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Digital Storytelling as an Educational Tool

Standards, Planning, and Literacy

There has been very little research conducted on the value of digital storytelling (DST) in education. But I wouldn't let that bother you. Much has been written about the effectiveness of storytelling in education as well as the importance of digital skills to today's students. The two complement and reinforce each other quite naturally.

However, it's worth discussing the value of DST in relation to some of the broad areas of concern that emerge in the public discussion of education. Toward that end, let's consider DST within the context of standards, instructional design, and literacy.

Digital Storytelling and Standards

My consideration of standards is concerned with how they can be used to help teachers better understand what DST offers classroom instruction. To facilitate this discussion, I consider standards in three areas: (1) content, (2) technology, and (3) language arts.

1. Content Standards

Standards exist for all K–12 content areas commonly addressed in schools. Standards typically address what is important for students to understand within a content area and at what grade level. In most cases, standards exist at both the national and state levels; in some cases they even exist at the district or school level. For the most part, content standards address outcomes more than methodology. Because DST is viewed primarily as methodology, it might therefore seem outside the scope of our discussion. However, it does seem reasonable to ask whether DST has any limitations that might preclude it from being used as a methodology to address the curriculum goals that are developed in response to content standards. Clearly, this does not seem to be the case. The examples I described earlier included stories about math, science, and language arts concepts, as well as stories of cultural and personal significance. It is reasonable to infer from the wide variety of topics addressed by these stories that DST has wide application and can be used by students in most, if not all, content areas. It also seems reasonable to infer that DST can be used to address most topics within content areas as long as the time, technology access, and technology training exist to support it. As always, this assumes a fertile and supportive educational environment to be successful.

2. Technology Standards

The K–12 world has embraced the educational technology standards developed by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). As of this writing, these standards can be accessed at the ISTE website: www.iste.org.

Even though ISTE has created separate technology standards for teachers, students, and administrators, they embrace common concerns and concepts. Teacher standards are listed in Table 3.1.

When I wrote the first edition of this book, I debated whether to address the ISTE standards in depth, given that using new media embodies the standards in such obvious ways. However, since the first edition was published, ISTE has come out with new standards, *the refresh standards,* which make a strong case for pursuing creativity and using new media narrative. (See Table 3.1 for the ISTE Refresh Standards; compare these with the original standards that can be found at http://cnets.iste.org/teachers/t_stands.html.) Briefly considering the new standards is very instructive.

A quick comparison of the two sets of standards shows that each has a distinctly different tone. The first set stresses technology operations and integration. The subtext is that technology is to be used effectively "within the box" to support existing effective educational practice. In contrast, the new standards make clear that technology is changing educational practice in deep ways and that out-of-the-box thinking has become part of the new paradigm. One of the predominant subtexts of the new set is that *the technology is changing who we are, how we think, and how we communicate.*

Table 3.1   NETS•T or NETS for Teachers

1. Facilitate and inspire student learning and creativity
2. Design and develop digital-age learning experiences and assessments
3. Model digital-age work and learning
4. Promote and model digital citizenship and responsibility
5. Engage in professional growth and leadership

We can discern the changes reflected in the refreshed standards by considering words that appear in the ISTE standards for the first time. For our purposes here, we are particularly interested in two words, *creativity* and *innovation,* which define Standard 1. Placing creativity and innovation so boldly and clearly at the top of the standards stands in stark contrast to the current educational testing climate in which conformity in content and uniformity in assessment are the order of the day. Emphasizing creativity and innovation also support efforts to blend creative new media narrative production into the curriculum.

Creativity is also important for students in the refreshed standards. Student refresh Standard 1 (2007) reads

1. Creativity and innovation. Students demonstrate creative thinking, construct knowledge, and develop innovative products and processes using technology. Students:

    o   Apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes
    o   Create original works as a means of personal or group expression
    o   Use models and simulations to explore complex systems and issues
    o   Identify trends and forecast possibilities.

The prominence of the words *creativity* and *innovation* in the refresh standards indicates the following:

1. *We must move beyond technology integration toward technology as tools to leverage idea generation.* We are formally recognizing the fact that our new technologies need to be used beyond mere curriculum integration or as a means to simply update the status quo with new tools. Instead, we need to use them to generate, explore, and use new ideas that challenge and redefine the status quo.

2. *We must shift away from operations and toward perspective, communication, and creatical thinking.* Learning how to use digital technology is no longer the primary challenge. After all, with enough tenacity and sense of adventure, just about anyone can be a reasonably good technology user these days. The real challenge now lies in understanding how to place our new tools in a larger educational and social perspective in innovative, creative, *creatical* ways. This is particularly true in the case of new media narrative. Narrative tools are now powerful, easy to use, and ubiquitous. The question has become, *What role does new media narrative play in the evolving educational and social landscape?* And, more to the point, *Now that we have powerful communication tools, just what was it we wanted to say?*

Please note that there are other words that appear for the first time in the ISTE refresh standards whose appearance is also significant. Among them are *digital, citizenship, culture,* and *global.* I address their importance in another book, *Digital Community, Digital Citizen.* However, it is worth noting here that the focus on global citizenship and the reality of the multicultural mediascape that have become our second home reinforces the importance of story and art as universal languages, concepts that are discussed later.

Below, I address a few other key points that may help readers align the ISTE standards and their educational goals. Beyond this, I recommend that teachers consult the ISTE standards, which are clear and well documented. Using the ISTE standards to drive DST projects is a no-brainer. Every DST project I have participated in involves most ISTE standards in some way.

How techie a teacher do I need to be? Standards 3 and 5 (model digital-age work and learning; engage in professional growth and leadership) are either directly or indirectly concerned with teachers' technical proficiency. Over the years, I have come to appreciate that

this is an aspect of teaching that every teacher makes peace with in a very personal way. The question that each teacher needs to address is simple in concept yet complicated in application: How technically capable do I feel I need to be to use new media in my curriculum?

There are a number of responses to this, all of which are quite workable. Teachers can opt to simply manage the talents of their students, an approach that opens the door for nontechnical educators to include DST in classroom activities. A nontechnically oriented teacher with an open mind and good classroom management skills can be very successful in a digital age classroom. On the other end of the spectrum, teachers can decide that they need to have an advanced understanding of new media in order to be truly responsible and helpful. As long as they see themselves as a resource and not a gateway through which students need to pass to gain access to resources and knowledge, they too can be very successful. And then there is everything in between.

After 25 years of advising teachers to be the guide on the side rather than the technician magician, I can tell you that the teachers who thrive are those who do what they genuinely feel comfortable doing yet aren't afraid of their next steps. Ideally, they look for these next steps and feel a sense of excitement and renewal in their professional practice when they take them. I can also tell you that if teachers decide to take their next steps, then they need to have access to the professional development necessary to do so. Fortunately, there is so much good, free training available via the web, that we all have just-in-time learning opportunities on a 24/7 basis. I have turned to YouTube recently to fix my dishwasher, learn advanced Photoshop concepts, figure out which video camera to buy, and understand the intricacies of playing a particular guitar solo. Professional development offered by schools and districts also continues to play an important role in teacher training. Often the greatest help a district office can offer teachers is to make sure professional development is available and to encourage and incentivize teachers to use it.

