POWERFUL VOICES FOR KIDS: DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Manuscript by

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CHAPTER 1
Digital and Media Literacy in Elementary School

In this chapter, you will learn more about:

Digital and media literacy. What is digital and media literacy? How can we expand the concept of literacy to acknowledge the worlds of print, visual, audio, and interactive media in the elementary grades?

Technology integration. How does technology integration support learning? How may it distract from meaningful learning practices in the classroom?

Bridging classroom and culture. How can teachers use digital and media literacy to engage students' interests, passions, and develop knowledge, competencies and skills?

It was lunchtime, and Ms. Dominguez's Grade 2 students had just finished eating. There were a few minutes remaining for table talk before children went out for recess. Three girls had opened up their black-and-white composition notebooks and were tapping their fingers on the pages. One little girl, Natalia, had propped up her composition notebook against her milk carton so that the top half of the page displayed a "screen" of sorts where she had written the word, "Facebook." She had also drawn a close-up picture of herself. On the lower page of the notebook, she had drawn a keyboard, with small square boxes drawn to represent keys, including the alphabet, space bar, return, shift and enter keys.

Giving each other knowing glances around the lunch table, Natalia and the other girls were "typing" on their composition notebooks, playing at being digital communicators. As Ms. Dominguez surveyed her classroom, she took note of this activity, smiling to herself because, unbeknownst to the children, she also had briefly checked her Facebook page using her cell phone at the teacher's desk while eating her own lunch that day.

All of us, children and adults alike, are growing up with more access to media and technology than at any point in human history. Well before they enter kindergarten, young children spend many hours with screen media. About half of all babies and toddlers under the age of two watch two hours of television per day. In 2011, a national survey showed that nearly one in three babies and toddlers have a TV in their bedroom, up from 19% just six years earlier.[1]

Although TV viewing is the most frequent screen activity of childhood, one-fourth of young children's screen time now includes the use of computers, handheld and console video game players, and other interactive mobile devices such as cell phones, video iPods, and iPad-style tablet devices.[2] Natalia, her mom, and her sister Sara like playing Angry Birds on the family cell phone or checking out what their other family members are posting on Facebook and Twitter. Research shows that half of all 5- to 8-year-olds have used an "app" (application) on a mobile device of some sort. And for Natalia, as with many young children, videogame and computer use is a part of daily life, with one in five using a videogame or a computer every day. Most children who use videogames or computers begin when they are just 3 ½ years old. [3]

How might screen time with digital media affect the developing child? Children use digital media tools as a diversion from everyday life, as a means to connect to others socially, to express their creativity, as a tool for learning, a cure for boredom, or just out of habit or routine. Researchers have found that when some children play in online social environments, they may develop important cognitive, social and emotional skills. In mastering a role-playing game called Gathering of the Elves, one Australian research found that children taught themselves through self-study, self-initiated research, and trial and error, noting that "the desire to get things done quickly, for the social purposes of both personal development and for the betterment of the community, inspires a passion and hunger in them to learn for themselves or in collaboration with other novices."[4] Under optimal conditions, virtual communities may support freedom of expression and

provide opportunities for children to create meaningful relationships with others. Having a place where they can be themselves, children may develop self-confidence and a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.

In her home in West Philadelphia, Natalia is among the 75% of children under the age of eight who don't often watch educational television programs like *Sesame Street* or *Between the Lions* on PBS. Instead, she enjoys the Toonzai block on Channel 57, the CW network in Philadelphia, which airs imported Japanese anime shows like *Yu-Gi-Oh!* and *Dragon Ball Z Kai*. Natalia's family is among the 50% of low-income families who do not have access to cable or satellite television programming. In her house, the TV is on most of the time, even when no one is watching. Because Natalia's mom works a lot, she doesn't get much opportunity for what is sometimes called *co-viewing* or *joint media engagement*, where parents help support the use of TV shows, movies, videogames or the Internet explicitly as a tool for learning.[5] Natalia and her mom, Joyce, do watch "regular" television together including *Good Morning America, Entertainment Tonight*, and *American Idol*. But generally this time together is a place of relaxation and escape, and neither Natalia or her mom see it as a time for learning.

Although research has been conducted to understand how children learn from media violence, advertising and stereotypical representations of gender, race and social class, it's not generally recognized how much children and young people learn from digital entertainment media. We still know relatively little about how entertainment media make a positive contribution to children's understanding of the political and social world.[6] By watching TV and movies, Natalia has learned much about the world around her: she's familiar with different types of family structures, recognizes the President, and knows about the different types of jobs done by people in hospitals and in law enforcement. The many stories Natalia watches also shape her understanding of social relationships, including both *prosocial* behaviors like kindness, generosity and helping others as well as *antisocial* behaviors like aggression, lying, and being mean to others.

Today, Natalia's mom and her teachers aren't thinking much about children's TV time--they're far more concerned about children's use of the Internet and social media. When teachers like Ms. Dominguez do notice the ways in which mass media, popular culture and digital media enter the lives of her students, they may have a sense of both the promise and the possibility but also the profound ways that media and technology may complicate classroom life. How could Ms. Dominguez use her own knowledge of social networks, and her students' developing knowledge of how computers, laptops, and mobile devices work, in a way that somehow connected a rich digital media culture to the everyday business of teaching her students how to better understand and communicate in the world around them?

Expanding the Concept of Literacy

Elementary educators, like parents, are responsible for the development of the whole human being. As they grow and develop, children transform basic sensory experiences into thoughts and ideas, gradually moving from simple emotional reactions

towards more complex and nuanced cognitive responses, translating experience into "a model of the world" through actions, images and finally, symbolic representation.[10] Through active engagement with the process of meaning-making, children develop their identities as literate individuals.

