iWrite

Using Blogs, Wikis, and Digital Stories in the English Classroom

Dana J. Wilber
To Chris, who understood all the hours I spent typing away
And to my grandfather, who always asked how the book was going
Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS   •   vii
INTRODUCTION: It’s a Brave New World   •   ix

CHAPTER ONE   •   1
What It Means to Teach Reading and Writing Today

CHAPTER TWO   •   20
New Literacies for New Times

CHAPTER THREE   •   43
What Are Blogs, Wikis, and Digital Stories?

CHAPTER FOUR   •   63
The Nuts and Bolts of Creating and Using Blogs, Wikis, and Digital Stories in Your Classroom

CHAPTER FIVE   •   78
Using Technology to Address Ten Key Issues in Reading and Writing Instruction

CHAPTER SIX   •   93
Upcoming Technologies That May Make a Difference in the English Classroom

CONCLUSION   •   107

APPENDIX: Helpful Online Resources   •   113

BIBLIOGRAPHY   •   129

INDEX   •   133
In this book, I tell stories of my own teaching at Montclair State University through the PreCollege Reading Program as well as my work done through the Improving Teacher Quality Program grant. I would like to express my thanks to, and deep respect for, my students in the PCRP classes and the teachers we worked with through the ITQP grant in East Orange, New Jersey. I have learned—and continue to learn—an enormous amount through this work. Thank you—for your time, for your stories, and for access to your classrooms and your lives.

I would also like to thank my colleagues Dr. Michele Knobel, Dr. Tina Jacobowitz, and Dr. Tamara Spencer, without whose support and cheering on this book never would have been completed. And enormous thanks to my research assistant, Sarah Davis, for her keen editing eye, quick hand at appendices, and ability to learn the Chicago Manual of Style overnight.

My heartfelt thanks to Jim Strickland at Heinemann for supporting this book. I can’t even explain how excited I was to get that email—and from a leading person in the field, no less. His help was invaluable. Too, thanks go to Cheryl Kimball, whose close editing and excellent ideas made this a much better book.
Introduction

It’s a Brave New World

Every day, when I walk from my car to my office on campus, I see students all around me immersed in technology. Many are using their cell phones, not to talk but to text each other—typing furiously as they wend through the crowd (and amazing me that they can do both at the same time). Others rush past, telltale white cords dangling from their ears as they listen to a hidden iPod or MP3 player.

Most of the students in the study lounges I pass are working on their laptops. Since our campus is wireless, they are doing anything from coursework to checking their Facebook page. Like any other campus in the United States, the majority of our students have a Facebook page and use it to communicate everything from their relationship status to their favorite books. They comment on each other’s pages; some even seek out the few faculty on the site (I have a page) and add us as “friends.” This is what it means to be a college student today. And what is really interesting is that I see many of the same behaviors at the middle and high schools down the road, perhaps with the exception of using laptops on a wireless network. From sixth to twelfth grades, students are texting, chatting, networking, and writing all over the place.
This book seeks to merge two important areas for teachers today: literacy and technology. As the world changes around us, we all become more and more aware of the ways in which we read and write or are called to communicate a message—and the technologies we have at our disposal in order to send those messages. This is true also of our students who, whether in middle school or college, read and write an extraordinary amount outside of school: on blogs, on personal pages on Facebook and MySpace, via texting and chat, or even through fan fiction based on favorite pop culture characters. It’s not that our students aren’t reading and writing, but where and what they are reading and writing is off the school radar, for the most part—at least until one genre, say instant messaging or texting, moves into another, like a school paper. We’ve all had students turn in papers with technologically derived abbreviations like IMHO (in my humble opinion) or gr8 (great). Our students, across the spectrum, need to be able to read and write more proficiently in academic genres just as they need to understand and view their participation online a bit more critically.

Often seen from two extremes—a magic bullet or an unnecessary tangle—technologies are simply tools that allow us to live our lives, more simply or in ways that deepen them, depending on how we use these tools. Technologies, in and of themselves, are not necessarily bad or good. They are the tools we choose to use as a part of our lives in myriad ways. As a result, more and more, the lives of teenagers are mediated and moderated by technologies that were new less than ten years ago. As their lives are lived more and more online, however, the boundaries between public and private begin to blur and our students struggle to understand the repercussions.

At the base of this struggle is a need to understand genre and audience in the midst of what is an ongoing technological revolution. At no point, however, do I mean to advocate for technologies over the reading and writing instruction that happens in your classroom. Because the tools have changed, our students need to be ever-more savvy about which tools they choose and the repercussions of each. And we need to know more about the technologies that shape the ways our students read and write in their everyday lives. Our students choose from email, text messaging, instant messaging, blogs, Facebook/MySpace and other social networks, Twitter, social bookmarking, Google Earth, digital storytelling, and more to communicate daily. Not everything they
do belongs in the classroom. But it makes sense for us, as teachers, to know about these technologies since they occupy so much of our students’ lives and because they are a big part of the ways in which students read and write today. And some new technologies lend themselves well to teaching reading and writing in the literacy classroom. This book concerns three tools that are easy to use and have free websites and instructions to help you get started.

Blogs, wikis, and digital stories are good tools to start with because of their ease in use, free application in many cases, and versatility. Simply defined, a blog (shortened from “weblog”) is a website that is written by one person or a group of people with posts listed in reverse chronological order—the newest first—and is an easy way to publish to the Web. A wiki, on the other hand, is a website that acts as a resource for information that can be collaboratively edited. Both can be either public or private, depending on how you choose to set them up and apply them, and both can be accessed by anyone with a Web connection. They can incorporate written text, visual images, audio, and video. A digital story is a narrative that begins with a storyboard or script and then is constructed of digital or computerized still images and/or video, together with audio including music and recorded voice. Digital stories can be fiction, non-fiction, or a combination of the two. All three of these technologies allow users to write electronic texts that can be published online and used to gather resources, create classroom blogs and communities, and much more. Throughout this book, I will show you how using these three tools can help support language arts learning with your students in your classroom and beyond.

Thomas Friedman, a columnist for the New York Times, writes that “the world is flat,” meaning that everything today has become interconnected across the globe. As I will discuss more, we have moved into a world termed Web 2.0; that is, dependent on the creation, collaboration, and diffusion of ideas and messages (Lankshear and Knobel 2006). What it means to read and write is changing quickly, even before our students can take into account different genres and texts when creating or receiving a message. Our teenagers have access to such a wide variety of ways for making meaning that teaching students how to discern between media is a tough charge, but an essential one.

For example, what and how teens communicate on Instant Messenger should be different from how they write for their classes, and even from the email messages they send (particularly to adults or for more formal reasons). Issues of
genre, audience, voice, and style are the natural domain of the English classroom and if we take on the multiple forms of student reading and writing outside of class, we naturally begin to work with reading and writing that are authentic and motivating to our students. Now I want to be very clear—I don’t mean that we should necessarily have our students create MySpace pages for class, for example. Some practices belong to our students; it makes no sense educationally or otherwise to bring every technology students use into the literacy classroom.