Teachers can't require what they can't evaluate. This most directly addresses Standard 2 (design and develop digital age learning experiences and assessments) and to a lesser extent the rest of the standards. As I say at a few points in this book, one of the most significant barriers preventing teachers from requiring more new media projects of their students is that they don't feel comfortable assessing them. This is understandable, given that the primary medium that most of today's teachers have produced is text, a fact that is rapidly changing as the workforce becomes younger. In an era of No Child

Left Behind, the Common Core, and already jam-packed curricula, teachers need assistance assessing schoolwork in forms that are unfamiliar to them. It is to be hoped that this book will provide help in this area.

Social impacts and media literacy. The issues addressed by Standard 4 (promote and model digital citizenship and responsibility) become extremely important within the context of new media production. Students live in a world of very persuasive media, much of which goes undetected by them. Students, as well as the rest of us, are much like the proverbial fish who are unable to see the water in which they swim. Having students create digital media provides the ultimate media literacy opportunity. As teachers oversee students creating their own media, they can help students see the water by deconstructing media and the many persuasive techniques media producers use to "pierce the neocortex and connect with people's feelings" (www. jasonohler.com/storytelling).

In addition to media literacy, teachers tend to be concerned with some of the legal and ethical parameters associated with student-generated media. In particular, they tend to be concerned with the issues and opportunities associated with their students downloading media from the web to include it in their digital stories. The chapter on copyright and fair use should help address issues in this area.

Include digital stories in your digital footprint. Also important is helping students understand their digital footprints—the public persona they leave behind on the web by virtue of how they behave and what they post online. I address this in some detail in *Digital Community, Digital Citizen.* However, it is worth pointing out here that while the term "digital footprint" often has negative connotations, it can also be viewed as a vehicle for putting one's best virtual foot forward on the Net. A key component of anyone's portfolio these days is the new media they create and post on the web for the rest of the world to see. Given that students are going to create media with or without our blessing, it behooves us to help them develop media that will generate as positive a digital footprint as possible.

3. Language Arts Standards

Two reasons inspire me to provide the following analysis of how and why the standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) are an effective vantage point from which to view the importance of

new media in the classroom. First, they deal directly with the production and understanding of narrative. In so doing, they offer a helpful perspective from which to view the extension of text into the digital domain and the expansion of concepts like reading, writing, and grammar that have come about owing to emerging technologies, literacies, and practices such as DST. Web 2.0 is, above all, a narrative environment. Second, DST is new to many teachers and policy makers. Thus, how it impacts the world of language arts may not be apparent. Even if readers already understand the connections between language arts and student-based new media production, they may benefit from the extra arguments they find here. However, if readers aren't in need of any further argument in this area, then I invite them to skip ahead in the book. This section is for those who have questions about this topic.

To structure my analysis, I use the Standards for the English Language Arts developed by IRA and NCTE (1996), which appear on the NCTE website: www.ncte.org.

Before proceeding, three elements of DST that I have previously identified bear repeating here for the purpose of this discussion:

1. Successful DST depends on traditional writing and the literacies associated with it in the development of scripts, narrative, and other planning instruments.

2. DST integrates traditional and emerging literacies while pursuing content-area learning.

3. DST is, above all, storytelling. As such it has many of the educational benefits of traditional storytelling, as well as some new ones.

With this in mind, let's consider how the standards are introduced on the NCTE website. The introduction begins as follows:

> The vision guiding these standards is that all students must have the opportunities and resources to develop the language skills they need to pursue life's goals and to participate fully as informed, productive members of society. (NCTE, 2006, n.p.)

The current de facto language is the multimedia collage. Consider the average web page. It's a mix of text, graphics, video, sound, and other elements of communication arranged to maximize aesthetics and effectiveness. Informed and productive members of society need traditional and emerging literacy skills in order to read, write, and

navigate web information, which, incidentally, are the same literacy skills needed to develop effective digital stories. The world of Web 2.0 is a social environment connected and facilitated by narrative, which depends on the literacy skills of its participants to be effective. I discuss the nature of these literacies, and the part they play in DST, in the next section. The introduction continues:

> These standards assume that literacy growth begins before children enter school as they experience and experiment with literacy activities—reading and writing, and associating spoken words with their graphic representations. (NCTE, 2006, n.p.)

Basic new media literacy begins at an ever-younger age. First-generation digital kids send text messages, take pictures with smartphones, and personalize their own web spaces without much training or trouble. To them, the technology is largely just intelligent furniture. DST is an effective vehicle to use to help students continue the literacy growth they have begun outside school while giving it shape and academic purpose. The introduction continues:

> Recognizing this fact, these standards encourage the development of curriculum and instruction that make productive use of the emerging literacy abilities that children bring to school. Furthermore, the standards provide ample room for the innovation and creativity essential to teaching and learning. They are not prescriptions for particular curriculum or instruction. Although we present these standards as a list, we want to emphasize that they are not distinct and separable; they are, in fact, interrelated and should be considered as a whole. (NCTE, 2006, n.p.)

Two important points arise from this passage, the first of which is about story. In his book *Teaching as Story Telling*, Kieran Egan (1989) notes that kids come to school already understanding the story form. Yet what they encounter is information in report form, which lacks the rhythm and imagination that make stories so involving. The result is cognitive dissonance as kids try to bridge the worlds of pre-school and school. If we view storytelling as an emerging ability and seek to nurture it when children enter school, we can tap into communication structures they already understand. Digital storytelling provides one avenue for doing this, a concept I explore more deeply in Part II of this book.

Second, with a little wordsmithing, this passage could easily be adapted as an inspirational vision statement for a school's educational technology plan or digital literacy scope and sequence. The phrase "emerging literacy abilities" effectively describes the skills and understandings young people are developing as they begin to use new media. DST not only provides ample room for "innovation and creativity" but expects it, anticipates it, and depends on it, largely because the tEcosystem and the participatory world of Web 2.0 facilitate it so naturally and pervasively. As I detail in the next section, DST interrelates standards, literacies, and content in truly unique ways.

Now let's consider DST within the context of each language arts standard. As you will see, it's not difficult to do, which is a testimony to the insight embedded in the standards, as well as to the utility of DST within a language arts context. In most cases, my comments merely point out ways that new media, and DST in particular, can be considered as natural extensions of language arts. As extensions they bring with them some new considerations about language.

> **Standard 1.** Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

The range of text now available to students spans not only literary genres and cultures but nonprint media forms as well. Students need to be able to "read" TV programming, digital stories, online discussions, and other kinds of media collages that consume much of the bandwidth in their tEcosystem. We owe it to language arts students to present them with a scenario in which conventional and emerging texts complement and challenge rather than collide with each other. Having students blend reading the classics in print with experiencing more contemporary works in new media form ideally situates them to be literate in the most useful, contemporary sense.