But what does it mean to be literate? The concept of literacy is not fixed and static. For most of human history, to be literate meant to be effective as a speaker and a listener. The concept of rhetoric emerged more than 2,500 years ago as people discovered that certain ways of talking were more effective and powerful in achieving social power and influence. When the Gutenberg revolution brought printed books to a mass audience, the concept of literacy expanded to include the skills of reading and writing, which required many years of practice to master fully. Over the past one hundred years, educators have recognized that a complex array of competences are needed to be effective communicators, including using cameras, graphic design tools and visual information, accessing and evaluating information contained in library databases, and using computers and the Internet. In this book, you'll find teachers who are strengthening both the "old literacies" and the "new literacies" nearly simultaneously:

Literacy	Speaking and listening
Print Literacy	Reading and writing
Visual Literacy	Design, interpretation & composition
Information Literacy	Access, retrieval, evaluation and usage
Media Literacy	Analyzing and composing using mass media & popular culture
Computer Literacy	Using tools and technologies effectively
News Literacy	Understanding and participating in news & current events
Digital Literacy	Using technology tools and being responsible users of social media

Today, people need to be able to "read" and "write" messages in a variety of forms. Each genre and medium of expression and communication demands certain learned competencies. For example, reading on screen, reading from a page, writing with a keyboard and writing with a pencil are all practices that require particular skills. In this book, we'll show how mass media, popular culture and digital media texts can be used to support the development of children's reading, writing, speaking, listening and communication skill development.

When children learn how to apply concepts like audience, message, purpose, and point of view to both familiar media (like TV shows and music) and unfamiliar media (like nonfiction textbooks and news articles), they strengthen critical reading strategies. Researchers have found that children's talk about popular culture and mass media is deeply tied to their language development, their comprehension, and expressive skills. For example, in hands-on work with media literacy in over 60 elementary schools in England, scholars found that film viewing and discussion activities promote high levels of talking and sharing in extended discourse. While watching, children listened closely and noticed much detail about the dialogue and music, plot, setting and character.[11]

BEGIN TEXT BOX
View and Discuss Strategies

When parents and teachers watch television, movies, play videogames and go online with children, there's an opportunity to model the practice of talking, listening, reasoning and abstract thinking. Parents might ask questions like:

- How would you describe your favorite character?
- What do you like or dislike about this particular program, game, movie or website?
- Who do you think made this and why do you think they made it?
- How do you think it was made?
- What might someone else think or feel about it?
- What questions do you still have? What information was left out?

END TEXT BOX

We've observed that many children who are just learning to decode and comprehend print texts can demonstrate complex reasoning and sophisticated thinking skills using familiar visual or digital materials. Especially for those children who have become disengaged and alienated from school, getting a chance to display one's background knowledge and reasoning skills with mass media, popular culture and digital media activities enables children to bring together their at-home media and technology experiences into the classroom. Not only are such practices engaging and motivating to young learners, such connections are at the heart of what real learning is all about.

Technology Integration in the Elementary Grades

As we write this book, we are concerned about the possibility that the current approach to the use of digital media technology in education may inadvertently widen the inequality gap in our society. In some American elementary schools, there are well-stocked school libraries, gleaming interactive whiteboards, video monitors, data projectors, classroom computers and well-maintained computer labs, all supported by capable technology staff and helpful school librarians.

In many elementary schools, however, especially in urban and rural schools, technology resources, if they are available, are often outdated, poorly-maintained, and underused. Many American elementary schools lack a full-time school librarian or technology specialist. In general, elementary schools have been the lowest priority for technology integration in most school districts, large and small. High schools get the lion's share of technology resources, followed by middle schools.[12]

But it's not just a matter of access to technology. Differences in skill level in using technology are generally influenced by a person's level of education and social class. Some children arrive to kindergarten able to whiz through a variety of applications while others are unfamiliar with how to use the mouse or trackpad. Family influences clearly play a giant role here. Sociologist Eszther Hargittai has conducted research with Internet users to understand differences among people in their levels of skill in using technology. She writes, "Baseline Internet use statistics do not distinguish among those

who go online for no more than checking sports scores or TV schedules and those who use the medium for learning new skills, finding deals and job opportunities, participating in political discussions, interacting with government institutions, and informing themselves about health matters. Yet such differentiated users can have significant implications for how ICT uses may relate to life outcomes."[13]

Of course, elementary educators have long been ambivalent about the use of technology tools for young learners. As we will see in Chapter 2, concerns about the sheer amount of time children spend in screen activities as well as the content of TV, movies, advertising may either lead educators to *ignore or embrace* the role of popular culture in the lives of young children. Most estimates suggest that about one-third of U.S. teachers use machines for instruction regularly--that is, at least once or more a week. About another third use them at least once or more a month and another third use them hardly ever or at all.[14] Nearly all American teachers have computers and Internet access at home. These differences are mostly the result of a complex matrix of personal attitudes and beliefs, a topic we explore in Chapter 3.

Computer games in education, similarly, are generally conceptualized as either a waste of time, harmless fun, or a powerful new resource that will transform education. While some educators have used computer games as a tool for learning since the 1980s, when The Oregon Trail, Math Blaster and other programs first became commercially available, such activities were not generally incorporated into the context of whole classroom learning. Today, school librarians and classroom teachers assemble links to a variety of generally free online learning games for children to use on the computer. But a few elementary schools are discovering how to fully integrate gaming in ways that move beyond drill-and-practice. This generally requires teachers with particularl kinds of expertise and skill. For example, one innovative school, Quest to Learn, teaches systems thinking to middle-school students using concepts of digital and media literacy. There, children practice "decoding, authoring, manipulating and unlocking meaning" by exploring games as learning environments.[15]

In this book, we demonstrate how new tools and new texts make new forms of teaching and learning possible. You'll learn about how online learning tools, video production tools and graphic design software can engage young children in understanding the power of authorship by creating content themselves. But we steer clear of either a "gee-whiz" approach to technology or a "danger, danger" mentality, adopting instead a middle ground. We respect the differing motives that teachers have in using media and technology with young learners and share our own experiences implementing projects and activities that develop habits of mind to support children's lifelong learning, including creative and critical thinking, collaboration and communication skills.