Yet there are many technologies beyond word processing that can be used to support and encourage student literacy, especially in a workshop setting. These technologies, including blogs, wikis, Google applications, fan fiction, filmmaking, and digital video projects, can be used to scaffold our students as they find their voice and learn how to communicate in a world constituted by millions of authors.

Using collaborative technologies in the literacy classroom builds on the ease with which teenagers pick up lingo and expertise around certain types of technology use, like creating a page on MySpace or even posting a video to YouTube, while at the same time addressing their struggle with doing some academic tasks like researching effectively online—finding the right sources, comprehending the information they do find, and avoiding plagiarism. Many think of this generation, often named the “Millennial Generation” (Howe and Strauss 2000), as being automatically expert in and comfortable with new technologies, especially as compared with their teachers and parents. Prensky (2001) terms this a divide between “digital natives,” those students who grew up in a world shaped by the Internet and its associated technologies, and “digital immigrants,” those of us who remember a world before cell phones, CDs, the World Wide Web, and even email.

Yet in my experience, a single divide between expert teenagers and less expert teachers isn’t that simple. Sure, there are many things our students know how to do online that we don’t—but they don’t know everything. In particular, they often have not thought through the differences between public and private spaces, or legitimate and false sources—even though they use the Internet to publish or research an enormous variety of texts. What does seem clear is that the use of technology is incredibly motivating and important to students who believe that their knowledge of these new technologies is key to their survival long after their schooling has ended. And they’re probably right.
Chapter 1 describes the lives of Millennials and the new technologies that are embedded into their everyday ways of using reading and writing to make sense of the world. Chapter 2 goes on to explain how, when new technologies interact with reading and writing, new practices or new literacies develop that can be used in your classroom. Chapters 3 and 4 explain in more detail—with examples from all over the World Wide Web—what blogs, wikis, and digital stories are, and provide you with instructions as to how to set up and use these tools. Chapter 5 goes further to show how wikis, blogs, and digital stories can be used to address ten key issues in the literacy classroom; Chapter 6 gives a brief overview of new technologies that are on the horizon, in order to familiarize you with the newest tools you might use someday soon.

My hope is that, with this book, you come to see some of the ways that new technologies have given students opportunities to read and write in powerful ways every day. Even with all of the dire predictions about kids not reading or writing today, we know that they spend a lot of time online and that being online involves reading and writing. We can build a bridge between the literate lives of our students outside of school and the literacies we want to teach them in our classrooms by capitalizing on their expertise, interest, and engagement with new technologies.
This chapter outlines the ten key ways in which blogs, digital stories, and wikis work to help students in the literacy classroom be more interested, improve their writing, increase their engagement with content, and much more. These themes represent important issues that all literacy teachers struggle with in their classrooms along with ideas and tips on how these digital tools can help address these points for you and your students. New literacies, as I have discussed throughout the book, are simply the interaction between literacy practices like reading and writing and new tools—and when these new tools are used to good purpose, they can foster creative and deep literacy learning.

**Safety**

Students need to feel safe as writers in order to take chances and develop a voice or even better themselves. If students don’t think their work will be taken seriously or treated fairly, they won’t take the chance to push themselves to try harder. This is particularly the case when it comes to sharing their writing with
others and learning how to give peer feedback. Your students need to feel protected when they share their writing in that they will be treated fairly by their peers, which means that they must be taught how to give feedback in specific and constructive ways. That means that you, as the teacher, must find safe ways for students to share their writing and to keep track of student feedback so that you can be sure students are supporting one another while offering substantive response.

Blogs, wikis, and digital stories present safe ways for students to use new technologies to support their writing as part of the literacy classroom. As the teacher, you can control the level of publication or audience you wish your students to engage in—from a classroom blog to group blogs to individual blogs—and you can choose to password-protect blogs and comments. While students are reading and writing to the Web at large, you can control who sees the blog, even as students learn to write with a particular audience in mind. You might have students post samples of their writing to a classroom blog and choose to password-protect it so that only you and the students in the classroom can see the writing and the comments. This protection offers a level of safety to your students while still allowing them access to one another’s writing and the opportunity for feedback, which you can view through the comments section. Or, students can use individual blogs to post their writing, which you and their peers can access via student-set passwords, again protecting the student while allowing access.

The same is true with wikis—you can set the amount and level of collaboration, although the responsibility of collaborating on something to be used by the classroom community is often enough to act as a safeguard and keep students not only honest but striving to do their best work, since it can be seen by their peers, teachers, parents, and community. A classroom wiki of student writing could be password-protected so that only those with access could read published writing.

Students also need to feel safe when sharing their thinking through writing, not just the writing itself. For example, you might decide to create a blog that teaches students to respond to reading through writing. One of your objectives, however, might be that you want students to learn how to engage in a debate about ideas while still being supportive and constructive with one another. You could do one of two things: you could either create an anonymous blog where students post using pseudonyms (you would keep a list with students’ real
names for your own reference) or you could create a password-only blog where students must have a password in order to access the blog and the post. Either way would protect the student, the first through anonymity and the second by allowing access only to members of the class. Also, as the teacher, you could monitor the posts and remove any that you don’t feel are appropriate to the discussion (because you created the blog, you have the power to do this).

You may be asking, but why use a blog if I am going to limit access? Well, a blog is still public to the students within the classroom. You are still creating a public, shared space for students where they can learn to trust one another and participate in a written dialogue. As they become more comfortable with using this form of online conversation and critique, you might use your classroom blog for students to workshop pieces of writing, or debate ideas and content from class discussions, among other ideas. Because this is their space, too, and because the forum is open to others in the class, students tend to put in more time and energy and are much more respectful of one another. They like having an audience where their voice matters, as well as a safe space where they can try out new ideas.

The publication of digital stories, too, can be done in very safe ways. Not all digital stories need to end up on YouTube—they might do best on a classroom blog or wiki, or shared privately in class. With digital stories, movies aren’t ready for publication until they are polished and you and the student storytellers decide to share them, thereby giving the locus of control to you and the authors of the story. Digital stories can easily be created in ways that do not share student names or identifying characteristics but still tell compelling stories and important historical information. These projects and tools are used throughout the literacy classroom, giving you oversight and helping you work with students in determining what is appropriate to share and when, an even higher standard than writing it for the teacher alone might previously have been. The safety resides in the steps you and your students take in creating and disseminating the story.

**Authenticity**

We know that students are much more motivated to engage in literacy tasks that are genuine than those that seem like busywork divorced from any real-world
context. Learning is much more likely to transfer, too, when students read and write in the classroom in ways similar to how they do outside of schools. Many assessments and tools we use in schools are bound by school contexts and often seem useless to students, who may not understand why they are being asked to do what they are doing. It’s essential to connect the kinds of reading and writing we ask our students to do for school purposes to the kinds of reading and writing that are important in the world so that they can learn to be literate in larger contexts than mere test taking or standardized assessments.

