

On-line Learning Script

RACHEL TALLEY SITTING AT COMPUTER: "I'M GOING TO, I'M GOING TO MAKE THIS BIGGER A LITTLE BIT." *COMPUTER SCREEN SHOWS TYPE ENLARGING.*

RACHEL TALLEY SITTING AT COMPUTER, JAWS SAYS: "WEEK 13: DISCUSSING JUSTICE AND THE NUREMBERG AND EICHMANN TRIALS VISITED LINK."

Tenth grader Rachel Talley is taking an on-line history class. She is part of a growing movement of teenage and adult learners across the country who use the Internet to take courses.

COMPUTER: "CONTROL F"

Rachel is vision-impaired and uses screen reading software to read web pages and that makes what was once inaccessible, accessible.

THERESA TATE, TEACHER, WASHINGTON STATE SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND: "WE ARE REALIZING THAT ON-LINE LEARNING IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE POPULAR AND THAT MOST OF THESE STUDENTS WHO DO GO ON TO UNIVERSITY WILL HAVE TO TAKE SOME OF THEIR CLASSES ON-LINE."

The Washington State School for the Blind, in collaboration with the organization, CANnect, is creating on-line courses for students. Theresa Tate developed and teaches on-line Beginning Poetry.

THERESA TATE, TEACHER, WASHINGTON STATE SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND: "FOR OUR STUDENTS, FOR INSTANCE, WE HAVE MANY STUDENTS SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE STATE. THAT ARE, SOME OF THEM ARE IN VERY SMALL RURAL TOWNS WHERE THERE IS A VERY LIMITED NUMBER OF COURSE MATERIAL AVAILABLE FACE TO FACE."

Rachel likes taking classes on-line. But it's not just the courses she likes.

RACHEL TALLEY, 10TH GRADER, WSSB: "BEING ABLE TO TAKE DIFFERENT COURSES THAT AREN'T OFFERED AT YOUR SCHOOL

AND GETTING TO MEET PEOPLE FROM ALL AROUND THE U.S. AND THE WORLD.”

10th-grader Billy Henry says the on-line courses offer him a fast track out of high school.

BILLY HENRY, 10TH GRADER, WSSB: “ONE OF MY GOALS IS TO GRADUATE EARLY AND I WOULDN’T BE ABLE TO DO THAT WITHOUT ON-LINE CLASSES BECAUSE OF THE WAY THE CLASS SCHEDULES ARE SET-UP. SO WHAT I AM DOING IS I AM USING US HISTORY BECAUSE I AM A SOPHOMORE AND YOU NORMALLY TAKE THAT AS A JUNIOR CLASS. I’M USING THAT TO TAKE THIS YEAR SO I CAN BE A SENIOR NEXT YEAR AND GRADUATE.”

On-line courses often have many links to other resources to broaden learning. Navigating through them can be frustrating though if they are not designed with blind and visually impaired students in mind.

RACHEL: “OK, I WILL DO SOMETHING ELSE.”

RACHEL TALLEY, 10TH GRADER, WSSB: “THIS WEBSITE IS SUPPOSED TO BE TOTALLY ACCESSIBLE BUT IT’S NOT VERY ACCESSIBLE FOR THE BLIND AND THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED. THERE, IT’S, THERE’S A LOT OF VISUALS WITH THE WEBSITE.”

Rachel knows there is a graphic or picture there, but has no idea of what. Her on-line course on the Holocaust vividly shows the horrors of the death camps but Rachel cannot study it. A descriptor for each picture would remedy that.

On-line learning has another benefit – not being judged for being different. Don Mitchell who is blind from birth remembers what school was like for him.

DON MITCHELL, INSTRUCTOR AND WEBSITE DEVELOPER: “AND I EXPERIENCED A LOT OF THE, AH, OH, BEING SET APART, TO BEING SET ASIDE BECAUSE I WAS A BLIND PERSON, AH, BEING IGNORED, BEING TEASED, BEING, UM, OSTRACIZED.”

THERESA TATE, TEACHER, WASHINGTON STATE SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND: “WITH ON-LINE LEARNING, ONE OF THE ADVANTAGES I THINK IS THAT STUDENTS FIND THEY ARE IN A MUCH MORE LEVEL PLAYING GROUND, UM, PLAYING FIELD. THERE’S, AH, FOR OUR BLIND STUDENTS, THEY HAVE THE OPTION OF WHETHER OR NOT TO REVEAL THE FACT THAT THEY WERE BLIND IN THE ON-LINE ENVIRONMENT.”

Currently, Billy is taking U.S. History on-line class and finds the course challenging.

BILLY HENRY, 10TH GRADER, WSSB: “I NOTICE WITH ON-LINE CLASSES, IT REALLY, UM, BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT IN THE CLASSROOM, IT IS A LOT MORE DIFFICULT THAN YOU WERE IF YOU WERE IN A CLASSROOM BUT IT’S ALSO GOOD BECAUSE, YOU KNOW, IN THE, UM, IN YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT, YOU CAN’T ALWAYS ACCESS ALL THE CLASSES THAT YOU COULD HERE.”

Adults can also take advantage of on-line courses to advance their careers or pursue a new one. Taking on-line courses can expand a student’s educational possibilities by accessing a world of knowledge – but only if the websites are designed for everyone to use. CANnect is working on accessible online solutions for users. The 70% rate of unemployment among the blind makes it crucial that avenues for education and training not be halted. Blind and visually impaired people must be able to pursue and train for any field of employment they desire.

DON MITCHELL: “I THINK THAT, AH, FOR HELPING BLIND PEOPLE INTEGRATE INTO SOCIETY, THE INTERNET IS A BOON!”

BILLY HENRY, 10TH GRADER, WSSB: “A LOT OF WEBSITE DESIGNERS, THEY DON’T THINK, THEY THINK ABOUT WHAT LOOKS GOOD ON THE WEBSITE, THEY DON’T THINK ABOUT IT BEING FAIR TO EVERYONE.”

RACHEL TALLEY: “ALL ON-LINE COURSES SHOULD BE ACCESSIBLE TO THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED.”