Connecting Classroom to Culture

Instead of thinking of television, movies, popular music and other forms of mass media and popular culture as the enemy of literacy, we see these media as resources that

can promote the development of critical thinking and reasoning skills that support academic achievement.

Of course, it's no surprise that the use of digital media and technology tools engages and motivates young learners. Many educators can remember a time when simply wheeling in the TV cart would yield a squeal of exciting happy voices. Today, many children enjoy the opportunity to use interactive whiteboards, clickers and other new technologies. But some researchers have found that, when it comes to technology use in school, the novelty effect may wear off over time.[16] The best educators do not simply use technology for its own sake; they use media and technology to meet the genuine needs of their learners.

Ultimately, the reason why media and technology may motivate and inspire student learning is because digital media, mass media and popular culture help children make connections between the classroom and their ordinary lived experience. Adults and children alike enjoy talking about social media, online games, celebrities, musicians, actors, books and movies, news and current events. One primary school educator found that references to television often dominate children's informal social interactions, games, and jokes on the playground and in the lunchroom, as children use program details, celebrities or other media incidents as points of discussion for informal peer engagement.[17]

High levels of student motivation and engagement are stimulated when children are empowered to bring their taste culture and media preferences into rich and complex conversations with their teachers and peers. As we will see in this book, conversations move from trivial and superficial to complex and deep when children and students ask "why" and "how" questions about what we watch, listen to, play, see and read.

When teachers permit and promote serious conversation about mass media and popular culture in the classroom, often these conversations are more substantive (and more unpredictable) than the relatively simple talk that children are having in responding to the content of basal readers. For example, researchers in one classroom discovered that when talking about advertising, children developed spontaneous critiques of ads' representation of race, childhood and class, even when curriculum materials did not suggest this approach.[18] Researchers have argued that the use of children's popular culture in educational institutions may offer recognition of children's identities and the things they value, thus enhancing self-esteem and motivating children to participate more deeply in learning.[19] Anne Dyson has examined how children blend images of football players, popular songs, plots from movies, and cartoons, using them in both personal narratives and extended pieces of writing.[20] Such instructional practices both engage learners and deepen their ability to participate fully in the learning process.

Digital and Media Literacy Competencies

Today, a wide range of literacy competencies are needed to be effective in society. Digital and media literacy includes the ability to access, analyze, compose,

reflect and take action in the world. It's a broad and expansive array of life skills. As you read this book, you will learn how to turn reluctant, passive learners into active, passionate ones by connecting the classroom to children's daily experience of contemporary culture.

We think it's absolutely essential for elementary educators to focus on the development of children's self-expression and advocacy skills, reasoning, critical thinking and communication skills. Social development, self-confidence, conflict resolution skills and sensitivity to the social responsibilities of using 21st century technologies are habits of mind that enable children to thrive. Here are the kind of competencies that are increasingly valued in the world outside the classroom:

DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY COMPETENCIES IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

ACCESS

- Listening skills
- Reading comprehension
- Using appropriate technology tools
- Asking questions
- Gathering information using multiple sources
- Applying information to solve a problem

ANALYSIS

- Understanding how symbols work and how they are used
- Recognizing particular types (genres) of messages
- Identifying similarities and differences in how people interpret symbols
- Identifying authorship, message purpose and target audience with a variety of texts
-
- Recognizing evidence of quality and credibility in different types of messages

COMPOSITION

- Speaking to an individual and demonstrating listening skills
- Speaking to a large group and responding to feedback
- Communicating a personal reaction and expressing a point of view
- Using language, images, graphic design and sound to compose
- Selecting messages and texts to use-respond to-remix-combine in a creative way
- Composing purposively to inform, persuade and entertain
- Composing in a variety of formats, including email, review, reports, film scripts, music lyrics, webpage, nonfiction, fiction and other literary genres
- Composing for a variety of audiences, including peers, family, educators, special interest groups, civic leaders, and members of the general public

REFLECTION

- Recognizing and valuing relationships and engaging in socially appropriate behavior
- Brainstorming and contributing ideas
- Staying on task and following directions
- Using good judgment and social responsibility when communicating with others
- Exercising leadership, integrity and accountability
- Offering feedback, helping and teaching others

TAKING ACTION

- Participating in a creative community, sharing and expressing ideas with others
- Being aware of and sensitive to differences among people
- Making connections between current events, the community and the self
- Generating ideas in order to improve a thing or an event
- Collaborating on solving a meaningful real-world problem

True to the spirit of John Dewey, these are precisely the competencies and skills that make people effective in both classroom and society. These are also the exact same skills that employers seek out in the workforce. Rick Stephens, Vice President of Human Resources for Boeing, and Elane Scott, author and blogger at Birth to Work, write about how the increasingly complex global environment requires a "quality of thinking and creative action." These habits of mind "involve new levels of communication, shared vision, collective intelligence, and direct coherent action."[21]

Just as Robert Fulghum pointed out that everything we need to learn we learn in kindergarten, we wrote this book because we think the competencies that are listed above can be learned by young children. To accomplish this goal, we must give children two opportunities: first, the chance to ask questions about what they watch, listen to, see and read and, secondly, the chance to use their powerful voices to communicate effectively using language and technology tools, contributing to the quality of life in their families, their schools, their communities, and the world.

BEGIN TEXT BOX
IMAGE: PVK ICON
The mission of the Powerful Voices for Kids program is to strengthen children's abilities to think for themselves, communicate effectively using language and technology tools, and use their powerful voices to contribute to the quality of life in their families, their schools, their communities, and the world. The program encourages independent learning, leadership, and community involvement by teaching participants more about their complex media worlds—how to understand them, and how to use media technology to take action.