Blogs, wikis, and digital storytelling may seem much more legitimate to students than many other classroom tools because they are designed to support students and share projects with others. People other than the teacher are going to read, use, or view what the student has created or written, which can make the project seem more valuable and worthwhile. One of the main purposes for literacy is to communicate and connect with others. Yet this point is often lost in assignments that are simply turned in to the teacher or restricted to school use. As well, because wikis, blogs, and digital stories can make use of resources available online, they are easily connected to real-life issues and ideas that students find more interesting and important. Moreover, students can use texts and text types, such as online video and images, that may not be used in many literacy classrooms on a regular basis but that are part of their lives outside of school. Using blogs, wikis, and digital storytelling for learning purposes more closely mirrors the practices of students’ lives and teaches valuable skills such as critiquing, understanding what to trust, and knowing what to use online outside of school.

If you think about any author today, chances are that he or she does not write in longhand on sheets of paper. This book, for example, was drafted using a software, called Scrivener, specifically designed for complex writing projects. It allowed me to draft chapters, put together note cards and outlines, and automatically generate a table of contents. Only then did I translate the manuscript into Microsoft Word in order to send it to my editor. Authentic reading and writing tasks today involve technological tools—whether word processors, online research, reading online texts, or more. Only in schools do we have large groups of people writing by hand for set amounts of time. In the workplace, most writing is done using technology, often by more than one person.
One good example of an authentic practice is a project resource wiki developed by a group of students. As we do research today, we must sift through enormous amounts of material, much like panning for gold. By creating a wiki, students can construct a place to put all those resources, which can be actively used and reused throughout the project. Students are constructing something they will actually use, that has meaning to them, and that potentially can be used by others.

The same thing holds true for digital storytelling. Students aren’t learning the tools and skills involved with digital storytelling just to learn them. Rather, they are using their technological skills to create a narrative that is cohesive and contains the elements necessary to make that narrative successful. In both the wiki and the digital story, learning the technology goes hand in hand with learning the literacies of research and design in order to construct narratives and conduct project-based learning. With all of these tools, the literacy practices learned are learned for use, not just for themselves.

**Practice**

Literacy skills develop through practice. No one is born literate; we are all in the process of becoming and developing as readers and writers. As literacy teachers, we need to give our students ongoing opportunities to practice their reading and writing in engaging ways. Students take up practices using blogs, wikis, and digital stories easily and incorporate them across their lives in a variety of spaces, both educational and nonschool related. If we push them to think critically and increase their reading and writing activities using blogs, wikis, and digital narratives, these digital literacy practices will become natural and intrinsic, and take on importance in their lives. Our students will become increasingly comfortable with using digital tools to think out loud, to add to existing forms of online knowledge, to use visual means to tell important stories, and more.

Blogs are one good way to establish a writing practice through new literacies. If you use individual student blogs, they should be visited and added to often—similar in a sense to journal writing, but public and interconnected. I have found that having students write at least once a week, and pairing up
students to respond to each other’s posts, is key. A regular routine establishes blogging as a writing practice, and as students become comfortable with writing to make sense of their world, they start to become writers.

Relevance

One of the issues with teaching adolescents today is relevance. Sadly, the curriculum we love and work so hard over is frequently seen as completely disconnected from our students’ thoughts and cares. Yet today, more than ever, literacy is central to everything they do. Blogs, wikis, and digital stories underscore this point. They are all about literacy. When students blog about what they read and create a classroom community through interconnected, personal blogs, we use the modern idea of social networking to teach the traditional technique of writing to respond to literature in a way our students understand, with a new technology they find motivating. Allowing students to craft narratives through digital storytelling still requires a written script with all the traditional characteristics of a story—setting, characters, plot, climax—but because the story is told visually, it can and will help support students who struggle with committing a written story to paper by allowing them to create a story in an alternative format with construction of a working script. Digital technologies bring literacy practices to where our students are without dumbing them down in any way—if anything, these tools can make practices more challenging.

With digital stories, for example, students can tell their own stories or persuade an audience—something that teens love to do and is a key skill for adolescents to learn. Because digital stories work best when researched, scripted or storyboarded, and well rehearsed, they meet many of the goals of a persuasive genre and can complement a piece of persuasive writing. Students can interview their peers and bring teen voices into the community through these stories.

Similarly, student blogs inject student voice into the classroom conversation. Because blogs are public, choosing them as a genre makes clear to your students that what they say (or write) matters. You can use student blogs as a part of a project, theme, or unit on memoir or throughout the year as ongoing writing practice. You might use blogging as a way for students to write about books they have read—to record their recommendations and thoughts. Or you
might have students blog in response to current events, politics, or the world. Whatever the topic, narrow or broad, student blogging allows student thought to be an important part of the conversation and makes what your students think and feel relevant.

### Meaning and Identity

We know that literacy practices are central to who we are, but we don’t usually capitalize on this in the literacy classroom. We do some creative writing with our students, but we too easily forget that any writing involves putting oneself out there. Instead, we must teach and support community and self-development through writing, research, and collaboration. Blogs enable students to create a space for self—to decorate, name, and write the self into being while interacting with others through commenting. Wikis give groups a chance for collaboration and a space to build knowledge over time, to create meaning. And digital stories are a place to engage in that most basic of personal journeys: storytelling, whether from a creative or historical perspective, whether telling your own story or someone else’s.

I have seen students create personal blogs that represent them through use of color, name, and photos (mostly pictures of themselves, often with their pets). I have gotten to know my students better because they have opened up a little. Seeing the Yankees logo on their blog, I know to ask about the score from the game last night, or about a new car mentioned in a post. I can know when a student is upset because the family pet had to be put to sleep or who has a big audition coming up. Because we know these things about each other, there’s a level of connection and closeness that’s missing when class is more anonymous, and with that level of connection comes students who are more willing to take a chance, to push themselves in their writing, to look for more meaning.

One of the things I enjoy most is using student blogs to respond to readings from class. Because blogs are written, I can see changes over time—a development—as students start to take more chances, respond to my questions in the comment field, ask themselves questions of their own. Some of the students begin to look deeper for meaning and even add links and connections to other information online, and I get to watch that understanding literally unfold.
With wikis and digital stories, the development of meaning comes through students working together to create a project that presents the results of research and writing, and that represents each student. Whether students are constructing a wiki of resources on stories of the Holocaust or a digital story about local history, part of the process of completing the project comes from negotiating a personal sense of themselves with a developing sense of the meaning of the work.

In all three cases, the digital tools provide opportunities for students to push themselves, develop a sense of who they are, and work toward deeper meaning.

**Interest and Inquiry**

 Definitely one of the most important things we can do to motivate our students is to build on their interests and innate sense of inquiry. Many alternative schools, from home schools to charter schools to schools within a school, have been built around this idea. But it doesn’t have to be that difficult or that intensive. Just making use of what’s available online can be enough, especially if you use tools that allow you and your students to link up to the virtually infinite number of resources out there. We all have assessments and genres we have to teach, but often the content is open or at least flexible. Through blogs, wikis, and digital stories, students can search for, write about, and use online resources to research and create content based on ideas they find personally meaningful and interesting—giving them reason to want to be there, in your class, day after day—a definite change from simply mandating attendance. We want our students to be natural inquirers, to follow a genuine interest and create a desire to learn about something merely because they want to learn about it. Through constructing a blog or creating a wiki in response to a project, they can do just that—and these kinds of tools give them power and a voice. Digital stories, in particular, allow them to create content, something that is increasingly important in the world of Web 2.0.