Being able to read new media is not just a matter of literacy; it's also a matter of survival, primarily for two reasons. First, reading new text is the basis of the kind of critical thinking needed for workplace success in an information economy. It is commonplace for employees at many levels of an organization to be required to acquire new information by searching the multimedia environment of the World Wide Web and analyzing and applying what they find. It is

also commonplace for them to be asked to participate in online communities for the purposes of collaborative problem solving and data mining. Such communities are rapidly adopting the multimedia collage as the de facto communication format, merging text and nontext sources into expressions of new media.

Second, while we want students to read new media for personal fulfillment, we also want them to read it in order to understand how it can be used to persuade its readership in powerful and often subtle ways. In an age in which media companies see young people largely in terms of market share, having the ability to read print and nonprint text critically is a matter of survival.

While this standard focuses on reading rather than writing, it's important to point out that just as with literacy associated with conventional texts, literacy involved with new media texts is an interplay between production and consumption. That is, the most effective way for students to learn how to read new media is to create it. Conversely, the most effective way for them to create effective new media is to be able to read, deconstruct, and analyze what they're creating. DST is as much a reading process as a writing process.

> **Standard 2.** Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

Blending literary tradition with new media texts provides a range of reading experience previously unfathomable in language arts. In the hands of a skilled teacher, the variety within this range provides a way to explore how much has changed yet remained consistent about human nature over the centuries, despite the evolution of language tools.

It's important to note that the world of digital stories has expanded the philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of the human experience beyond the famous to the masses of the great unknown. There are many websites and other online environments that host digital stories by people with seemingly ordinary lives. It can be a great source of inspiration to students to know that what may seem common is actually special when explored with appropriate reflection and expressed in the language of their generation.

DST is not only personally empowering but also widely applicable across genres and academic areas. I've seen compelling new media pieces produced by students that explicate the works of authors as diverse as Shakespeare and Sylvia Plath. The new media

documentary is rapidly becoming a respected and even expected format for student presentation.

> **Standard 3.** Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

We saw earlier that teachers used a number of strategies in their evaluation of the digital stories they watched, most of which were drawn from their work analyzing more conventional texts rather than new media. This is understandable, given that their prior experience with new media was mostly as passive consumers of TV, movies, and other popular media. That is, their experience had rarely consisted of "active viewing"—a process used to deconstruct media within a media literacy context—and even more rarely of actual media production.

That is why an important aspect of the experience of viewing digital stories was teachers' interactions with each other as readers and writers of new text in a professional setting. Much of their conversation was focused on "seeing" new media and reading it with understanding, a new experience for most. These insights were then carried forward into the new media they produced in the workshop. Reading and writing new media are important abilities for teachers to have, particularly so they can teach them to students who are so immersed in the tEcosystem that new media are largely invisible to them. Standard 3 clearly supports teaching these abilities.

Standard 3 is also important with regard to the role of traditional literacy in the development of digital stories. As I stated earlier, the world of new media is built on the written word in the form of scripts, treatments, narratives, and other planning documents, all of which require the foundational literacy skills associated with success in language arts. They are the same skills necessary for reading and analyzing new media as well as creating it.

> **Standard 4.** Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

Standards 4 and 5 support the need to conceive new media production in terms of audience expectation and needs, recalling our earlier discussion of digital as essay versus poem. The ability to write for diverse audiences for a variety of purposes is as important in the digital domain as it is in more conventional communication environments. The world of possibility in this regard was made clear by the tremendous variety of the digital stories described earlier. We can further infer that with the appropriate motivation and imagination, digital stories can and should be developed to suit virtually any audience.

Standard 5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

These standards are also helpful in reinforcing the potential of new media to appeal to multiple intelligences, as a way to both approach diverse audiences and facilitate students seeking the most effective ways to use their many talents. Within DST, a range of communication strategies exists through the use of different media elements, including words, pictures, music, and so on, allowing creators to speak in many different languages to a wide range of listeners.

Standard 6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

This standard can be used to address "language" in two senses within the context of student digital media development: conventional writing and the language of new media employed in DST and other nonprint texts.

As I mentioned earlier, conventional writing is a key component of new media development. While digital stories are typically viewed as an event on a computer screen, written work provides the foundation and blueprint needed to give them life. Students need to apply an understanding of language structure and conventions commensurate with what they are reading or producing, particularly in the following genres: stories and story treatments written in clear expository

prose, narrative written in authentic vernacular, and story maps, story tables, and storyboards written in concise shorthand.

New media also introduce an expanded notion of language while retaining some of the familiarity of more conventional text. Recall that when teachers analyzed digital stories, they identified traits that were familiar, like tone and point of view, as well as traits that were new, like the application of music and visuals to support spoken narrative. It is because of the overlap between conventional and emerging languages that I call my approach to new media language convention "media grammar." I find that digital stories have their own version of run-ons, fragments, weak organization, and clumsy pacing, as well as effective uses of adverbs and adjectives, character development, and flow. Media grammar allows teachers to approach the often unfamiliar language of new media using tools that are familiar and still useful for the purposes of creating, critiquing, and discussing new media text.

> **Standard 7.** Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

Standards 7 and 8 reinforce the notion that whether students are generating traditional reports or digital stories, they need to engage in the same quality of inquiry, research, and analysis in order to be successful. What may be new for some is the use of new media texts, including TV, movies, new media work by peers, and web-based animations, as textual sources, as well as the need for media literacy skills in order to read and analyze them. What may also be new is the participatory nature of research on the web and how instrumental that will be as students "gather, evaluate, and synthesize data" for their projects. But regardless of the methodology, the goal of high-quality research remains.

> **Standard 8.** Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

From the examples of digital stories described earlier, we see clearly that students can use new media to communicate discovery based on research. In the small sampling of stories that I provided, students communicated their understanding of a number of academic concepts,

including super bugs, metaphor, and the mathematics of a rolling ball, as well as their understanding of important personal events.

> **Standard 9.** Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

The web provides access to many sites that feature digital stories and other new media texts created by students from many cultures throughout the world. Their stories are highly diverse: Some detail daily life; others chronicle living in a war zone. Their approach to media development is equally varied: Some use no more than a cell phone, while others use sophisticated video technology. These same sites provide opportunities for students to become part of Web 2.0's global village (as well as its many subcultures and enclaves) by posting their own stories. In short, the Internet provides a reading list of a breadth and depth that were unimaginable not long ago. It also does something else that is truly unique: It provides students the opportunity to add to the global reading list itself. Blogs, YouTube, Wikipedia, and so on mark the infancy of celebrating diversity on the web in a very grassroots sense.

An important aspect of respecting other cultures is understanding the communication limitations imposed by the media. Some things are more faithfully reproduced in the digital domain than others. For example, the current standard of music video presentation, particularly for youth, includes a good deal of movement and razzamatazz, which may be at odds with the nature of the culture trying to present itself via digital means. As always, part of showing respect for diversity lies in trying to understand how the media distort cultural expressions and favor some cultures while disadvantaging others.

> **Standard 10**. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.

