

Personal Narratives: Integrating Digital Writing with Traditional Writing

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Introduction

21st century teachers are working in a time where they are encouraged to incorporate technology and digital writing into their classrooms with little training or research to guide them. There are new catch phrases like "digital storytelling", "21st century skills", and "digital natives," but what do these phrases mean and how are they changing the culture of the classroom? We should not forget that the classroom culture has been affected by the students themselves. Often teachers are working with students who are significantly more technologically advanced than previous generations. Even those students who lack access to digital media in their homes know of it and want to be part of the digital world.

The purpose of writing continues to be to communicate and share ideas but the definition of writing has evolved to include digital media. Traditionally, writing in an educational setting involves paper, pencil, and paragraphs made from a format of one topic sentence, three support sentences and a concluding sentence. However, this regimented writing process is not reflective of the writing that will be created in college, nor in careers. Writing is for communicating and sharing; writers are able to express thoughts, feelings, beliefs and perspectives. Technology is changing the role of the writer by allowing for more creativity in expression and collaboration, and schools must adapt to these changes.

Common Core State Standards that now integrate and include technology forces teachers to take a look at how technology can best be used and to develop new methodologies with which to use it. Teachers are given different forms of technology, but that doesn't guarantee that teachers will know how to use them or find benefit in their curriculum. Although technology is being handed out to students and teachers, curriculum has not been purchased to support the use of technology in the classroom. Teachers are being asked to find their own ways of incorporating meaningful technology without curriculum to support them. Since many teachers already have loved and trusted writing curriculum, it makes sense to find ways to incorporate the meaningful use of technology into the already developed writing program. A question to be asked of the modified curriculum is whether or not second grade students will show a transfer of skills between their traditional writing and digital writing.

The field project described in this paper aims to develop a unit of curriculum that combines the use of traditional writing lessons to incorporate rehearsal time and digital media. The overarching purpose of this project is to provide teachers a new tool and teaching strategy to increase student engagement, excitement, creativity and ownership of writing.

Materials and Methods



The personal narrative unit designed for this project combined the use of traditional writing practices with embedded time for rehearsal and technology. A brief explanation of the lesson components was presented to give an understanding of the design of each lesson. Actual lesson plans included detailed explanations to guide the teacher in the execution of each lesson within the unit. Lastly, the relationship between this unit to the stated objectives was given to support the use of technology in an educational setting with the support of curriculum.

Flight Plan: Literature Examples, Direct Instruction, Storyboard by teacher

Lift-Off: Student created storyboard and Rehearsal

Entry: Final draft & Digital Story creation in Toontastic

Results

Personalize your own setting



Choose your own character & setting



Choose multiple characters & interactive settings



Personalize your own characters & setting



Add details to characters



Reviewed literature showed the importance of a renewed focus on traditional writing in an educational settings while also pointing out a need for rehearsal time within the writing period.

"In the Common Core State Standards, writing is treated as an equal partner to reading and more than this, writing is assumed to be the vehicle through which a great deal of the reading work and reading assessments will occur," (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012, p. 102).

Additional literature was presented to show the value of technology, specifically digital storytelling as a new avenue and additional form of writing that occurs under the guidelines of Common Core State Standards and a 21st century classroom.

Digital writing tools have enhanced the level of collaborative writing by first allowing student to learn multiple ways to approach writing from others and second, it has broadened the sense of audience beyond the teacher to include peers and Internet readers (Nagin, 2012).

The rubrics used to score both the traditional and digital writing were based on Common Core State Standards. Traditional and digital writing scores for focus/setting, organization/plot and narrative techniques were compared for any significant variants. Students' scores on the traditional and digital storytelling did not differ significantly between the two modes of writing. Students who scored at grade level in the traditional format also scored at grade level in their digital stories because they did not change the content of their story. Students read directly from either their finished writing or their storyboards when they created their digital stories and did not deviate from what they wrote, even when encouraged.

For instance, in Lesson 3 GG All About Me, the student scored at grade level in the three overlapping domains (focus/setting, organization/plot and narrative techniques) in her traditional writing. She did not make any changes when recording on Toontastic so she received the same score in her digital writing. This also occurred in Lesson 4 AJ Chickens where the student scored approaching grade level in focus/setting and narrative techniques and at grade level for organization/plot in both traditional and digital writing formats. This trend was consistent with students who use English as a second language. In Lesson 5 IJ Running with Dog, the student scored at grade level in all three domains for both writing samples. This left the teacher with a sense that the students' first work was their best work, and that second grade students are not developmentally able to make edits based on their own assessments.

Conclusions

Although there are many challenges and strong emotions about the integration of technology into curriculum, the new Common Core State Standards tell us that it is a change that must be made. The standards do not state that teachers have to change their practices completely. By combining what educators know to be best writing practices of the last era with what is to come with 21st century writing we can better prepare our students for their future. This is not something that can be done all at once and in every grade level, but a change at each grade is needed. Schools need to refresh their writing programs to adopt a more collective and unified understanding of writing with technology. When teachers are given curriculum that join these two worlds they will see the value of digital writing for their students and perhaps understand the level of excitement and engagement that students seem to feel towards the digital world. The pedagogy of writing is much like the process of writing, we must be willing to draft, edit, rehearse and revise our techniques to improve and increase our effectiveness as teachers in the 21st century.

Literature cited

Calkins, L., Ehrenworth, M., & Lehman, C., (2012). *Pathways to the common core: Accelerating achievement*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Nagin, C. (2012). *Because writing matters: Improving student writing in our schools*. John Wiley & Sons.

For further information

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