

Ways to Use Technology to Motivate Students' Writing

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Abstract

Writing methods have evolved and continue to evolve in order to keep pace with advancements in technology and its' accessibility for students in the classroom. According to research, teachers who use technology in the classroom have students that are more engaged in learning and retain more information. Teachers in this technological age often struggle to teach writing in creative ways that motivate reluctant writers. Since technology is such an integral part of students' lives, teachers need ideas on how to incorporate technology into the writing process. This article offers ideas on using multimedia projects that incorporate technology in the writing process to give students choice and motivation for writing, thereby enhancing the students' listening speaking, and viewing skills. (Keywords: motivation, technology, and writing)

I. Introduction

Writing skills remain an important concern for every teacher. Writing skills are more important than ever in today's society because of technological advances and the increased access to technology for students. Prensky noted in 2001, "Today's students – K through college – represent the first generations to grow up with this new technology" (p. 1). Cleary, The Internet has opened a global pathway that allows writers a platform to influence others and share ideas with the masses. According to the most recent study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010), 93% of American teens between the ages of 12 and 17 are utilizing the Internet, a number that has remained stable since 2006. The motivational factor of the digital world has a new prominence in students' writing. Sweeny (2010) notes, "Writing, for adolescents who live in an age of digital communication, has taken on new importance and plays a prominent role in the way they socialize, share information, and structure their information" (p.121). Not only is it easier to produce and revise writing through word processing, it is also easier to select a platform of delivery and a choice of audience.

The platforms available for delivering written messages are vast. Research conducted by The Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010) notes that 69% of teens ages 12-17 have a computer and 93% of teens ages 12-17 stated that they used their computers to go online, with 27% of teens ages 12-17 reporting using their cell phone to go online. Whether students are using word processing to compose an email on their computers, iPads, or Blackberries, texting on their smartphones, blogging, or interacting on a social network, it is imperative that they are able to express themselves through writing. How students learn writing has changed as much as the way it is generated and delivered to an audience (DeVries, 2011). Generating and delivering pieces of writing, requires that students be efficient with computers and knowledgeable about how to share their work globally. They, also, need to have a choice about the topic they would like to write about, scheduled times to engage in writing, and feedback provided by peers and teachers about their writing.

II. The Changing Writing Curriculum

Writing methods have changed over the years and will continue to change due to the wide range of technology available to students. Beginning in the 1970s the paradigm for teaching writing changed from a focus on the product to a focus on the underlying process of writing used by professional authors. Donald Murray (1978) pioneered the idea of using the more authentic process approach to writing in the classroom that begins with substantial prewriting, then drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The process approach to the teaching of writing, popularized by Graves (1983), is still the preferred method for teaching writing in many U.S. schools.

A convergence of research has shown that the use of the writing process has a positive correlation to students' writing proficiency (Research & Evaluation department of Kamehameha Schools, 2011; Perin, 2007; Unger & Fleischman, 2004). One reason for the positive outcomes of process writing may lie in the collaboration, inherent at each stage of the writing process, where students seek help and discuss ideas from their peers and the teacher through writing conferences. This collaboration can be facilitated and expanded significantly through students' use of technology signifying yet another change for writing instruction. Today, students have scores of opportunities to work with others through technology as they research topics, seek ideas, share their writing, and find mentor texts related to their genre. They no longer have to write an entire piece in isolation with the teacher being the sole instructor and audience.

III. Technology in Schools and the Classroom

Technology is readily available in the schools. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that in 2008, 100% of schools had one or more computers in the classroom, with 95% of these computers having Internet access. Over the past decade, there has been a steady rise in technology usage in U.S. schools and homes. In 2009, 88% of American students used computers in school; whereas, 71% reported in 2003, were using them at home. With most students using computer devices such as, touchscreens, infrared ports, built-in keyboards, video games, cell phones, internet, and messaging services daily (Swan, van'tHooft, & Kratcoski, 2005; Prensky, 2001), they are probably more comfortable using technology rather than using the traditional "pen and paper" delivery method. With this information in mind, changing the writing curriculum to incorporate technology into the curriculum is essential. According to The United States Congress Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), "...effectively incorporating technology into the teaching and learning process is one of the most important steps the nation can take to make the most of past and continuing investments in education technology" (1995, p. 8). However, in light of the relatively new and growing technological age, many teachers continue to struggle to teach writing in new and creative ways to motivate reluctant writers.