 For another example, students can choose a topic for a research project and, instead of turning in a traditional research paper with bibliography, can create a project wiki. Say the student chooses to research the life and work of
Edgar Allan Poe. That student (or students, if you choose to have them work in groups) can create a wiki instead of writing a research paper. Individual pages on the wiki can be devoted to different topics: Poe’s life, his poetry, his short stories, why we continue to study Poe today. Each page might contain a written piece, not unlike a paper, but instead of a bibliography at the end of the overall project, each page would connect to resources on that topic. So if one page was about Poe’s poetry, the page could contain a summary and analysis of his important work along with links to his poems, like this online page with the entire text of “The Raven”: www.heise.de/ix/raven/Literature/Lore/TheRaven.html. Being able to directly link to the information enriches the project; allowing students to choose and research areas of interest builds on their own desire to inquire.

Because there is so much information online, we need to teach students how to research online effectively and how to write about what they find. You might try using a classroom blog to help students conduct research; in this blog, you could post instructions on the main page on how to conduct research. Students could then post the questions that they intend to use to frame their research; subsequent posts could outline where they are going to look for sources, links to what they have found, and so forth. Those posts, then, would become an informal way to assess how students are doing and to check on the sources they are using. You could do the same with student blogs—have students post about their research process as a way of keeping tabs on how it is going.

In my college class, students conducted a group research project, on a topic they chose, relating either to Three Cups of Tea, a book we read, or to current events in Pakistan and Afghanistan. First, I had the students post their research questions on their blogs so that I could comment on them and help them shape a question that was neither too broad or too narrow. Then, students posted about how they were conducting research—what search engines they were using as well as helpful links they found. I was able to go through these posts and check sources by clicking on the links. If a source wasn’t valid or reliable, I could comment on the post or talk to the student in class about why. This kind of transparency allowed students to conduct their own inquiry projects in areas of interest while still being supported and learning how to do research online.
Perhaps the best example, though, of a digital technology that builds on student interest and inquiry is the digital story. Our students love to tell stories and are becoming increasingly comfortable documenting their lives in front of the camera. But they may never have thought about using digital video in an academic sense to present information. Digital stories, as mentioned before, are often most appealing to students who struggle in the literacy classroom because they provide another mode of expression—another way to show what they know.

I’ve already mentioned the digital history project from East Orange as one good example, but there are many others. Digital stories can be used to construct a response to literature, to present a persuasive argument in the form of a public service announcement, or to create and perform a piece of writing. Since a digital story contains both performance and publication in the form of a digitally preserved film, digital stories serve to legitimize your students’ words and ideas—which in turn supports student interest and inquiry. And because almost any digital story project requires research, inquiry is built into every project.

**Cognitive Development**

Our students continue to develop over time, but how often do we record that growth? We can collect assessments over the course of the semester or the year, but the assessments are often disjointed, with different kinds of writing or tests that show many different pictures. A student’s blog, however, displays a trajectory of cognitive development through writing that even the student can see and reflect on. How did I change? What did I think at the beginning of my blog compared to how I see things now? Or a project wiki—What were the questions we had when we began this project? What did we learn and how did we learn it? A digital story, too, can be the story of how we learn something as much as what we learn when a reflective piece is included. A short conclusion, added by the student or students on what was discovered through the project, offers important insight into the cognitive development of the student.

As I have used blogs with my students, I have come to see their individual development change just over the course of a semester. Even with the use of
student blogs in response to reading, student posts change from short, surface-level comments to detailed analyses and questioning. With a classroom blog, I have observed how students foster discussion among one another, the kinds of questions they ask, and who participates and to what degree. Since all participation comes in the form of writing, we have a semipermanent record of student thinking and work that we can draw on, not just for grading, but for understanding how our students are faring in terms of cognitive development.

Take *The Secret Life of Bees* blog. Students created chapter guides and responses that their teacher could then use to determine how well the students were doing with comprehending and analyzing the material. She was also able to use the students’ comments to the posts to see how well students responded to the study guides and understood the key themes of the book. In some ways, using a blog is like being able to extend discussion and keep a transcript at the same time—an invaluable source of information about how your students are doing in terms of comprehending and interacting with the text and the discussion.

With wikis, the proof is in both the writing and the links the student or students create. If you have students create a project wiki, you can assess the writing on different pages as well as the validity and usefulness of the links they include. A wiki created to help persuade people not to text while driving might have a main page that outlines the rest of the wiki; subsequent pages could detail different aspects of the argument along with links to news stories and research about the dangers of texting while driving. The wiki then would allow you to assess the students’ ability to construct an argument in both a written and a hypertextual sense through the inclusion of links; you can assess how well students did their research as well as the kinds of sites and information they chose to include. The wiki overall then becomes a concrete representation of student thinking.

**Community**

Students generally come to our classes for one subject period, and then they’re off again to their next class—a moment in time. They do their assignments at night and turn them in to us the next day. But as we know, with group projects,
collaboration creates important connections between classmates that support learning and communication—we know better what we can explain to others. Classrooms that become communities support deeper student learning and encourage students to feel safer and take chances as writers and readers.

Wikis and blogs can extend what is learned in a classroom well beyond its physical walls and the hours of a single period. Students’ blogging and commenting after class, or contributing to a blog, broadens the classroom community to include times and spaces past designated school hours and create relationships that will be reinforced in class and will help support learning.

In the prefreshman summer program, using blogging with the students allowed us to create a summer community that continued to make and sustain connections beyond the summer and into their first semester—an important support network for what can be the toughest semester for college students. Their development as readers and writers continued after class ended, and as the program progressed their blog posts and comments grew in length and developed in sophistication. They offered each other better, deeper commentaries on their presentations and research. Without this tool, the class would have ended each day devoid of these additional connections, and the essential sense of community they developed would have been lost.

Many of the blogs mentioned in previous chapters knit together the members of a class into a community. The best and perhaps simplest way to do this may be through a classroom blog. You can create a classroom blog easily and as soon as you start using it to showcase student work, report on new projects, and keep parents in the loop, you have moved toward creating a community that extends beyond the classroom and the school day. You might choose to create a classroom blog around a particular unit—say, poetry—in order to publish student poems, put up links to poems of the day (April is National Poetry Month; a class blog could be used to showcase a link to a different poem each day for parents and students to read together, and even respond to), and connect the unit to other activities on the Web more generally—poetry sites, famous authors’ pages, and more.