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How We Created This Book

This book is the product of three years of work by Renee Hobbs and Laurada Byers, who created the Powerful Voices for Kids project as the result of a unique partnership between the Russell Byers Charter School (RBCS) in Philadelphia and Temple University's Media Education Lab. Co-author David Cooper Moore began as a teacher in the program and then took on increasingly significant roles as a program manager, teacher educator, curriculum developer and researcher. The program developed over three years through collaborative research and planning, supported by grants from the Wyncote Foundation and the Verizon Foundation. Partnerships with the National Writing Project (NWP) expanded the reach of the program regionally and nationally.

The program consisted of several interrelated components:

- Summer learning program for children aged 6 – 13
- Staff development program for educators
- In-school mentoring
- Parent outreach
- Multimedia curriculum development
- Research and assessment

Summer Learning Program. In the summers of 2009 and 2010, children participated in a month-long summer program that combined play and learning about media, popular culture, and digital technologies. More than 150 children participated in the program. They learned about the different purposes of media messages—to inform, to entertain and to persuade. They critically analyzed a wide variety of media genres, including news, advertising, drama, music video, documentary, reality-TV, and online media. Children used Flip brand video cameras (which we refer to in the book as FlipCams) to create hundreds of videos and used simple wiki software to create web pages. Children increased their confidence in using digital technology as tools for learning, and felt increased comfort in expressing their ideas and working in a team.

Staff Development. School leaders, elementary educators, school library and technology specialists, teaching assistants and parents participated in a variety of programs that enabled them to gain knowledge about how to use digital media, mass media and popular culture to build connections between the classroom and the child's daily life as a media user. Some programs were designed as weeklong summer institutes and other programs were more intensive programs where small groups of teachers in a single school gathered monthly over the course of an entire school year.

In-School Mentoring. We pioneered an approach to staff development that we call "elbow-to-elbow" support, where someone with some expertise in media literacy and technology integration works with individually a teacher or small group to support a particular unit of instruction or media project.

Parent Outreach. We initiated workshops and discussion groups with families to explore the uses of media and technology in the home. When parents get to learn from other parents, they deepen their sensitivity to the explicit and implicit choices that occur

each and every day when it comes to music, TV shows, news and current events, movies, videogames, the Internet and social media.

Multimedia Curriculum Development. By collaborating with classroom educators and summer learning instructors, we created a variety of lesson plans that activate a variety of learning outcomes. These lessons are effective with a variety of young learners in both "low-tech" and "high-tech" classrooms.

Research and Assessment. We used observation, data collection and interviews to understand children's media and technology uses in the home and at school. We explored teachers' motivations for digital and media literacy and examined how children's conceptions of author, audience and purpose shape their reading comprehension and academic achievement.

Web Documentation. We recorded informal excerpts of classroom practice, reflective writing from teachers, samples of student work, and lesson plans created by instructors in an online community, available at www.powerfulvoicesforkids.com.

In this book, we'll share stories from all of our experiences with these components of the program. We'll identify what we learned in helping instructors and classroom teachers to discover how they could develop children's critical thinking, creativity, collaborative and communication skills in responding to the complex messages offered to them through news and current events, advertising, popular music and music videos, celebrity culture, movies and TV shows, videogames, the Internet and social media.

In this book, you will meet more than a dozen instructors and teachers who shared the experience of developing the Powerful Voices for Kids program. Appendix A provides a list of the team members who participated in the program.

But even after three years of exploration, which was itself based on decades of experience in research, teaching, and scholarship, we'll be honest with you: we're still at the very beginning stages of learning how to integrate digital and media literacy into the PK-6 curriculum. We present our learning experiences with humility. There is so much that is still to be learned about how best to engage young children in the practices that support their growth and development as 21st century learners. We believe that many of the readers of this book will continue to advance the field in exploring, experimenting and discovering "what works" with your own students.

Renee's Story: Why Create the Powerful Voices for Kids Program?

I learn best by doing and making things. The Powerful Voices for Kids program emerged from my desire to craft a long-term university-school partnership, one that could truly be a "win-win" for researchers, teachers and students. In 2003, I had created the Media Education Lab in order to improve the quality of media literacy education through research and community service. Looking back, much of my career can be viewed as a

series of informal experiments: developing new programs and projects as a form of learning. The process of initiating, implementing and assessing media education programs in K-12 schools helps me develop new knowledge to advance the field. With this particular project, I was looking for opportunities to work with younger children and involve graduate students in the process of teacher education and curriculum development.

There's no substitute for hands-on experience as a way to generate new ideas for writing and research, as those who advocate for teacher action research have claimed.[22] Living in Philadelphia, we were deeply aware of the real needs to provide direct service to poor and minority children. So when I met Laurada Byers, the inspiring leader who created RBCS, we decided that a summer learning program for young children might be perfect as the cornerstone to launch the Powerful Voices for Kids program. During the spring of 2009, we reached out to parents to encourage them to enroll their children in the program. We emphasized the hands-on nature of the program with a list of activities including making movies, producing music, creating videogames and field trips. We emphasized academic skills including language arts, writing composition, research and technology skills, public speaking and citizenship, collaboration and teamwork, and health and nutrition. We reached nearly 200 children over the course of two years and our staff development programs reached more than 150 elementary educators and summer learning instructors.

All the members of the Powerful Voices for Kids program were invited to keep an online journal of reflective writing about the learning experience. In the first week of the program in the summer of 2009, I wrote:

> I believe that team members will engage with their kids in learning and use creative strategies to build students' critical thinking and communication skills. I think that each team member is a gem--- what a great group we have! However, I am worried about both the scope and the quality of the work-- will there be the right balance of analysis and composition? Will we meet the requirements of the funder, who thinks we're exploring the topic of advertising and persuasion? Are my expectations too high? Is this too much to ask from this group of young people, most of whom have never had any formal exposure to media literacy education as a subject of study? What about the first week, when I am juggling 25 elementary teachers in a professional development program --- I will really need to be able to depend on my team to manage the mentoring process. Will it be controlled chaos or just chaos?
>
> The idea of instructional strategies as a form of "structuring learning" is so deeply built into the fiber of my being-- it's so much a part of what I do and what I truly LOVE to do-- that it's like breathing to me. I don't always notice it--- and what's fascinating is to see other instructors explore this creative practice: the art of creating structured learning experiences that enable people to discover, grow, develop skills, learn new things and change.