Writing for digital media projects compels students to focus on the use of language in ways that they don't necessarily focus on when writing is the only final product. Because digital stories often employ spoken narrative, students get to hear what their writing sounds like by recording it and listening to it as many times as they like. It is not uncommon for students who are crafting a short narrative to labor

over phrases that don't sound quite right. In much the same way that good writing is rewriting, good narration is renarration. Because of the interplay between writing, speaking, and listening, DST has great potential to help students learn language.

It is worth mentioning here the "translative" benefits of DST. In order for students to translate something from one language to another successfully, they need a firm understanding of the content. I used to require my ed tech students to translate technical information into plain English for this reason. DST has great value in this regard because it compels students to go from script to new media, a language translation process we are just beginning to appreciate. The potential for second language speakers to use this process to develop first language skills—as well as media literacy skills—is very great.

> **Standard 11.** Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

Reflective communities are part of DST in many ways, two of which are particularly important here. First, reflective learning communities are primarily storytelling communities. As I walk among students in a DST workshop engaged in the creative process, whether they are huddled over paper during the planning stages or are at their computers during production, I often hear them helping each other by telling their own stories of success and failure. As I sit with students individually, I hear them reflect on the story, the process, and their technique, looking for the insights that will help put on the screen what they think and feel. Effectively, they are teaching each other new media literacy through trial and error, peer assessment, and the media production process. In addition, the Internet hosts a number of resource communities that can help students learn about everything from telling stories to using technology to do so. Second, once their stories are completed, students have to share them to complete them—a story is not done until it has been told. This happens within class and often in the broader context of school and community in "literacy communities" devoted, often informally, to sharing and critically assessing new media in terms of story and technique. It also frequently happens on the great world stage of the Internet.

> **Standard 12.** Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Outside the academic arena, students engage with new media because they enjoy it and because it has great practical value to them as communicators. Digital media extend the hours of the school hallway, provide a collective canvas for emerging artists, and put young people at the helm of a culture creation engine that is constantly surprising all of us with its potential. The result is that in the less formal, less school-oriented context of text messaging, cell phone chatting, online community discourse, and the many other things that young people digitally do, students are already producing digital stories of a sort. Language arts provide them with many ways to create their own voice. They are first-generation digital. This is how they speak.

The Common Core and New Media

The developers of the Common Core Standards are identified on corestandards.org as a state-led effort involving "parents, teachers, school administrators and experts from across the country together with state leaders, through their membership in the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center)." The subtext here is clear: the crafters of the Common Core have tried to involve a wide variety of experts and concerned citizens to tackle the very important question, *What does it mean to be literate at this point in history?*

Specifically, their mission is to develop standards for the areas of English language arts and math. As of this writing, these standards have been developed. It should be noted that Common Core Standards are also being developed by other groups in the areas of science, world languages, and the arts.

While the Common Core currently does not come with threats of defunding for noncompliance (as does No Child Left Behind), it is safe to assume that it has the potential to be as much a threat as an inspiration. Adoption of the Common Core is voluntary, yet nearly every state has signed on, giving it so much pervasiveness and power that it is rapidly becoming the de facto standard for "the 3 *R*s" for most students in the United States. Given how tedious, expensive, and potentially contentious it is to develop standards—and given the fact that the Common Core has achieved widespread acceptance rather quickly and without much dissent—it's safe to assume that the Common Core is here to stay. You can bank on its becoming the benchmark against which teachers, students, schools, districts, and states will be judged for some time to come.

Thus it makes sense to ask how the Common Core Standards have advanced the areas addressed in this book, including creativity,

storytelling, digital literacy, digital storytelling, and new media narrative, as well as the languages of art and design that dominate our multimedia landscape. In particular, we should look for signs that the Common Core addresses digital literacy and the new grammars and forms of expression that students must learn if they are to be literate using media beyond text. Please note that this analysis considers only the ELA (English Language Arts) Common Core Standards. But also note that these standards apply to reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language wherever writing occurs in the curriculum. Specifically mentioned in the ELA Common Core Standards in this regard are the areas of "history/social studies, science and technical subjects."

New media literacy and the Common Core. The ELA standards appear to be a mixed blessing. Overall, we find mention of literacy beyond text peppered throughout. However, when it comes to requiring students to demonstrate abilities in the specifics of new media literacy, the standards are noticeably silent. In contrast, the standards provide copious detail about writing, down to the level of comma use. The message here is clear: While the ELA standards may champion literacy in a number of media areas, they are interested in specific literacy skills related primarily to traditional forms of what most would refer to as *literacy* the way our parents experienced it.

Particularly disappointing is that mention of words such as *creative, original,* and *innovation,* and derivations thereof, is nearly nonexistent. Any sense that writing and media development are art forms, as well as means of communication, is subtle at best.

What's good? First, let's consider the upside of the ELA Common Core Standards. The reality is that there are glimmers of hope that provide us enough of a foundation to build a bridge between the Common Core and the world of new media literacy, if we are willing to accept the challenge to do so. Of particular note is that the Common Core has tried to include breathing room for teachers to use their own classroom strategies, opening the door for teachers to try a number of methodologies.

In the introduction we find the following:

> To be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society, students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts . . .

While there is much to discuss in this passage, we are interested in the phrase "nonprint texts." It is indeed at least a nod to the mediascape that pervades our lives, which is filled with far more than just letters, words, and paragraphs.

This is not an isolated reference. For example, Reading Standard 7 reads, "Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words."

Similarly, Speaking and Listening Standard 5 reads, "Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations."

As we wade into the specifics of the standards at the grade level, we catch glimpses of the importance of new media:

Reading Standard 7, Grade 5: "Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone and beauty of a text . . ." This speaks to media alignment, an essential element of media grammar that I discuss later on.

Reading, Standard 7, Grade 8: "Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea." This describes the process we want students to go through as they make decisions about how to blend media to best convey their message.

Particularly encouraging is a standard like Speaking and Listening Standard 5, Grade 2: "Create audio recording of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings." This sounds very much like a digital story. In fact, there are a number of references in the standards to crafting narrative that will help teachers tie their use of digital storytelling to standards-driven activities.

And there are two other bright spots with regard to digital narrative. First, there is the attention to writing and research throughout the standards. A point made throughout this book is the importance of writing and research as the first steps in the development of media. And second, there is an emphasis on speaking. This is often absent in language art curricula. As we will see throughout this book, many digital stories take the form of voice-over narration. Being able to speak clearly and with nuance can often make the difference between a digital story that is compelling versus one that is ho-hum.

What's missing? But what does not appear in the standards is any kind of reference to what is referred to in this book as "media grammar," that is, the guidelines used to develop successful media. Whereas there are standards that refer to the correct use of linking words, prepositions, and other conventions of traditional writing,

there is nothing like that for multimedia texts, which might address, for example, the coordination of music, image, and narration.

The realist in me says this is to be expected. Grammatical conventions have evolved over centuries, ever since literacy began to enter mainstream society. In contrast, we are just now entering an era in which the job of making media has shifted from a select group of media elite who dominated the broadcast mass media landscape to anyone with a computer and an Internet connection. Teacher education programs, often slow to respond to changes in society, don't typically spend much time on how to plan for, create, and evaluate good media. Thus, it's not surprising that teachers bring this deficit into their professional practice.