The purpose of this article is to provide ideas and websites for teachers on ways to integrate technology into their writing lessons. Since technology is an integral part of students' lives, why not use it as the vessel to assist them with their writing? Most students are savvy users of technology. They grew up with the Internet, social networks, and blogs that provide an instant dynamic multimedia delivery system. This familiarity with technology by today's students is one of many reasons why technology should be incorporated into classrooms. Since they are already adept at using technology, then why not provide them opportunities to explore its use with their writing? When presented with an opportunity to create and present a book report using a multimedia platform with videos and hyperlinks, students' attitudes change. They enjoy blogging and communicating by using electronic communication. This is the life of students today. The expression of their ideas in unique and creative ways engages students and gives them a sense of ownership of the writing. Available technology allows students to choose the writing form that best presents their thoughts, as well as, the vehicle to deliver to their chosen audience (Sweeny, 2010).

The prominent use of technology today, requires that students be taught 21st century skills that augment writing instruction. Through technology, writing easily becomes a global effort where students have access to other writers and information from around the world. To use technology effectively and efficiently, students must learn what Donald Leu (2004) calls the "new literacies." This new way of being literate includes students' ability to search and navigate through the myriad of available information, locate information that is relevant, and evaluate it for accuracy.

IV. Student Engagement and Motivation

Students are more engaged when they have an iPod, cell phone, or other technology devices in their hand and are self-assured to investigate other technologies (Prensky, 2001). Facilitating successful lessons that involve the use of technology can create a positive learning experience; therefore, increasing students' motivation toward education (Knezek, Miyashita, & Sakamoto, 1993). As far back as 1993, Knezek et al, 1993 found that, students, who had computers and were able to take the devices home, completed homework in a timely manner. Researchers also found that overall, writing improved and students were more engaged and excited about completing projects and assignments. Interviewed students confirmed that they preferred using the computers because it was easier and more fun.

Blogs provide students a venue to publish their writing and get immediate feedback, which will help students improve their writing skills (Davis & McGrail, 2009). The ease and speed of being able to publish their work empowered the students and made them want to write more. There are numerous websites available for publishing student writings. See figure 1 for a list of some of the websites willing to publish different forms of student writing. With the motivation gained from the use of technology and the plethora of websites willing to publish work, incorporating technology into the curriculum is vital.

If technology is incorporated into the curriculum, it may not only improve students' motivation, but also increase test scores. Project CHILD (Butzin, 2001), effectively incorporated technology into classrooms ensuring students had equitable use of computers that had educational instructional software to enhance learning. The findings from Project CHILD concluded that there was a significant difference in students' test scores when technology was integrated into the classroom vs. classrooms that did not integrate technology on a regular basis. Not only did it improve test scores, it increased students' motivation to complete the writing process.

A study conducted by Keeler (1996), examined the effects of integrating technology school wide. The results found that technology increased motivation and learning, which in turn helped with classroom management by keeping students on task. This allowed teachers to spend more one on one time with students who needed extra assistance.

Engaging reluctant writers to start the writing process can be a challenge to the teacher. Sylvester and Greenidge (2009) explored the use of digital storytelling as a means to teach the writing process. Students in this study created a story using Windows Movie Maker or Macintosh iMovie. Using this form, students integrated multiliteracies including, technological, visual, media, and information literacy. They found that the use of digital storytelling encouraged students to go through the editing process to improve their work.