> My current instructional design problem has been the issue of screening and discussing kid media--- as part of the Summer Institute for teachers. In my search around my library, looking for children's own media to show, I also realize that although I have some resources at my fingertips (since everyone and his brother shares their kid-produced media with me, and there's tons of it online), most of it is content produced by teenagers. And the works that are made by children tend to come in two flavors: the plain vanilla type where kids are enacting a project that has clearly been designed by a grownup, and the cool mint flavor where the teacher gives the kids a camera and they do a project working individually or collaboratively.
>
> The first type is easier to watch, because an adult has organized and led the process, although these vary because of the differences in the level of artistry of the filmmaker who spearheads the project. The second ones are more challenging to watch, but (to me) more strangely entertaining and unpredictable. I wonder what kind of student media products will result from the Powerful Voices for Kids program? Hopefully they will balance the relationship between form and content, between amateur and professional, between sweet and savvy. Most importantly, I want the kid-produced media to accomplish its primary goal: as a *process* for learning. If some of these video also can stand alone as a media *product,* that would be amazing. But first things first: let's help these kids learn.
>
> We will need to continue to explore the issue of the audiences for student-produced media. I wonder if we can create work where RBCS students can use their "powerful voices" to communicate to their parents, their teachers, their friends, their political leaders and the world?

As you can see from my reflections on the process at the very beginning of the journey, I was struggling with some real challenges: this work was not easy. The management practices to keep the whole enterprise running were substantial. It took many meetings to develop a shared understanding of what might be possible. I needed to spend time in the Russell Byers Charter School, meeting with the Assistant Principal, observing children and their teachers, and sitting in on staff meetings. My school partners needed to better understand our capacities as faculty and students at a university; they also needed to appreciate and respect the core concepts and instructional values that underpin digital and media literacy education. My graduate students needed to understand that learning-in-action calls for demanding levels of creativity and intense focus combined with a robust spirit of self-reflection, courage, and openness to inquiry.

For years, communication scholars and education theorists of all stripes have long called for innovative educational programs to support children's "critical viewing" or media analysis or internet evaluation skills, urging teachers to offer creative media production opportunities for children to write a school newspaper, create videos, and build webpages.[23] It sounds pretty easy. But education scholars have long recognized that one of the primary reasons for the failure of school reform initiatives is the unwillingness of the partners to commit to collaboration over an extended period of time.[24] One scholar

notes, “It takes so long just to develop trusting relationships based on respect that to think improvements in school or useful research can be produced quickly is at best naive.”[25] My experience working in long-term relationships with school districts in Massachusetts had taught me that such programs didn’t magically happen overnight. It takes time for teachers to develop the knowledge and skills they needed to open up meaningful conversations about mass media and popular culture, to learn how to organize a simple media production project from start to finish, and to navigate the complicated terrain involved in building connections between media culture and school culture.

Could we establish long-term relationships with the school by engaging an ever-changing cadre of graduate students to “get their feet wet” through experiential learning as teachers and researchers? Would this process also simultaneously support the creation of new knowledge in the field? Could the fruits of our labor result in the development of the social, intellectual and emotional needs of young children? Juggling these three priorities seemed a near-impossible task. That’s why it was just the right project for me.

Dave’s Story: From Techie to Teacher

I had my “aha moment” about why digital and media literacy mattered in elementary classrooms in the summer of 2009. As a new instructor in the Powerful Voices for Kids program, I was thrilled to work with Renee, peers who went on to find roles of their own in PK-6 education, and an amazing co-teacher, Angela Carter. We worked with sixth-grade students. I noted in my teaching journal—a document that was part observation and part confessional—what happened on Week One, Day Three:

> Worked on our websites. Angela had half of the students in the computer lab to work on research, and I had half the kids in the room to work on web design on the website Glogster. The researchers were far more productive, learning a lot about online sources and how to use multiple strands of information to make a single argument. I would call this a more explicitly media literacy lesson -- we were asking students to synthesize print, visual, and audio information into an argument that they would express first in print (on oversized note paper) and then visually on their websites. They had to understand complex messages and then turn them into their own unique message to communicate to the rest of the world online.
>
> The web design component felt more like technology literacy -- teaching students how to copy and paste codes, URLs and other information into a web template. We focused on formal visual elements (pictures, videos, etc.) but the instruction of new technology (embedding, copy and pasting, saving to the desktop) eclipsed the media literacy objectives we had set for the project. What I noticed was that students became obsessed with relying on their prior, "comfort zone" knowledge to learn the new technology.
>
> I don't want to generalize too much, but it seemed to me that the technology actually impeded our learning. Asking the students to create the website on

paper would have foregrounded the media literacy lessons without letting the glamor of the technology get in the way of the learning process.

(In Chapter 6, you will see that "going online on paper" by making "paper websites" with younger students is, in fact, a great strategy for helping students focus on the learning process even as they explore design and aesthetics.)

I came to media literacy as a self-professed film geek and professional filmmaker, often enamored myself with gear—lenses, high-definition cameras, and trucks full of tripods, Steadicams, sandbags, dollies, gobos, and snoots (I was a sucker for the ones with silly names). But it was not until I worked with younger children that I began to realize and clarify my own interest in media production and analysis as a broader component of more fundamental literacy skills. I knew—or thought I knew—that children brought a wealth of unique knowledge and insight to subjects that adults often take for granted. I also knew that their media worlds were even more complex than my own at the dawn of the digital age.