The same can be done with wikis. Project or classroom wikis around specific topics or classes can be used for students to connect to one another through reading each other’s work, responding to posts, putting up links of interest related to the topic, and so on. Because wikis and blogs make space for
student voice, they open up that space to a community where students feel valued and get to know one another in a deeper sense than just as classmates. Students are also taking on the responsibility for posting and keeping the blogs and wikis; that responsibility, too, goes a long way toward building a community.

Wikis and blogs allow space for student voice, and they also carry with them responsibility for posting comments and text. In this way they contribute to building and opening up a safe community where students can feel valued and begin to know one another in a deeper sense.

And last but not least, creating digital stories together puts students in the position of learning from one another, stitching together into one voice a question or topic that means something to them. I have seen students put extensive time and energy into digital stories—and get out of it deeper relationships to one another. The fifth and eighth graders in East Orange would never have worked together under any other circumstance, nor would my college reading students have told their stories of hardship as recent immigrants or as the first in their families to attend college without that sense of community and trust.

Process

We know that writing and reading are part of a process of literacy development over time. We plan, write, edit, and rewrite when we write in the real world, and many of us use the process approach to teach writing in our classrooms. We also know that reading is an active process that involves interacting with texts, discussing and responding to them, and recommending or critiquing books and readings. Digital tools are excellent ways to support the reading and writing process in your classroom. Blogs and wikis can be used not only to post in response to reading or collect resources for projects, but also to post drafts of writing and get comments and feedback from peers. Many of us struggle with
how to teach students the process approach to writing in ways that help them with the drafting and peer editing aspects of the process, and here are free, online tools that allow students to post writing where a peer can access it from any computer with an Internet connection and, additionally, use the commenting feature to peer edit. Multiple people can read it, and a classroom blog (as some of the examples in this chapter showed) can be used to publish class writing and feature finished pieces. It’s an excellent, easy publication tool, as is a wiki, since countless pages with published writing can be added readily. Student blogs can also be used as brainstorming spaces for new writing ideas or places to gather research links that you can check in on to see where your students are in the writing process without having to collect papers in various forms. Instead, just put up a page on a class blog or wiki with links to each student’s blog and have access to all of them—there, in one place.

This could be a two-part process. First, you might set up a classroom blog where everyone could participate and post pieces of writing. Other students would comment and, through the commenting process, learn how to give constructive feedback. Because comments would be seen by others as well as you, students would be pressured to write something more substantive and less generic; also, since their names are attached to the comments (if you choose), they don’t have the protection of anonymity to be cruel. Comments on writing are much more likely to be helpful and useful rather than malicious or useless, particularly if the class has become a community through the use of new technologies like these.

Say you have students working on the genre of memoir. They could workshop first lines and first paragraphs by posting them on the class blog and inviting feedback. Having a public forum often pushes students to do better work, as well as learn from others about what makes for good writing, a good lead, and good feedback. You could also post in your own responses examples of good memoir opening lines or links to classic memoirs, for instance.

As students move into completing pieces, the class could construct a memoir wiki that would publish student work on separate pages. The main or opening page could have a description of the assignment and genre, along with links to each student’s page and piece. On each page, a student would publish his or her piece, along with any visuals—photos, or even links that extend or make sense within the written work.
Outstanding pieces might end up as excellent digital stories. The memoir itself would be an excellent script, read aloud and set to images and music. The writing is still there and, in fact, serves as the backbone or structure of the piece. Extending it into a digital story just allows for the visual aspects of a memoir to flow, matching word to image.

So the writing process can be applied across all three tools, moving from early stages of work posted on a blog through polished pieces published on a wiki or transmediated or transformed through the addition of visual and musical elements into a digital story. The underlying idea remains the same: writing and rewriting to create and carefully construct a polished piece of work—not as an individual but through a process involving a community.

Motivation

What it all comes down to is motivation. What motivates our students? We see the best work, the most interest, and the highest engagement when students are motivated to learn and participate. For some of our students, the literacy classroom is fraught with difficulty. They struggle with reading and writing and we work hard to reach them. We have to find ways and tools that motivate our least motivated students, to bring them into the class conversation and engage them in learning. When we use new technologies, when we connect what we teach to their lives, when we give them the opportunity to research, write, and create from topics of interest to them, when we establish a classroom community, and when we understand that literacy is intricately intertwined with who they are and how they see the world, we create paths of motivation for them to engage with literacy learning in our classrooms. The students we are teaching today, whether you call them digital natives, twenty-first-century learners, or just teenagers, are motivated by new technologies, ideas that engage them, the possibilities of being able to create something that is their own, and the concept of being heard for who they are. Using new technologies like blogs, wikis, and digital stories is one way to do that—as I and countless other teachers, from New Jersey to Australia and Singapore to Colorado have learned. I hope you do, too.
Appendix

Helpful Online Resources

Blogs

http://areallydifferentplace.org/ is the Broken Arrow Enhanced Learning Center blog. This center is part of the mission school district in Shawnee, Kansas. Their classroom blog is a forum for both students and teachers to discuss books, writing assignments, movies, and plays. Each student can start their own personal blog in addition to contributing to the whole class discussions. Personal blog listings can be found on the left-hand column of the home page.

www.blogger.com is a free blog-publishing tool with a range of options for creating multiple author blogs. It includes a host of privacy settings, and the ability to moderate comments. Blogger is a great tool for creating a blog in which all members of your class can upload and contribute text and media. All of these attributes make this blogging platform ideal for a private or public classroom format. A small drawback is that although there are several options for personalizing the look of the blogs, there are very few options for changing the basic layout. However, the options for widgets and applications that can be
added to Blogger-host blogs is unlimited, because the platform allows applica-
tions and widgets to be added from alternate sites.

http://bookwrap.edublogs.org is a blog set up by a year 3 classroom in Syd-
ney, Australia. The main purpose of this class blog is to create discussion
around books that the students are currently reading. The blog serves as a
reading community for the students, where the goals are learning more about
certain authors, discussing key parts of books, and testing out their voices as
readers with important opinions and ideas.

http://dmcordell.blogspot.com is a blog by the educator Diane Cordell titled
Journeys: Exploring Life and Learning. It is a blog worth looking at not only for
its artistic and intellectual merits, but for its very soothing and reflective nature.
The site is filled with exquisite photography, paintings, drawings, and poetry.
This teacher’s writing is equally pertinent and ranges from topics such as the
disgrace of closed school libraries, how the painter Degas was linked to music,
and using technology as a teaching tool.

http://doyle-scienceteach.blogspot.com is a blog from a science teacher
who focuses on teaching practices within his subject matter as well as his
opinions and reflections on education and the world we live in. Topics range
from a school marching-band shirt that depicts evolution, to the water in char-
ter schools, to how it all equates to the cycles of life and mortality. It is safe to
say the voice of this blog is decidedly for adults.

www.facebook.com/ is a very well-known free site for social networking. In
fact it is the most used social network, with MySpace coming in second. Reg-
istration is required in order to use Facebook. Users can very easily form
accounts and create their own personal home page in order to send their
friends messages and update personal profiles to keep those friends informed
on their activities. A user’s profile can be set to public or private in order to
control who is able to associate with them. Since the site is now worldwide, it
is organized into networks by city, workplace, school, and region. Key points of
Facebook are the vast amount of groups that users can join according to their
interests and the numbers of features available for users to interact with.
Among these is the ability to share photos, give status updates, virtually “poke” a friend in order to get their attention online, and write a message or leave an attachment on someone’s “wall.”