The real problem here is that the Common Core developers missed a wonderful opportunity to appear prescient and to provide leadership in an area that will at some point become mainstreamed in standard education. Any good research project—and the Common Core is, in many ways, a research project—ends with a call for further research. Certainly one area of research the Common Core could have called for is that of investigating the evolution of standards in the areas of new media grammar, expression, and evaluation. Students need to understand what makes a quality digital story, documentary and mash-up, as well as a good essay and research report. There is little sense of this in the Common Core.

And there is little sense that media evolution is in its infancy and that standards will need to evolve to keep up. What will it mean to be "gaming literate" or "augmented reality literate" as the technology evolves to the point where it becomes easy to create games and augmented reality projects? We may not have answers, but we should at least be asking the questions.

A note about addressing information overload—the shift away from literature. I should note that storytelling figures quite prominently in the Common Core, particularly in the earlier grades. I refer you to T. O'Brien's list of ways in which the Common Core identifies 4–7 substandards per grade that address this storytelling in some way (2012). It is also important to note that the standards support an emphasis on informational text versus literary text in the later grades. While this might die hard for some—including this English major—it is a completely understandable reaction to a rather new problem that students will need to address for the rest of their lives: being overwhelmed by an endless avalanche of information that is largely conflictual and biased in nature and which requires finely tuned critical analysis skills to fully understand.

In fact, a good deal of what the standards call for in this regard easily falls under the heading of conventional *media literacy.* Largely developed during the 1960s in response to broadcast media, Media Literacy 1.0 taught students the skills necessary to evaluate and analyze information as a way to distinguish evidence versus opinion, and separate the spin from the facts. The underlying assumption of Media Literacy 1.0 is that we would forever be consumers of media, never creators of it. Therefore, the best we could do was learn how to read media as critically as possible. Toward this end, the Common Core could have more fully recognized other forms of informational text, like the documentary, which receives scant mention. By and large, the documentary is the primary form of nonprint informational text, versus fictional text, that students will encounter. YouTube is filled with documentaries, mockumentaries, and other forms of media (of wildly varying degrees of quality) that purport to be more factual than fictional. How to read these is essential to being literate. So is learning how to write them, the subject of Media Literacy 2.0.

Where is the 4th R? Where is creativity? Of particular concern is how the Common Core defined literacy itself—as the 3*R*s, with the welcome addition of speaking and listening.

At this point in history, as we all spend so much time awash in audiovisual media that populate the tEcosystem, for some reason we still won't stand up and say what needs to be said: Art is the 4th *R* because it is the dominant language of our universal, international mediascape. And because we don't have either the wisdom or the courage to have that great cultural ah-hah moment in any public way, some of the real literacy skills students need to develop in the highly aesthetic age of art, multimedia presentation, and navigable web design will continue to languish. We will ask our students to create multimedia projects with no art or design help, yet would never consider asking them to write equations or essays without the help of specialists. It is a situation that really boggles the mind. The implication is that all that web stuff is stuff we will either consume and not produce, or produce and not value.

Yet we all know that while we may test for traditional literacy, we all hope and pray our kids leave school with highly developed digital literacy skills because those are the skills that will open the doors of opportunity in the digital economy. The worlds of transmedia, augmented reality, gaming, and other forms of expression are right around the corner as primary means of communication. Traditional literacy will be important as we develop these, but new media skills

are pushing their way to the forefront. It is so unfortunate that the Common Core effort didn't take the lead on this.

Add to this the unforgivable but entirely predictable exclusion of creativity and innovation from the Common Core, and there is still much work to be done.

We need a Common Core Plus. What is the bottom line? The Common Core provides enough to work with, but we will need to build bridges to bring new media narrative into the mainstream. The CC people say they don't prescribe methodology, which opens the door for a number of possibilities described in the Common Core Plus presented below. But until we lobby successfully for the kinds of additions I mention, producing quality media as a component of mainstream literacy will be considered an outlier. As always, if we don't value it, then we won't try to measure or fund it. Building the bridges between the CC and new media will need to be driven by leaders who see the inherent deficiencies of the Common Core. Once again, real leadership will be required for real change. Bear in mind that leaders are not just administrators. In fact, they are often classroom teachers.

What would Common Core Plus look like? Let me suggest some modest changes to the Common Core. This is off the top of my head. It would be most interesting to see what others in, say, an online research group devoted to this topic, might propose.

To Writing, we might add Standard 6.5:

"To blend a number of different kinds of media, including voice, still and moving images, sound, music, and titling, effectively and professionally." Please note that the inspiration for this standard is Reading Standard 7, quoted earlier.

This might be followed by specific substandards at specific grade levels about coordinating text and images, using music effectively to support rather than detract from narrative, and so on.

We might expand Standard 10 for both reading and writing that relate to the range of reading and writing, with something like Standard 11:

"Read (and write) a variety of media critically in terms of content and production values."

This could be followed by specific kinds of media literacy skills needed to read media. Note that we are far behind national efforts in Canada, Australia, the UK, and other countries with regard to state-mandated or encouraged media literacy education. Standard 11 could also be followed by references to specific kinds of production values used by professionals at the level of specificity that the CC now

devotes to the specific skills of reading and writing. In much the same way that we expect students to read "great writers" to understand how to write, we should expect them to read, watch, and analyze the work of great mediasts in an effort to understand and create quality media themselves.

We could call for the development of skill sets related to creative thinking and expression, as part of every curriculum. Even though we all seem to value creativity, for some reason we won't say so publicly in a set of standards like the Common Core. For those who maintain that creativity has more to do with process than goals—and those who drafted the Common Core are very clear that they are not trying to impinge on methodology—I say, rubbish. Creative product is as much a real thing as good grammar. And the fact that creativity is not honored in the Common Core provides every school district the leadership it has been searching for this in area: If it's not in the Common Core, then we won't be judged by it, and we can ignore it.

And of course there needs to be the call for further research that I alluded to earlier. It might appear at the end of each set of standards or perhaps once in bold letters at the end of the entire set of standards. Wherever it appears, it needs to read something like this:

Common Core: A Call for Further, Never-Ending Standards Research

In an era of evolving media, which induce new literacies to emerge that are associated with new media, we need to be prepared to review the nature of and our assumptions about literacy, as readers, writers, speakers, listeners, and language users. We need to consider not only the literacies that are widespread at the time that we update the standards but also those that are appearing on the horizon. We need to be prepared to modify our previous Common Core standards and to add to them as new literacies become important. We need to empower anyone using the Common Core to modify the standards as they see fit in order to reflect their understanding of what is important. We need to encourage them to submit their modifications to groups who are actively considering modifications to the Common Core. And we need to continually look beyond literacy to other aspects of what it means to be prepared for life in a rapidly evolving global community, including the areas of creativity, innovation, and citizenship that should be infused throughout any set of standards that we profess to honor. Therefore, please consider these standards not as a fixed product, but as an ongoing research project that cannot, and should not, ever end.