V. Help for Teachers

With research showing that technology does indeed improve motivation and the quality of students' work, then, teachers need to utilize technology in the classroom as often as possible. This section includes ideas teachers can use to integrate technology with writing.

The lesson plan in figure 5 integrates two types of technology, multimedia presentation and videotaping, into a listening, speaking, and viewing Language Arts lesson. The purpose of this unit is for students to read a book, create a multimedia book report, and present the book report to the class. Students are given an opportunity to use the writing process: plan, draft, edit, and publish. Once the steps are completed, students present their multimedia book reports to their peers. Through these presentations, students are introduced to a variety of books that may just peak their interest and encourage them to read the book presented by their peers.

The students are placed in a literature circle based on their reading levels that are previously determined by their teacher. Once children are placed in their groups, they are presented with a selection of

books at their reading level. The students review each book and decide as a group which book they will read. Students then have two weeks to read the book in a group or alone; the choice is theirs. Once all students are finished with their books, they write a book report. Students are not to write a traditional book report, but they are to develop a multimedia presentation so they can present their book to the class. Their presentation consists of the 10 story elements from their book.

Using multimedia to create book reports has had many positive effects. First, students read a book of their choice at their reading level and are given an opportunity to discuss their book with classmates. Students are then presented with questions that must be answered for their book report. Once the students answer the questions, a rough draft is created and edited. Students are then taught how to make a multimedia presentation that generates excitement, and an eagerness to write the book report.

Using Multimedia as the presentation platform not only will interest the students, but it also incorporates learning other software programs. The knowledge of how to work with these tools can be a driving force in student's creativity during their school years. Incorporating this technology has been an effective way for students to learn the proper way to write a report and keep them motivated and engaged.

VI. Conclusion

The concern for writing skills will always play an important role in education. With the constant changing of technology, it is imperative for teachers to motivate and engage students as they socialize and share information using the Internet along with other tools. Because writing will continue to develop due to constant evolving of technology, teachers must find innovative techniques to help their students grow in creativity and originality. Technology gives hope to struggling writers and helps create a more positive outlook on school. It not only improves students' writing skills, but technology is also a way for students to express their own ideas through different multimedia projects. The websites given for publishing student writing is a great motivational tool for students. Along with this, the Core Curriculum College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (2011), the National Education Technology Standards, and the example lesson plan and rubric serve as a great guide for teachers who need assistance in incorporating technology into their classroom.

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VIII. Figures

Figure 1: Websites that Publish Student Writing

Cyberkids, <http://www.cyberkids.com/index.html> - This website allows students in grades Kindergarten through 12th grade to publish pieces of writing.

Scholastic, <http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/index.htm> -

Wartgames, <http://www.wartgames.com/themes/writing/writingprocess.html>- This web site can teach and encourage students to become better writers. There are many games that involve the writing process

Connect Reading and Writing, <http://www.literacy.uconn.edu/writing.htm>- Teachers can use this site to gain access to a variety of reading and writing websites.

Figure 2: Core Curriculum Content Standards**Core Curriculum Content Area Standards**

- Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.
- Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.
- Write narratives in which they recount a well collaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
- With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of two pages in a single sitting.
- Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on *topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly
- Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, sound) and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.
- Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, using formal English when appropriate to task and situation.
- Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
- Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Figure 3: National Education Technology Standards (NETS)**Creativity and Innovation**

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

- a. apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes
- b. create original works as a means of personal or group expression
- c. use models and simulations to explore complex systems and issues
- d. identify trends and forecast possibilities

2. Communication and Collaboration

Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others. Students:

- a. interact, collaborate, and publish with peers, experts, or others employing a variety of digital environments and media
- b. communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats
- c. develop cultural understanding and global awareness by engaging with learners of other cultures
- d. contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems
3. Research and Information Fluency Students apply digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information. Students:
- a. plan strategies to guide inquiry
- b. locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media
- c. evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on the appropriateness to specific tasks
- d. process data and report results
4. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making
Students use critical thinking skills to plan and conduct research, manage projects, solve problems, and make informed decisions using appropriate digital tools and resources. Students:
- a. identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation
- b. plan and manage activities to develop a solution or complete a project
- c. collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions
- d. use multiple processes and diverse perspectives to explore alternative solutions
5. Digital Citizenship
Students understand human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behavior. Students:
- a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
- b. exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity.
- c. demonstrate personal responsibility for lifelong learning
- d. exhibit leadership for digital citizenship
6. Technology Operations and Concepts
Students demonstrate a sound understanding of technology concepts, systems, and operations. Students:
- a. understand and use technology systems
- b. select and use applications effectively and productively
- c. troubleshoot systems and applications
- d. transfer current knowledge to learning of new technologies

Figure 4: Lesson Plan

Objectives:

- The student will apply strategies and skills to comprehend, respond to, interpret, or evaluate a variety of texts of increasing length, difficulty, and complexity.
- The student will analyze text to understand, infer, draw conclusions, or synthesize information.
- The student will express, communicate, evaluate, or exchange ideas effectively.
- The student will apply Standard English to communicate.

Procedures:

The Student will read a chapter book within a literature circle; utilize the writing process (plan, write rough draft, edit, write final copy; publish), collaboratively create a multimedia book report presentation; present to peers.

Materials:

- Trade book at appropriate grade level
- Computer
- Internet access
- Access to multimedia program such as PowerPoint or Corel

Evaluation:

The student will be evaluated on content knowledge, organization, grammar and spelling, speaking skills, creative presentation, and teamwork. See Rubric below.

Rubric for Multimedia Presentation

Content Knowledge	1	0	Content Knowledge	5	4	3	2	1	0
Title /Author			Description on main character #1						
Publisher-date and place			Description on main character #2						
Setting –time and place			Description on main character #3						
Authors Purpose			Plot Summary						
Tone or Mood			Conflict						
			Resolution						
			Book Review						
Total for this section			Total for this section						
Organization				5	4	3	2	1	0
Slides were presented in correct order									
Total this section									
Grammar and Spelling				5	4	3	2	1	0
Sentences are written in complete sentences									
Words are spelled correctly									
Total for this section									
Speaking Skills				5	4	3	2	1	0
Speaker had eye contact with audience									
Speaker spoke clear and loud									
Total for this section									

Creativity	5	4	3	2	1	0
Used a different background for each slide						
Used proper font color						
Used proper fonts						
Used a variety of transitions between slides						
Used a variety of animations schemes						
<hr/>						
Total for this section						
<hr/>						
Teamwork	5	4	3	2	1	0
Presentation was well-rehearsed						
Group members Took turns talking						
<hr/>						
Total for this section						
<hr/>						

Figure 5: Breakdown of Lesson Plan

Step One	Research a variety of books of a variety of levels; write a summary of each book. These summaries are what is being read to the students so that they can choose the book they want. Scholastic Book Club is a good resource to purchase books from, http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/ .
Step Two	Give students a reading test to determine reading level. This step may have been done prior to this.
Step Three	Organize students into literature groups based on reading level. Read the summaries to each group and have them vote on the book of their choice.
Step Four	Organize the book order and obtain the funds to purchase books. I have parents pay for the books, that way students can keep their books. If parents cannot buy the books, I will use my reward points to purchase the books for them, or they can go to the library to check out the book.
Step Five	Order the books. Once books have arrived, give students time to read it.
Step Six	Teach lesson on speaking, listening, and viewing skills so students will be prepared for their presentation.
Step Seven	Teach students how to make a Multimedia presentation and explain to them the format to be used.

Step Eight	Have students plan, write out their rough draft, and edit their report.
Step Nine	Have students create and edit their multimedia presentation for their final copy.
Step Ten	Students practice their presentation. Video tape their practice session and review it with them. This is the time to review the speaking and listening skills.
Step Eleven	Students deliver their multimedia presentation.