http://kathyschrock.net/blog/ is a blog by the educator Kathy Schrock. Her thoughts, ideas, and discoveries are geared toward the use of technology as an educative tool. She raises discussions about topics like utilizing Twitter and the use of Google in the classroom. Her writing voice is very informal and welcoming, with poignant observations on how students are using technologies socially (for example, sharing music earbuds while sitting next to each other). This blog is a great resource for seeking out information and conversations surrounding educational technology that is extremely smart yet not intimidating.

http://mrcoyle.edublogs.org is a blog from Gary Coyle’s grade 8 Humanities class in New Delhi, India. The unique quality of this class blog is that it has links to student blogs as well. The whole-class blog hosts a question for discussion in accordance with what information was covered that week, while personal student blogs respond to specific posts.

www.myspace.com is another very well-known free social networking site. Its popularity comes in second next to Facebook, with its slogan being “A Place for Friends.” The site’s blogging features are the main concept that makes up this social networking tool. Each profile contains a blogging area with space for content, media, and emotion. Users simply create a home page with profile information such as “About Me,” and “Who I’d like to meet.” There is a place for other users to post comments, images to portray a user’s mood (emoticons), and a section for other details about the user.

http://plethoratech.blogspot.com is a blog for educators about teaching and learning. The author fills it with thought-provoking ideas on the learning process, reminders that our goal as educators is to always strive for better understanding, and suggestions and Web links to accomplish all of this.

www.rebeccablood.net is a website from Rebecca Blood, who has been blogging on rebecca’s pocket since 1999. Her blog is an interesting amalgamation
of articles and links pertaining to things that interest her. Among her varied interests are sustainability, Web culture, and media literacy. Rebecca is a pioneer in the blog world and is known for authoring *The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Blog.*

**http://edublogs.org/** is a blog-hosting tool designed specifically for teachers and classrooms. Created and maintained by teachers for teachers, Edublogs is an ideal starter service for educators who are hoping to learn how to blog with their classes. The site features extensive support forums, video tutorials, and helpful documentation to aid you in setting up a blog community in your classroom. One of the best aspects of this site is the blog-management features (i.e., editing and monitoring of all content and comments) for teachers. All aspects of the site are free, with each account receiving 20 MB of upload space. This can be extended to 5 GB through a donation to the site. A unique feature of Edublogs is the ability to import preexisting blogs from sites such as Blogger, TypePad, or LiveJournal to the Edublogs server. The reverse, exporting blogs from Edublogs to other hosting sites, is also possible.

**www.ning.com** enables the creation of social networks for a closed group of individuals. This makes it perfect as a classroom and administrative group tool. It basically operates as an organized online meeting space, discussion forum, and information sharing space for students and educators alike. Each Ning site features a customizable layout and provides a place for discussion forums, photo and video sharing, event notices and invitations, link posting, chat capabilities, document and note sharing, blog hosting, group creation, and member profiles. Privacy features allow the site to be made available to anyone or invited members only, and all aspects of the site are completely free. Additionally, each Ning site is assigned its own unique Web address at ____.ning.com. This makes the site very easy to find. Members must set up a Ning account and specific identity in order to access other groups hosted on the Ning network.

**http://posterous.com/** is a blog-hosting tool that works from your e-mail account. Their tagline is, “If you can e-mail, you can blog with posterous.” It’s an easy way to create group blogs or update multiple blogs all at once. All that is required is a two-step setup process on posterous.com. After setup,
posterous.com supplies a unique email address where all information is sent. Posterous.com then does the posting for you! The site supports photos, videos, music, and documents. All aspects of the site are free to use, with the downside being a lack of any privacy features.

**www.scribd.com/** is the largest social publishing company in the world. Whether students need a place to host their original works or teachers need a tool to facilitate the sharing of original class documents, Scribd is a simple, well-designed platform to meet a classroom’s document-sharing needs. All accounts on the site are not only free of charge, but merely browsing the site does not require a free membership and is greatly facilitated by the impeccably organized genre categories. It is worth noting that any document you upload to the site is available for the public to read.

**www.tumblr.com** is a very basic blog-hosting tool. Advertised as “the easiest way to blog,” single-author blogs can be set up with only one click. All aspects and options, however bare-bones they may be, are entirely free. Though there are no layout options, very few opportunities to customize the design, and no way to add applications to the page, Tumblr makes a great starter tool for quick, media-centric posts. Perhaps the best feature of the site is the ability to create blogging communities by following the blogs of others. After choosing to follow other blogs, updates from each of them will show up in a central location, making the need to check a large number of individual blogs obsolete. No privacy options for Tumblr blogs currently exist.

**www.twitter.com** is a micro-blogging application that challenges users to share links, questions, and other pieces of information in 140 characters or less. A Twitter account can be used in conjunction with note-taking software such as www.evernote.com and www.jott.com. All Twitter accounts are free, and users can share information as privately or publicly as they wish, through the use of personal messaging features and privacy settings that can be applied to the entire account. Setup of the account is easy and no downloads are required. However, desktop applications can be downloaded to facilitate the ease with which you maintain the account by receiving and making updates. In addition to being a great link-sharing tool, Twitter can be used as a vital
source of real-time information, since many news websites (i.e., CNN and the New York Times) have Twitter accounts that they update regularly with links and breaking news stories.

http://weblogg-ed.com/ is the website of educator Will Richardson, author of Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms. It has a plethora of information on using wikis, weblogs, audiocasts, and RSS as well as a host of other technologies. He also has links to important conferences and videos. Worth noting is the site’s information on creating a consent form for a specific project.

## Wikis

http://budtheteacher.com/wiki/ is a very content-rich wiki by Bud, a technology integrator and blogger extraordinaire. This wiki is chock-full of resources and links to other educators’ blogs and wikis. Although not fancy, this wiki reads like a laundry list of digital information and resources.

http://delicious.com/ is a link aggregator. Once the application is installed, it’s easy to collect, organize, and share your links with the entire Web community. Delicious is ideal for collecting information for research projects or papers. A single Delicious account could be used by an entire group or classroom, to organize and store links in one central location. Alternatively, each member can have their own account to collect research independently, and share it publicly with others. All aspects of Delicious are free, with a quick setup and easy-to-use service. Many Web pages have link-aggregator service icons, making saving a link to your Delicious account incredibly easy. Additional applications for Web browsers are available for free download.

www.etherpad.com is a real-time collaborative editing tool that ensures consistency between everyone’s screens by logging the changes in real-time. This account allows for the creation and editing of unlimited documents. Each document receives its own unique URL with editing privileges open for up to eight users by invitation only, and the URL of these documents can be distributed and shared with anyone who may wish to view it. The basic account is free to
use, but with purchase of upgrades available in order to access certain security features. These premium editions offer more privacy and access to support, making them well worth it. Additionally, EtherPad’s chat feature makes it ideal for group papers that need to be completed outside of classroom time.