Or something along those lines. What is important here is that while those who developed the standards are no doubt eminently qualified in their fields, they missed some important points. This would happen to any team who set out to create a common core of standards. They need the help of the greater community of educators, available via the Internet and at-the-ready to contribute. This is the way of our participatory culture. Our model for developing standards should look more like the process used to develop open source software, which evolves because of the interest, expertise, and contributions of its users. In many ways, we need to see literacy as an operating system that evolves as our capabilities evolve.

A Closing Note About Web 2.0

If this book were about the social web, I would have much to say about the Common Core and the world of participatory media. Instead I will make just a few comments.

How the Common Core addresses the world of Web 2.0 is also a mixed blessing. On the upside, we find standards like:

Writing Standard 6 for Grade 5: "Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing . . ." This acknowledges that writing can be pursued publicly and can be shared with more than just the teacher. It's common knowledge that when students write for a large audience like the web rather than for just a classroom authority figure, they often raise their sense of internal expectations on their own. In an era in which we want students to cultivate a positive digital footprint on the web, understanding how and what to publish on the Internet is vital.

Also of note is Writing Standard 6 for Grades 11–12: "Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback including new arguments or information." This expands what we saw in the Grade 5 standard above to deliberately include "shared writing products," which seems to refer to blogs, wikis, joint research projects, and so on, all of which are now staples of communication outside of K–12 education, but often not within it. The important point here is that literacy has evolved from a wholly private activity to one that has a public component. Being literate may begin with the individual, but it now includes being *jointly literate,* producing media with others, in committees, communities, and media teams. We might consider a writing standard something like this: "Create media as part of a team, using processes that emphasize collaboration in order to produce joint products representative of the team's efforts."

Of course, then we would have to teach how to do this and then value student efforts when they did so.

A Note About No Child Left Behind

As the early version of this book was going to print, No Child Left Behind was just taking hold. Since that time, it has spread like wild-fire, some would say more like kudzu, choking out everything in its path as it pursues standardized testing in a limited number of academic areas at the expense of many of the aspects of education we hold dear, like art, creativity, and belief in our teachers to teach how they know best. While I am sure NCLB has its admirers, by and large the educators I have worked with over the years complain bitterly about it.

My purpose in raising it here is not to debate its merits or lack thereof but to point out that a little known fact of No Child Left Behind is that federal government created an expectation that students achieve proficiency in the use of technology by the eighth grade. From the outset, technology proficiency was not expected to be tested in the first few years of implementation, and consequently many states focused on reading, writing, and math proficiency when reporting adequate yearly progress. States that did implement an expectation of student technology proficiency tended to come on late in the implementation and use the International Society for Technology in Education's National Educational Technology Standards for Students as the indicator of proficiency. Title IID, Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT or E2T2) was designed to provide both resources and funds to provide professional development to help students gain the skills necessary to be proficient in technology by the eighth grade.

Forever optimistic, I see the opportunity to use this aspect of NCLB to help support the need for new media skills across the curriculum. Perhaps.

Instructional Design: Stories, Inquiry, and Backward Design

In Part II of this book I discuss in detail what makes a story memorable and effective. Suffice it to say for now that stories usually work when they have at their heart an effective story core: a central character (which can be anything from a person to a group of people to an

inanimate object) that undergoes a transformation in order to solve a problem, answer a question, meet a goal, resolve an issue, or realize the potential of an opportunity. Note how similar this is to inquiry-based education, in which students are presented with a problem or essential question that they address through learning and other activities of discovery. In many ways, a memorable story and an effective unit of instruction are very similar. When students become heroes of their own learning stories, success occurs through a learning process in which they are transformed by becoming smarter, more aware, more skilled, or more developed in some regard.

In *Understanding by Design*, Wiggins and McTighe (2001) add a clear and helpful voice to the public discussion of effective learning processes by focusing on, from my perspective as a storyteller, the transformation component of the story core. They shift from activity-based to outcome-based lesson design by employing the backward planning model: understand the goal first and then build a learning process that leads to it. They capture the essence of the instructional design process in three essential questions: (1) What is important for students to understand? (2) What is acceptable evidence of this understanding? (3) What learning experiences can promote this understanding? I adapt these three questions to a story context in the following way: (1) What transformation do students, as heroes of their own learning stories, need to undergo? What discoveries do they need to make to successfully conclude their quest? (2) How can students, by the end of the story, prove to themselves and their evaluators that they internalized their transformation and discovery in an authentic manner? (3) What adventures, either of their own creation or designed by the teacher, should students undergo to make sure this happens?

Shifting from unit form to story form is largely a matter of perspective. As I pointed out earlier, Kieran Egan (1989) notes that kids come to school well versed in the story form and instinctively look for it in what is presented at school. When they don't find it, boredom or disorientation ensues. The primary difference between the two forms is the rhythm of their internal structures. Units of instruction can often be episodic, consisting of a series of events that may be logical but don't employ tension/resolution and other elements of story that involve story listeners through a rhythm of anticipation. The result is that to students, the information in a unit of instruction can feel disconnected, while the same information within a story context can feel organized. The tools needed to add these elements to an otherwise sound unit of instruction are covered in Part II.

Digital Storytelling and Literacy Development

Traditional storytelling is highly regarded as a powerful tool for helping students develop literacy skills. DST merely extends this into the digital domain. In the process, it usually integrates a number of traditional and emerging literacies into the storytelling process.

In its minimalist form, a digital story consists of still pictures, voice-over narration, and perhaps music, titles, and transitions. Most of the stories I described earlier were of this kind. Teachers who require students to write their narratives and rehearse their recitations involve them in oral and written literacies. If they include photography, drawing, or even music development, then they expand literacy development into the domain of art and design as well. If students perform their stories, as is the case with *Fox Becomes a Better Person,* they involve what storytelling expert Brett Dillingham (2005) calls "performance literacy." Of course, the tools and skills that make much of this possible fall under the heading of digital literacy. As we shall see, an important component of this is media literacy, which can roughly be defined as recognizing, evaluating, and applying the methods of media persuasion.

Figure 3.1   The DAOW of Literacy
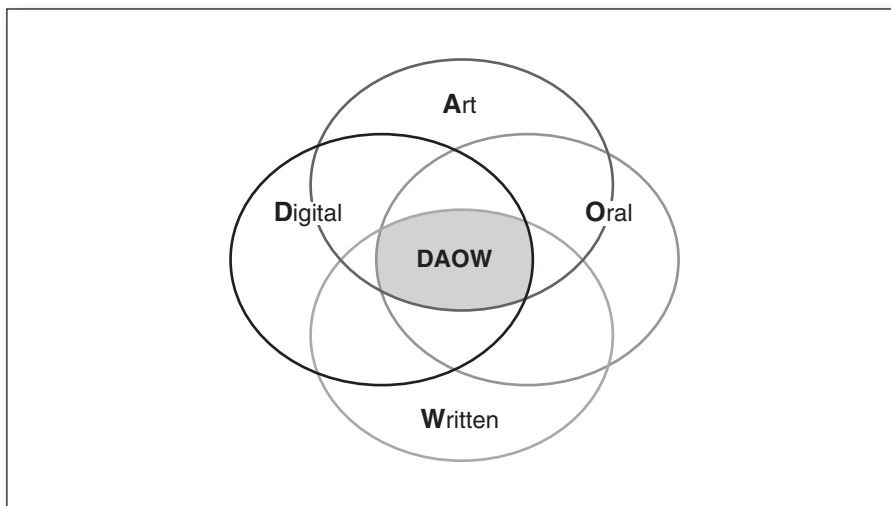
I call what DST offers the world of literacy and learning the DAOW (pronounced "DOW" or "Tao") of literacy, an acronym arising from the four major literacies it most often involves: digital, art, oral, and writing. In the pages that follow, I address how each literacy is involved in the creation of digital stories and how each adds an important dimension to the overall domain of literacy development.

