like experience I have had on a device. It takes getting used to! Regular iPhone users grab the Kindle and swipe their finger on the screen. But the new techniques for the reader, once acquired, make for seamless reading. Initially I thought the Kindle was too unresponsive – but what it was really was that it needed a different technique to use it well. Read and as you get near the bottom you will press down the next page button, releasing it exactly as you need to. Rather than having to swipe, this means that you can hold the Kindle just the way you would a book, and get on with reading. Yes, it's great for reading anywhere, anytime.

The font size can be changed to suit the reader, as well as the spacing between the words.

Many of the books have an audio function (text-to-speech-enabled) meaning that the Kindle can read to you. Not perfect, a bit computer-like, BUT what a bonus for kids needing reading support! In addition, it has a built-in dictionary to check the meaning of words while you read and the capacity to highlight text and take notes.

The Kindle lets you buy media – books and periodicals – either via the Amazon website or on the Kindle itself via a 3G mobile network data connection called WhisperNet. I was able to order books directly from the Kindle, or directly on MyKindle at Amazon – both methods delivered the full book in less than 30 seconds – with a confirmation email arriving at exactly the same time. Astounding! Users can buy books for the Kindle. The Kindle also lets you browse Wikipedia – at no cost. Other features are disabled in Australia, so no general web browsing!

Regular and new release books can be purchased for less than the physical book. More than 280,000 English-language books are currently available from the Kindle Store, along with more than 85 U.S. and international newspapers and magazines. There are no Australian newspapers available at the moment, but I don't see that as a problem right now as the Kindle newspaper pricing seems a bit steep considering that I can read Australian papers online for free.

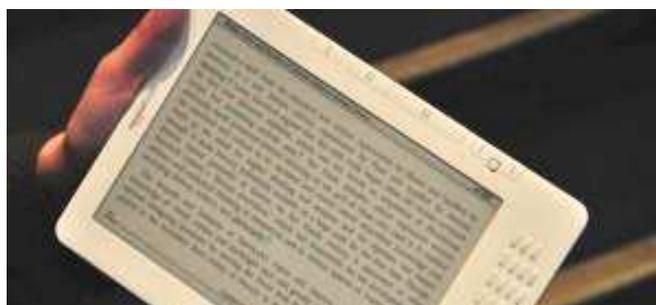
Audio books can also be purchased via Audible <http://www.audible.com>, and used on the Kindle – again a bonus for schools to have a device that covers both audio and text and the bonus of text being read for the student! Of course, audio books are available from other sources – or use mp3 files.

More than 280,000 English-language books are currently available from the Kindle Store, along with more than 85 U.S. and international newspapers and magazines.

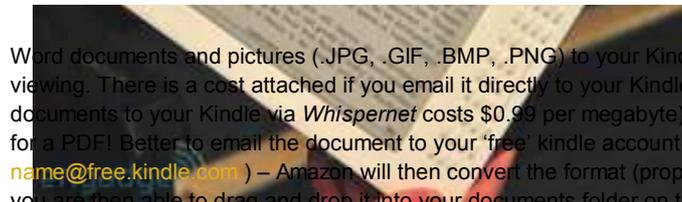
There are many places to find free books to add to the Kindle. Some of these have been converted to Kindle format by Amazon, and can be purchased for a nominal fee.

But I tested a couple of other services – quick and easy for a teacher or school library to manage. I have already used Feedbooks <http://www.feedbooks.com> way back on my Nokia before my iPhone - so off I went. There you'll find **thousands of public domain books and original books from new authors** that you can **read on any mobile device**. Gosh, they have a Kindle format ready to grab!

The new Stanza Desktop <http://www.lexcycle.com/stanza> is also the first program that has a built-in export feature especially for the Amazon Kindle (Read eBooks on your Mac or PC and share with your iPhone, iPod Touch, & Kindle using Stanza). The fact that other ebook repositories have Kindle compatible formats tells me that the Kindle is not about to die any time soon – though the competition with Google books will be interesting. There is also the Barnes and Noble new e-book reader called 'Nook' – hot, both inside and out, but like always, there will be a delay before we can get it in Australia.



Of course, if we also get the iPhone/iTouch App for Kindle, then we'll be really lucky. Being able to pick up from where you left off has got to be another advantage of edevices!



Word documents and pictures (.JPG, .GIF, .BMP, .PNG) to your Kindle for easy on-the-go viewing. There is a cost attached if you email it directly to your Kindle (Transferring personal documents to your Kindle via *Whispernet* costs \$0.99 per megabyte). But I don't recommend that for a PDF! Better to email the document to your 'free' kindle account conversion service (name@free.kindle.com) – Amazon will then convert the format (properly) to Kindle format and you are then able to drag and drop it into your documents folder on the Kindle. I tested them all, and liked how well it all worked.

Documents folder, you ask? That's right – your Kindle connects to your computer, and you can then read it as a HD and manage in the usual way. You can add music – though at this stage I don't think you can activate the feature that would allow music to play in the background while reading.

International limitations?

- No web browsing (and no Google search)
- iPhone Kindle application not available
- More limited range of book and periodical titles
- No access to blogs
- No power adapter (USB cable only)

Do I like the Kindle?

Yes, because it's giving me a way to engage in the ebook era. I have enjoyed hours of reading with my Kindle. I also noticed something else – I could read faster!! My screen reading habits triggered a different response on the Kindle, bringing the best of both worlds together – book reading and screen reading – for both work documents and new releases. Strange!

Will we use some Kindles in 2010? Not sure yet – but I'm interested to learn more about them. The idea of having six Kindles linked to one account seems useful, as does the ability to have so many books to share. The fact that the main account is on Amazon means that an account user will not lose their purchased collection if the Kindle is dropped into the swimming pool.

The fact that the wireless connection links it to a personal credit card is, however, a management problem for schools – time to go out to the newsagent and get one of those fixed amount credit cards to use for tools like this. I am sure there will be more and more of them coming our way.

By the way – the **Kindle DX** is a whole other option . . .

Summary

The Kindle is not new, but it is revolutionary. Some percentage of book lovers, including me, will buy one to add value to their reading and to their beloved paper book collections.

Once you have a Kindle, grab a few guides to fast-track your Kindle experience:

[Kindle2 Cookbook: How To Do Everything The Manual Doesn't Tell You](#) by David Emerson
KindleShortcuts, Hidden Features, The Complete User's Guide to the Amazing Amazon Kindle 2

Getting books

If you're looking for free kindle books try some of these recommended by Kindle Review
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3. [Munsey's](#) - Around 22,193 great free books and they're all in .prc format (Kindle supports it).