http://learning2shanghai.wetpaint.com is a wiki titled, Welcome to Learning the Wiki Way, by the educator Jason Welker. This wiki does a thorough job of informing teachers on how to create and operate a wiki. It also has information on wiki workshops, and teacher conferences that include topics like how to make your wiki fun.

http://savedarfunhs.wetpaint.com is a wiki created by the eighth grade at North Hampton School in New Hampshire, after an assembly generated student interest and compassion for the genocide in Darfur. The site is set up as a complete information hub on Darfur itself and on what the students are doing to raise awareness and money for the people of Darfur. It is a very passionate website that is not only a great example of a productive and educative wiki, but a resourceful way to get other educators interested in this vital subject matter. This wiki also contains a great navigation bar with headings: The Darfur Song, Petitions and Protests, How You Can Help, What We Have Done, What We Need to Do, and Recent Activity in Darfur.

www.jott.com is a note-taking tool that utilizes phone calls made to a toll-free number that are collected, stored, and transformed into text. The basic function of Jott is to take audio, turn it into text, and post it to the location of your choice (i.e., email, blog, twitter update, etc.). What can you do with this technology? You can create notes for yourself with only a mobile phone, make to-do lists, email or text using only your voice, and even record interviews for class projects complete with perfect transcripts of the conversation. Although all of this technology comes with a price, the service is free to try out for a week. With a free week’s account, you will be given a toll-free number to call in your audio, and Jott will place a text version of your audio in the location of your choice (i.e., email or blog). After the free week, you can end your trial period or purchase a monthly account for as little as $3.95. Pay-as-you-go accounts are available as well for $6.95 per every five minutes of audio.
www.moodle.com is a Course Management System (CMS), also known as a Learning Management System (LMS) or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). It is a free Web application that educators can use to create effective online learning sites. You must download a software package, but all versions of the program are free. Moodle can be used as an alternative to Blackboard or even Ning as a central place to organize course documents and create online forums for your students.

http://mpolselli.wetpaint.com/?t=anon is the wiki for Mrs. Polselli’s fifth-grade class that she has set up with the free “create a website” site: www.wetpaint.com/. She has set it up to be a wonderful resource for keeping parents informed of classroom activities and to get her students excited about the school year. She includes PowerPoints of the class schedule, syllabus, and other important announcements. She also posts any featured books, musicians, contests, and webquests that will be part of her curriculum for the upcoming year.

http://pbworks.com/ is a site that offers free wiki templates in order for you to easily create your own classroom, business, or personal wiki. More advanced featured templates are available at a fee. The templates are categorized according to what they may be used for, so there are legal, campus, and project editions depending on your goal. Another plus is that all cost packages are available with no charge on a thirty-day trial basis, and packages are priced moderately at $8.00 to $20.00 per month.

http://supportblogging.com/Links+to+School+Blogging#toc6 is a site that, although about supporting blogging, is technically a wiki to be explored and contributed to. You can think of it as a “how-to” manual for blogging. It is a free, informative, and instructional website that promotes and encourages the practice of educational blogging. The site is very well organized, with a table of contents that includes alphabetical running lists of personal blogs, definitions and lengthy descriptions on educational blogging, blogging community resources, and instructions on how to contribute to the SupportBlogging! page.

http://victoriaaurorahistoryfairproject.wetpaint.com is a student-created wiki that focuses on women soldiers in the Civil and Revolutionary Wars. The
wiki was originally created for a history fair project. It includes photos and profiles of women soldiers, and is written in a very peer-friendly way that would draw any student in.

**www.wetpaint.com/** is a free-of-charge social networking and wiki-hosting service. Simply put, Wetpaint is a great website to go through in order to easily create your own URL, blog, wiki, or forum. The company targets users who may not be as technologically savvy as others but who want to create efficient and effective websites. Among its strong points are a three-step wiki creator, the option to have educational sites be free of any advertising, and simple site navigation that allows you to seek and join sites rather than make your own.

**www.wiki.com** is a tool for facilitating the sharing and construction of knowledge by a group of people. A wiki is a Web page that can be viewed and modified by multiple people. The only drawback to a wiki is that changes do not occur in real time. This means that updates to the information should not occur at the same time since each change must be saved before it shows up on the page. Wikis can be viewed and used by anyone on the Internet, making them ideal for creating an authentic purpose for research and writing. Private wikis are also available at no extra charge. All aspects of the wiki service are free and relatively easy to set up with the tutorials provided on the site.

**www.wikipedia.org/** is a very specific and prominent wiki known as “The Free Encyclopedia that anyone can edit.” This resource is a multilingual, content-based encyclopedia project. It is a collaboration by anonymous volunteer authors, meaning that anyone with Internet access can contribute, create, and alter an entry on Wikipedia. The main idea is that Wikipedia entries should not be based on new research, but rather founded on existing information. Information should be edited within the appropriate policies and standards of the Wikipedia site in order to maintain true, genuine, accurate, and beneficial information for all readers. Searching is as simple as typing in the name of what you are interested in learning about. A great feature is the additional notes, references, and external links that are included at the end of each article. These can ultimately become resources that lead you to explore your original topic in greater depth.
http://wikisineducation.wetpaint.com is a wiki tutorial site that is hosted through the free website www.wetpaint.com/. This wiki serves not only as a community to inform educators on using wikis, but also as a means to start your own educational wiki. It has a variety of wiki samples to explore, use as samples, and contribute to. The wiki categories include higher education, classroom, group project, teacher created, and student peers.

http://writersrock.wetpaint.com is a website for middle school teachers using the Teachers College Writers and Readers Workshop model. Their goal statement includes the wish to “support each other in our teaching practice by sharing resources, systems and management strategies. . . .” The wiki encourages users to share tips, and begin discussions about their teaching practices.

Digital Storytelling

http://epencil.edublogs.org is a sixth-grade writing workshop weblog called The Electronic Pencil. The site showcases students’ digital stories by embedding them into a wonderful class blog. Posts are very conscious of student climate, with threads like “what worries you, or what excites you?” It includes fun links like art tools, comic sites, crazy dictionary, and current events.

www.evernote.com is a note organization application powered by recognition technology. Though it’s easy to create an account, understanding how to utilize all of the amazing features of the application will take an investment of time. The idea is that one can use their Evernote account to tag and organize information one encounters every day. For example, if you find a sign during a field trip of a historical site and want to remember the information, you can take a picture of the sign and upload it to your Evernote account. Then, Evernote’s text-recognition technology will convert the image of the sign into text. The basic account option is free and includes a limited number of useful Web pages, images, and other media per month, but purchased premium accounts are available with 500 MB. Evernote can be used for everything from to-do lists, Web page favorites, audio, images from a camera or computer, and documents. It is also possible to send information to your Evernote account via email or Twitter.
**www.flickr.com** is an image- and video-hosting website that has gained much popularity for its user-friendly ability to share personal photographs. The site describes its main goals to be “helping people make their photos and content accessible to the people most important to them,” and “creating new ways of organizing photos and video.” Use of Flickr’s basic account is completely free, with additional features/packages such as high-quality video as something available to paid subscribers. The home page with sign-up is very easy to navigate in order to get anyone set up to share photos and video. A virtual instructional tour breaks the whole process down into eight steps, and the About Us page is worth reading not only for the information on its founders and features, but also for its fun and quirky delivery.