The Value of Digital Literacy (the *D* of DAOW)

Pointing out that digital literacy is an important component of DST truly sounds like something Captain Obvious would say. Yet the reality is that while the importance of digital literacy might seem obvious, how it should be approached might not. The nature of digital literacy covers a vast area of concern and has been debated without resolution since the first desktop computers showed up in schools. Many books, articles, and technology-planning meetings have been devoted to a very simple question that drives public concern in this area: What is important for our students to understand about using digital technology? For many years my mantra as an educational technologist has been simply this: Students need to be able to use technology effectively, creatively, and wisely. These characteristics play out in DST in the following ways:

Effective use of digital technology. Obviously, we want our students to use digital tools effectively. That is, we want them to use digital tools intelligently and proficiently. This includes knowing how to push the right buttons, use the web efficiently as an information resource and collaboration tool, apply technical skills with proficiency to solve problems, and transfer learning from one situation to another. Effective use addresses the domain of know-how and applied know-how. Digital storytelling is quite demanding in this regard. Students have to be able to use and apply a variety of digital tools in some depth if they are to be successful. The skills they develop in creating digital stories are widely applicable to a number of endeavors.

Creative use of technology. Beyond effective use lies the creative domain of technology application. This involves not just all those attributes associated with "art the 4th R" discussed next but also those associated with using technology as an imagination amplifier to solve seemingly mundane problems. We want students to be able to use technology to work creatically to combine their own insight, creative problem-solving skills, and critical thinking, can address issues

and create opportunities that they would not have seen before. DST offers tremendous opportunity in this area.

Wise use of technology. Last, we want students to be able to evaluate technology and its impacts within the larger picture of community. The wisdom we want our students to cultivate is both practical and theoretical. Practically speaking, we want them to be media literate— to be able to recognize, evaluate, and apply the persuasive power of technology and media, much of which flies beneath their radar unless they are actively looking for it. Perhaps more theoretically, we want students to be able to zoom out and place digital technology in the larger perspective of personal, social, and environmental impacts. Having students use DST for important purposes, particularly those that extend beyond themselves and attempt to provide connections with the world, helps cultivate this wisdom. The interplay of theoretical and practical wisdom compels us to think globally while acting locally and to balance our personal needs with those of our community.

The Value of Art Literacy (the *A* of DAOW)

Before addressing art's value in DST, I am saddened to report that even in the year 2007, I still need to address its value in education at all. But there is hope. Art, long considered in our schools as an elective at best, superfluous fluff at worst, has taken center stage, because the multimedia tEcosystem we inhabit is largely based on the language of art and design. Art has indeed become the fourth *R,* a literacy in a very practical sense, as important as reading, writing, and arithmetic. While there are many reasons for this, three in particular make our need to adopt art as a literacy particularly urgent:

Digital tools provide assistive technology for the art-challenged. Today's relatively affordable, easy-to-use, multimedia technology acts as assistive technology for the artistically challenged. In the same way that word processing opened up the world of the writer, multimedia technology has opened up the world of the artist. Today, anyone with a computer can jump in and give it a go.

Art is an international language. The web uses the multimedia collage as its Esperanto, spreading the language of digital media throughout the global world of the Internet. In retrospect, it seems inevitable that citizens of the internationally networked world would move away from text-centric communication and toward pictures,

diagrams, sound, movement, and other more universal forms of communication.

Art is real work for real pay. Just 10 years ago some of the words most feared by parents were "Mom, Dad, I'm marrying an artist." We needn't fear these words any longer. Artists now have real work for real pay. Businesses are desperate for the artist's design eye and know-how to provide them a professional, effective presence on the web. Artists are sought after because they are literate in the language of imagery and design that is so prevalent in the physical and virtual worlds we construct but which is still largely not valued in our schools. The value of this language is not merely aesthetic. It also helps navigation, orientation, and other aspects of the media collage associated with getting the job done.

How does art literacy impinge on DST? In several ways. Here are some of the most important:

- *Art creator.* Digital storytellers are often required to create artistic material. In some cases, it's taking pictures. In others, it's actually creating original paintings, music, video, and other work. In the absence of artistic production values, such work lacks communication impact, just as poor writing does. Note that having students create their own work is the most effective way to address the legal morass associated with copyright and fair use.
- *Art manager.* When not required to create original material, digital storytellers are required to manage artistic material created by others. Selecting, editing, and mixing material require art literacy to be effective.
- *Art producer.* Whether students are creating or managing art material, they need to apply it to their projects with the skills of a producer. DST is essentially an artistic endeavor, requiring storytellers to write, direct, and create a multimedia dramatic production. They are required to blend text, images, video, music, sounds, animation, and other media sources into a unified, seamless whole according to the grammar of design. Effectively, digital storytellers enter the world of the producer, painting with a wide brush.

Seeing DST as an artistic activity is the antidote to seeing it as a technical event. All too often I see syllabi for DST courses that look like software training sessions. When digital storytellers begin with the story and proceed as artists, the technology usually falls into place.

The Value of Oral Literacy (the *O* of DAOW)

Oral literacy—or oracy—is often defined simply as the ability to understand and use spoken language. DST provides opportunities to do both.

Most of the DST I am involved in falls into two categories, both of which rely heavily on speaking and listening:

1. *Computer-based DST*. This is the traditional storytelling I have already described. Looking somewhat like a typical documentary, it is built on a voice-over narration, to which are added images, music, and so on. Most of the stories I described earlier were in this form. In this kind of DST, the writing process becomes the renarration process, as students write out their narrative, record it, listen to it, and then rewrite and/or rerecord it.

2. *Performance-based green screen storytelling.* A good example is Hannah Davis's story, which I described earlier. In it, she performed in front of a green screen, allowing original artwork to be added in after production.

Both approaches to DST require an attention to the spoken word that simply is not found in conventional approaches to written literacy. In both cases, students hear themselves via recorded media for the purpose of listening, self-assessment, and rewriting and/or re-speaking or re-recording—the re-narration process. The power of hearing oneself for self-assessment purposes can't be underestimated. It's as though the process of getting words out of one's head and into the open air exposes them to a quality of critique not available within the confines of one's internal landscape, even if the only people reviewing the narratives are the authors themselves. In addition, we value oral literacy in the DST process for the following reasons:

- Oral storytelling is how storytelling began and has endured for millennia. It has a history that is rich in timeless skills, perspective, and sense of audience. Good teaching is often a matter of good storytelling. No matter how high tech we become, telling stories orally will endure as one of our primary and most powerful forms of communication. It will always be an important skill to have in the workplace, in our communities, and in our schools. As we become overwhelmed by media, speaking effectively becomes an important way to cut through the clutter to make a point.
- Oral storytelling provides a skill set that can be used regardless of the kind of storytelling students are doing. It informs

storytelling activities whether they involve high, low, or no technology.