So how could I continue to help good teachers figure out how to connect elementary students' media worlds, as messy and complicated as any classroom, to meaningful learning experiences? It was only later, as the program director of Powerful Voices for Kids, that I also learned how crucial the respect of teachers are to changing the way kids learn. I am not a classroom teacher, but I know that it is classroom teachers, not technologies, school design, or funding alone that will change learning in the most profound ways. I'm glad to see that some research has started to bear this observation out by suggesting that feedback, high expectations, mentorship, and more time for instruction—all of which involve the effort and skill of educators—are indispensable characteristics of effective classrooms.[26]

Having too often blamed institutions, social contexts, and parents for the "state of education" myself as an armchair education pundit, I discovered in working directly with younger students and, just as importantly, working beside classroom teachers how messy, complicated, and powerful classrooms really are. I discovered that not only do you "learn everything you need to know in kindergarten"—you re-learn everything you thought you knew by teaching it. I only hope that by sharing some of our experiences with Powerful Voices for Kids, we can help others to continue to learn and re-learn what it means to be a powerful *teacher*.

BEGIN TEXT BOX
A Compressed Theoretical Rationale for Digital and Media Literacy

1. Children are growing up with more access to media and technology than at any point in human history.
2. The rapid rate of change in the development of new communications technologies is likely to continue, so people now need to engage actively in lifelong learning from age 5 to 85 in order to use new tools and resources to accomplish ordinary personal, social, cultural and civic activities.

3. Digital media create *empowering* opportunities for people to connect with others and share ideas, engage in dynamic new forms of formal and informal learning, express their creativity, and use digital media and technology tools to participate as citizens in a democracy.
4. There are also real and potential *risks* associated with the digital age: *content* risks include exposure to violent, harmful or offensive content, manipulative advertising and inaccurate information, including sexual/racist/hate material; *contact* risks include contact with strangers, privacy, cyberbullying, and cyberstalking; and *conduct r*isks involve gossip and misinformation, giving out personal information, illegal downloading, gambling, hacking and more. Respect for intellectual property and reputational safety are also important in a time when we are experiencing rapidly shifting notions of ownership, authorship, privacy and social appropriateness.
5. Therefore, to protect against the negative aspects of contemporary media culture and take advantage of the empowerment potential offered by digital media and technology, a constellation of media literacy life skills is needed. Media literacy includes the ability to:

    a) ACCESS: Make responsible choices and access information by finding and locating materials and comprehending information and ideas;
    b) ANALYZE: understand messages in a variety of forms through textual and contextual analysis, identifying the author, purpose and point of view and evaluating the quality and credibility of the content;
    c) CREATE: compose content in a variety of forms for authentic purposes, making use of language, images, sound, and new digital tools and technologies,
    d) REFLECT: consider one's own conduct and communication behavior by applying social responsibility and ethical principles; and
    e) ACT: take social action by working individually and collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems in the family, workplace, community, nation ad world.

6. Texts come in many forms. Today, people need to be able to "read" and "write" messages in a variety of forms, including language (in print and oral forms), images, sounds, graphics, and interactivity.
7. Each genre and medium of expression and communication demands certain learned competencies. For example, reading on screen, reading from a page, writing with a keyboard and writing with a pencil are all practices that require particular skills. Today, a wide range of literacy competencies are needed to be effective in society.
8. The use of digital media technology tools engages and motivates learners. Mass media and popular culture texts that connect to children's lived experience are more motivating and engaging than texts with unfamiliar content.
9. Learning textual and contextual analysis concepts like audience, purpose, and point of view supports the development of reading strategies. Critical analysis of mass media, popular culture and digital media texts can be used to support literacy development, especially with reluctant readers.
10. When learners use technology tools to compose and create messages, they activate multimodal literacy competencies.

11. Young children who are just learning to decode printed symbols can demonstrate comprehension, critical thinking and textual and contextual analysis skills when using familiar media, including the texts of mass media and popular culture.
12. Understanding and applying concepts like author, purpose and point of view to texts of mass media and popular culture and using technology tools for composition increases children's motivation and engagement and helps sustain reading and writing practices that increase academic achievement.

END TEXT BOX

A Preview of What's To Come

This book offers a vision for what children ages 6 – 12 stand to gain when they have opportunities to explore the worlds of mass media, popular culture and digital media in the context of both informal and in-school learning environments. In Chapter 2, "The Media Worlds of Children," you'll get a sense of the landscape that families now experience while raising young children today in a media- and technology-saturated cultural environment. In Chapter 3, "Teacher Motivations," we share our experiences with staff development as we discovered that teachers' approach to digital and media literacy will depend on their existing attitudes and beliefs about media, popular culture, technology and the big-picture goals of teaching and learning.

Then in Part II of this book, we report on our experiences with intermediate students in Grades 3 – 6. In Chapter 4, "Connecting Culture and Classroom," we learn about the ways that young children can become powerful communicators by using their creativity and collaboration skills to address real issues in an urban community -- homelessness and littering. In Chapter 5, "Making Media," teachers show us how they helped students experience the power of authorship by using a range of technology tools, from simple to more complex, using tools including PowerPoint, screencasting, and video production with young children. In Chapter 6, "Asking Questions about Popular Culture in the Classroom," we examine the impact of students asking questions about celebrity culture and social media, finding that teachers' ability to manage the unpredictability of classroom conversation is a key factor in creating a robust learning environment. In Chapter 7, "Literacy as Social Practice," we look at the development of children's critical thinking skills about popular culture and advertising and learn about what observed in the development of children's active reasoning skills in responding to popular media like television, music and videogames.

Part III of this book reports on our experiences with younger children in the primary grades. In Chapter 8, "A Story Is a Story," we take a close look at teachers who are working to develop children understanding of language and other symbol systems, like photographs, animation and drama. In Chapter 9, "Authors and Audiences," we explore the primary theory behind our work: learning about concepts like author, audience and purpose in conjunction with familiar texts like TV shows and advertising supports children's comprehension skills and academic achievement by increasing motivation and engagement and activating critical thinking skills that transfer from one symbolic form to another. Finally, in Chapter 10, "Transforming Practice," we reflect on the staff

development models we used and outline the learning that resulted from attempting a develop and implement a comprehensive approach to digital and media literacy education for K-6 learners. By sharing our experiences in helping young children develop the key competencies they need to make sense of their increasingly digital and media-saturated world, we hope you'll be inspired to bring these ideas to the children and teachers in your community.