**http://jasonohler.com** is the website of Dr. Jason Ohler, who is an expert at the practice of digital storytelling and the author of *Digital Storytelling in the Classroom*. His site boasts the phrase “To live, learn, work and play in the Digital Age,” and is laden with articles, resources, and keynote addresses about digital storytelling. Links not to miss (under the About tab) include Portfolio, At work with teachers, and Pictures of home.

**www.slideshare.com** is a presentation creation and hosting tool. No downloads are required, and all membership accounts are free and unlimited. Privacy settings are available if you’d like to use them. You can make your presentation online, or choose to upload previous presentations you have constructed with other software (i.e., PowerPoint, open office, or Apple Keynote) and share it easily with a unique Web address. In addition to supporting other software presentation formats, SlideShare can also host documents and spreadsheets for easy participation. SlideShare also makes it simple to sync audio files to your presentation, or even embed your presentation into another website (i.e., blog or classroom home page). It also allows you to search for presentations and documents others have uploaded or created, using their very accessible search feature.

**www.storycenter.org/** is the website for The Center for Digital Storytelling, which is an international nonprofit organization based in Northern California. Their focus is on the concept of real-life people telling their stories in a digital
format such as still pictures, written scripts, video, and music. Their mission statement includes the phrase, “We assist youth and adults around the world in using media tools to share, record, and value stories from their lives. . . .” In addition to digital stories archived on their site, and a list of resources for educators, they also host storytelling workshops across the United States and Canada. Their original digital storytelling workshop is the format used by most digital storytellers and educators. Their book can be found online at www.storycenter.org.cookbook.html.

www.teachertube.com is a community-based site created by teachers for sharing instructional videos. Since it is monitored for relevance, appropriateness, and usefulness much more rigorously than YouTube, this site is an excellent place for students to search for original videos. Teachers will also find it to be a useful and free website for locating relevant resources and videos for curricular content as well as professional development and Web 2.0 tutorials. Anyone can contribute to the website, making it an ideal venue for posting class project videos that other students may find helpful.

www.vimeo.com is a higher-video-quality alternative to YouTube. Like other video-sharing websites, Vimeo is a democratic community, allowing anyone to upload their original work. Vimeo lauds itself on being a respectful community of creative people who are passionate about sharing the videos they make. As such, the site ensures the highest viewing quality for the videos they host, and can even support HD quality. Like Teachertube, Vimeo also holds high standards of quality, respect, and originality for the videos they allow on the site, making it an extremely student-friendly resource.

http://wisdomlostwisdomfound.wikispaces.com/introduction is a wiki that showcases students’ digital stories based on oral histories of their local community members. The site is set up almost in a report form with an introduction and overview of the history project, guiding questions and activities, and the solution to fill in the blanks of generations past. It is a very thought-provoking and inspiring resource for social change.

www.280slides.com is a presentation creation tool. Like SlideShare, there’s no software to download and all accounts and services are free. Unlike
SlideShare, 280 Slides has the unique feature of a built-in media-searching tool, making researching media resources quick and easy to accomplish while building your presentation. Creating a presentation is essentially as easy as surfing the Web since all editing and research are done from the same Web browser. Additionally, the autosave and recovery features are very practical, and work well. When you are finished, you can download it to PowerPoint with one click.

Additional Pertinent Resources

http://community.discoveryeducation.com/ is the website for The Discovery Educator Network. The site frequently hosts free virtual conferences for teachers as a way to share ideas about the utilization of Web 2.0 applications in the classroom. The Network also hosts personal blogs of innovative educators, and maintains an up-to-date list of Web resources for the classroom. All webinars, resources, and applications on the site are free. It is possible to access all of the resources on the website without signing up for a free Discovery Educator Network membership; however, a free membership is necessary to attend live webinars.

www.edutopia.org/ hosts a variety of blogs written by professional educators in addition to producing professional development webinars (available to members only) and videos. Much of the content on the site is dedicated to Web 2.0 tools in the public school classroom. The site also features a range of research articles, in addition to having a helpful search feature for all of the content displayed. All aspects of the site except the webinars are free, though it is possible to become a member and support the site voluntarily in exchange for a subscription to Edutopia magazine, and access to all professional development webinars.

www.eschoolnews.com/ is a free online educator newspaper that started solely as a monthly printed paper in 1998. Their tagline is “Technology News for Today’s K–20 Educator,” and articles focus on all aspects of education technology from new products, to the Internet, to specific case studies and
breaking events in education technology. The site is wonderfully organized, with categories of breaking news, most popular, funding, technology, conferences, best practices, superintendent’s center, eclassroom news, and site of the week. Again, the site offers free registration and important email updates if you choose that option. It is worth noting that you can also view eSchoolNews articles without registering, but if you decide to use it as a consistent resource, registration is more practical.

www.loc.gov/index.html is the website for The Library of Congress. It is the largest library in the world and the oldest federal institution in the United States. The site is a great resource for learning about literacy projects such as the American Folklife Center, the Center for the Book, and the Poet Laureate. It also has maps, recordings, and manuscripts. Although the actual library in Washington, D.C., is not open to public lending, the site itself can be explored for hours, and serves as a great way to promote research, reading, and many other projects within the classroom.

www.scholastic.com features a teacher resource page with a classroom home page builder. The home page builder is free and can even be hosted by scholastic.com for free. Though it’s easy to create a home page in three steps using the builder, Scholastic also has a tutorial for this to aid you in the process. The security options for the free home pages are excellent, and Scholastic ensures that the student version is advertisement free. Additionally, the teacher resource page features a discussion forum for teachers to share their own innovative ideas.

http://teenink.com/ is a monthly print magazine, book series, and website that was founded in 1989 and is completely dependent on teen submissions. It is marketed to and published by teenagers from the nonprofit organization The Young Author’s Foundation. The main purpose of the magazine is to foster the development of teens’ writing, reading, and critical thinking skills while giving them their own venue to do so. The magazine publishes anthologies, perpetually accepts writing submissions, and has a large focus on poetry. The website is very creative and easy to navigate, with categories such as poetry, fiction, nonfiction, hot topics, opinion, art and photos, and reviews. They also
host many contests not only for writing, but magazine artwork as well. Both
the site and the magazine are free and widely distributed in classrooms
nationwide with a simple online request. It is worth noting that there is always
the option of a donation since they are maintaining themselves on a not-for-
profit basis.
Thank you for sampling this resource.

For more information or to purchase, please visit Heinemann by clicking the link below:


Use of this material is solely for individual, noncommercial use and is for informational purposes only.