- Oral storytelling is an effective tool for improving writing.
- As a preproduction exercise in the development of a digital story, oral storytelling is an effective way for students to develop their own voice and determine what is important to include in their stories.
- Including oral storytelling within a school project provides a rich teachable moment for students to explore historical connections between their activities as digital storytellers and storytelling as an ancient and timeless means of education, communication, and entertainment.
- Video material of people acting as well as telling oral stories will become increasingly important in DST as shooting and editing video becomes cheaper and easier.
- Students are required to tell stories with media accompaniment as a matter of course these days. Delivering a PowerPoint presentation is a good example. The average audience now expects a blend of media and oral presentation.

> Having students write for media is an effective way of slipping writing in under the radar.

We've been telling stories with just our voices and bodies for many years. We will continue to do so, presumably forever. Involving oral storytelling can only be helpful to students, no matter what kind of storytelling project they're developing.

The Value of Writing (the *W* of DAOW)

Those worried about the fate of written literacy in an era of DST will be happy to know that writing is more important than ever for the following reasons:

- *DST is built on writing.* As I mentioned earlier, while writing may not be the final product of a digital story, it's an important part of the process students must use to create it. The saying "If it ain't on the page, then it ain't on the stage" is just as true for DST as it is for projects created for theater and movies. Recently, I watched an HBO documentary in which actors, directors, and producers were interviewed about what made great movies. Several interviewees made the point that a good script was absolutely essential and that no amount of good acting or special effects could compensate for the lack of one. Good new media rest on the foundation of solid writing.

- *DST involves authentic writing.* Media production is an effective way to engage kids in writing in an authentic way. Anecdotally, I have heard from teachers that students who don't want to write school reports or essays are happy to write media plans and narratives, because doing so is not perceived as schoolwork but as "scripting." Many teachers refer to their use of scripting as "slipping writing in under the radar." Students who are attitudinally predisposed not to like writing can develop a taste for it as well as the writing abilities they don't often use.
- *DST builds bridges to conventional writing.* The writing skills that students employ in the process of creating their digital stories embrace many aspects of writing that are considered important in school as well as the world outside school. Of particular note is the fact that digital stories require students to synthesize the techniques of both creative and expository writing in order to produce an effective piece of media.
- *Writing for DST requires deep thinking.* The deep processing for which writing is so often noted is crucial to the DST process because it engages storytellers in personal reflection prior to their using technology that has the potential to distract them from the intent of their project. It's simple: When students write, they think.

No matter how sophisticated our technology becomes, the future of DST will involve writing and conventional forms of literacy. It is our job as educators to make clear to parents and the public that DST is an effective way to pursue traditional literacy as well as emerging literacies. They need to understand that students are not giving up traditional literacy; they are simply expanding its utility while developing new literacies they need in the digital world.

A Letter to Parents About the Value of Digital Storytelling

Now, let's imagine using DST in practical terms. Suppose you're interested in including DST in a class project and feel the need to explain to parents why you're doing so. You decide to send a letter home to parents to explain what you're doing and why you feel it's important. You know it needs to be short and compelling and needs to mention how DST addresses academic standards and literacy. Here's a rough draft you can modify for your own use.

This letter has evolved over the years. Feel free to adapt it however you wish. To see the most recent version, go to www.jasonohler .com/storytelling.

A Letter to Parents About the Value of Digital

Dear Parents:

(Note to teachers: I provide you two different openings, depending on the kind of digital storytelling project you are doing. For performance-based digital storytelling, use this paragraph.)

I'm happy to announce that students in my class will be part of a digital storytelling project. In this project, students will be creating original stories and telling them in front of a green surface like the one the weather announcer uses. Students will then create their own artwork and add it behind their performances using a technique called chroma-key editing. The result is students performing their own stories in front of their own artwork.

(For computer-based digital storytelling, use this paragraph.):

I'm happy to announce that students in my class will be part of a digital storytelling project. In this project, students will be using the computer to create a short movie or documentary.

Here is some important information that I thought you would like to know about this project.

- Students will engage in a good deal of writing. A goal of this project is to improve students' writing and communication skills.
- Students will engage in a good deal of research, either personal, historical, or academic.
- Students will engage in many planning processes that can be used in other personal and academic projects.
- This is a classroom-based project and will be used to support [teacher's name] as she [he] addresses research, content understanding, and skill building with her [his] students.
- Students will be developing a number of technology and media production skills they can use in pursuing important schoolwork.
- Students will learn how to create stories that are engaging and meaningful.
- Students will be learning how to tell stories or show stories in front of an audience. This helps them develop presentation skills and self-confidence.
- Students will be developing artwork to support their stories. In the visual world of the digital age, art has become the fourth *R*. This project helps students develop art and creativity skills that can be used to communicate ideas and support project goals.
- Students will be involved as "producers and directors" of a media project. Kids are very involved in media these days, and helping them develop skills in this area is becoming an important part of their education.

I also wanted to let you know that this project will require parent permission because we will be recording students and showing their performances to others. I will be sending home a permission slip for this.

When the digital stories are done, we hope you will join us for Digital Storytelling Day on _____ . Students will then complete a DVD or website containing all students' stories. Should the students create DVDs, all parents and students will receive one. Should their work be posted on the web, every teacher and student will receive access to the website.

We are very excited about this project and welcome any comments you have. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
[Teacher's name]

Permission Slips

Note that I did not include a permission slip template in this book, simply because parent permission requirements can vary from district to district. Ask your administrator for the standard media release form to use for recording and distributing student work. When in doubt, always ask an administrator or your district's legal counsel for clarification. The release must be signed by a parent or guardian, or the student can't participate.

A Word About Multiple Intelligences

It's fitting to end this chapter with a nod to Howard Gardner (1983) and his theory of multiple intelligences, which has generated so much enthusiasm in educational circles.

Although the significance of multiple intelligences is usually reserved for discussions of student learning styles within education environments, the reality is that we live in a multiple intelligences world outside school as well. That is, the real world communicates using the intelligences that Gardner identifies. If this were not the case, then they would not be so highly prized in education.

DST is a veritable cornucopia of intelligences, particularly if blended with the DAOW of literacy. Like traditional literacy, DST is widely applicable across the curriculum. Unlike traditional literacy, it taps skills and talents that might otherwise lie dormant in many

students. Most of Gardner's intelligences, from the linguistic and the musical to the kinesthetic and intrapersonal, are important in the development of digital stories if we understand how to teach DST effectively. It is our job as educators to deliberately include as many intelligences as possible in DST assignments. We need to do this not just to provide students an opportunity to engage the intelligences but also to allow them to see how they are at work in the world, particularly the world of media.