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CHAPTER 2
The Media Worlds of Children

In this chapter, you'll learn more about:

Children's media worlds. What are the effects of a media-saturated environment on children, and how do different children experience "media worlds" differently according to their access to messages and their family environment?

Media in the classroom. How can teachers better understand how children think about, talk about, and use media in their homes? How can they scaffold learning experiences that incorporate children's unique media experiences?

The messy reality of children's media knowledge and skills. How does the way that teachers and parents view children's experiences with technology affect how media is discussed and used both at home and in the classroom?

Media at home. What strategies do parents use to protect their children from harmful effects of media and empower children to use media and technology in positive ways?

Skye is ten years old. She's a precocious, tech-savvy child. As a fourth grader, she has basic proficiency in typing, word-processing, and navigating the Internet on laptops, PCs, and mobile devices. While sitting in the computer lab, she pauses on a particular question in an online questionnaire about media use. She squints at the laptop screen and looks to the researcher sitting next to her with a puzzled expression.

When we asked Skye a question about her use of social networking sites, we were aiming to better understand her technology and media use habits and preferences. Until this point in the survey, Skye had been vocal about her online habits, repeatedly informing us about her favorite games and the personal website she had recently developed. But now she was more cautious. Her eyes furrowed. One of the questions asked about her use of Facebook or MySpace.

"That's not appropriate for kids until they're older," she said. "You really shouldn't ask that question to kids. You should ask us about things that kids are allowed to use."

Skye's concern about what's "appropriate" for kids was interesting to us. And she's correct— the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 2000 clearly limits children under the age of 13 from revealing any personal information online, which often precludes them from signing up for a social networking account. In addition, user policies at sites like MySpace and Facebook set strict age limits that, as Facebook spokespeople claim, are regularly and vigilantly enforced.[27]

Skye, like many 10-year olds, sees the world from an either-or point of view. She is hyper-conscious of the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate media. But one in four of her classmates between the ages of 8 and 12 have visited a Facebook page—often the pages of family members or older siblings to which they have personal access. One in ten of her classmates, and double that number of children in the grade above her, already have a profile of their own. Some surveys have revealed that there are more than 5 million children under age 13 currently using Facebook in the U.S. alone.[28]

Those statistics may not be surprising to Skye or her classmates. Most (but not all) American children live in constantly connected homes in a 500-channel universe where TV and the Internet are available from nearly every room in the house, twenty-four hours a day. What is surprising is how many teachers are unfamiliar with children's media and technology use in the home. In our work with teachers, we've found that few can name favorite TV shows, popular musicians or commonly-played videogames.

Truthfully, it's difficult to keep up with the ever-changing nature of popular culture. Who is that cool new singer on American Idol? (Was it *American Idol*, the *X-Factor*, or *The Voice*?) What's the name of that boy band? (American, Mexican, or Korean?) And who is the latest up-and-coming child actor in all the Disney shows? (As if you could only name one!) For many years, educators considered these things to be irrelevant or unrelated to our primary goals as educators. But, as we demonstrate in this book, teachers can reap enormous benefits when they gain more knowledge and have a

better understanding the social and emotional worlds that children inhabit—and a major component of this includes the significant volume of time they spend watching TV, using the Internet, listening to music, and playing videogames.

Celebrities, athletes and musicians are important figures in the lives of many American children. When children are given the opportunity to list the names of up to three famous people who were important to them, only one in four children do not list a favorite celebrity, athlete or musician. More than half of students name three favorite celebrities. As of 2011, musicians like Ke$ha, Selena Gomez, Katy Perry, Eminem and Taylor Swift are popular among children in Grades 3 – 6. Athletes are also quite popular among young children (in Philadelphia, home of the Phillies, these include local stars like Ryan Howard, Jimmy Rollins and Chase Utley), as are actors (including people like Miley Cyrus, Johnny Depp, Miranda Cosgrove and Anne Hathaway).

Different families may be more or less engaged with current trends in music, movies and sports. If parents are active readers, their children are more familiar with books. If parents are into music, their children will be into music. If they watch a lot of movies, their children are likely to be film viewers. And parents who are active online have children who use the Internet and social media routinely. For these reasons, children are differentially invested in mass media and popular culture, with some being active participants and others not paying much attention to it.

For teachers, these differences may create some anxiety. Can we talk in class about a TV show or movie that most children will be familiar with but others may not be allowed to view? Can we talk about a rap song when some children only listen to gospel and others only listen to classic rock and roll? In this chapter, we share what we learned talking with children about media and technology in two different elementary schools: a city school and a suburban school.[29] Navigating the different cultural worlds that children inhabit today requires sensitivity and discretion.

Kids on Facebook: Objectionable or Adorable?

Researchers are just beginning to explore the nature of children's participation on Facebook or other social media sites. They have found that most parents perceive that Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter are "mature" sites, meant only for teenagers who are old enough and mature enough to handle the various online safety issues present. Many parents aren't aware that restrictions to these sites are the result of government regulations designed to protect children's privacy, including the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), created by an act of Congress in 1990.

Are parents aware or unaware of the age restrictions? Or are they complicit in children's covert participation on these sites? Survey research with parents of children ages 10–14 shows that many parents do not support the site–imposed age restrictions that limit children's access to communication services and social media. Many parents knowingly allow their children to lie about their age, especially when using general–

audience social media sites and communication services such as Facebook, Gmail, and Skype, which allow children to connect with family members, peers and others.[30]

Skye's 10-year old twin sister, Rebecca, has a Facebook profile of her very own, one that violates the company's Terms of Service agreement because she's under 13. While Skye plays by the rules, Rebecca in many ways couldn't be more different from her sister. She already calls herself a "hacker" and has found ways around school filtering software to access restricted websites like Facebook and YouTube during school hours. She dresses in darker clothing, listens to rock and emo music marketed to older children and teens, and finds hurdles to online access to be a mere annoyance. For Rebecca, "inappropriateness" is still a boundary, but one that she enjoys transgressing. Skye and Rebecca, growing up in the same house, have strikingly different attitudes about the Internet and social media.

Today a classroom teacher will have in his or her classroom some children who have little or no experience using social networks, watching inappropriate or R-rated movies and TV-MA television shows, or listening to explicit music. Sitting right beside them will be other children who, either alone or with friends, trawl on YouTube for funny videos, play violent and sexually-explicit videogames like "Grand Theft Auto," and watch R-rated horror films like the *Saw* series.

Many children are exploring, discovering, and testing their own boundaries of comfort through their media choices, and the fluid nature of content on the Internet makes policing those boundaries increasingly difficult. In our research, we found that over half of 8 – to 10-year olds have seen, either intentionally or unintentionally, something they themselves deem to be "inappropriate" on YouTube, for instance. Only a third of those children were alone when it happened.[31]

But how do children (or their parents or teachers) even define what is inappropriate and appropriate? When you visit the Nick Jr. website, there's a catchy rock-and-roll song playing, which features a 5-year old at a concert, in a crowd filled with children and teens, watching a teen pop band perform the song, urging fans to "Put your rockstar jacket on." The child is invited on stage, where he puts on a 'rockstar' jacket as the band sings, "Play it loud, just like a rockstar." And while some parents may find it objectionable to feature very young children as fans of teen pop music in this way, others will find it simply adorable.

In nearly every community, kids today now explore a vast and ever-changing world of media. Table 2.1 shows the most popular websites for 4 – 12 year olds. Children now use media and technology alone and in groups, in public and in private spaces that are made accessible through wireless technology, cell phones, and mobile devices. The Internet offers a deluge of unfiltered information that might be either helpful or harmful for children, from Nick Jr. to Poptropica, from Wikipedia to Internet pornography. But navigating this sea of entertainment and information choices is rarely predictable, particularly for children who are budding anthropologists in a new information wilderness. [32]

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A Wide Range of Competencies

By all accounts, most American children are acquiring some skill in using new communications technologies just through their ordinary engagement with media and technology outside of school. Often adults assume that children are "digital natives," able to intuitively grasp the mechanics and language of digital media from a young age. YouTube hosts hundreds of home movies of children playing and learning on parents' mobile media devices with no instruction. Children who use media and technology can often be quick learners—quicker learners, in fact, than many of their teachers and parents.

But children have a wide range of skills, abilities, tastes, and needs that depend on lots of factors, including level of child development, peer groups, family influence, digital access at home, and community values. That's why we reject the concept of the "digital native," since it leads parents and teachers to mistakenly overlook the differences between children in their familiarity with digital media and technology. In the world of digital media, the differences between children can often be remarkable, and are never entirely predictable. We found:

- Students in kindergarten who can download, view, and record their favorite television shows using a digital video recorder, but who have trouble controlling a computer mouse

- Students in fourth and fifth grade who are masters of complicated videogames requiring strategy and precision, but who nonetheless have never re-sized text or used the "copy" or "paste" functions of a word processor

- Children who can find and use sites where they can "download music for free" (via illegal file sharing) but do not know how to perform a basic keyword search.

The reality of teaching digital and media literacy in an elementary school setting is that teachers must create an environment where children with widely different experiences and abilities can all learn. Children need to feel safe, respected, and intellectually challenged in a classroom where their media worlds are acknowledged — the media that they spend many waking hours—up to 10 hours per day, according to survey research—watching, listening to, playing with, and reading.[33]

BEGIN TEXT BOX
What Young Learners Can Do
Children ages 6 – 12 have a whole set of competencies that enable them to be effective learners. They can:

Cognitive

- Communicate easily and use language effectively many different situations
- Activate memory and use imagination
- Use logical reasoning, problem solving and critical thinking
- Talk about their own ideas, thoughts and feelings
- Focus on activities for longer periods of time.

Social & Emotional

- Negotiate a wide range of social interactions without adult help
- Establish relationships that are not extensions of their parents' networks
- Form meaningful peer relationships and desire to be liked and accepted by friends
- Play and learn in teams or groups.
- Create social hierarchies and build a sense of group identity
- Be strongly influenced by family values and routines

Moral & Ethical

- Begin to form a consistent set of values to guide behavior
- Develop a sense of right and wrong
- Understand and adhere to social norms.[34]

END TEXT BOX

Creative digital activities really begin to take off among children between the ages of 8 – 12. Many will have already used a digital camera to take a photo or gotten information from the Internet. Many children download music from the Internet well before they enter adolescence. In one suburban elementary school, we found that nearly half of students in Grades 3 – 5 have had experience with image manipulation tools like Kid Pix, Tux Paint and even Photoshop. Many children have used instant messaging, chat or Skype to talk to family members on a computer.

But learning to be an author takes time. We found that while children in Grades 3 – 6 are playing games and using websites, they're not generally adding content as authors of webpages. We found that only one in five Grade 5 children in high-performing suburban schools have created a webpage. And while most children in this age group have watched a video on YouTube, only one in four have added a comment.

Helping children make important choices related to their use of media—how to search safely, how to communicate online respectfully, how to think carefully about the choices authors of their favorite television shows and films make to express a point of view—takes the work of an entire community. Parents, teachers, school administrators, and peers are all important social actors in the process of helping all children make sense of their increasingly dense, and increasingly omnipresent, media worlds.

Media Present Opportunities and Risks

Media and technology resources offer tremendous opportunities for children's intellectual, social and emotional development. Since most media and technology use happens in the home, many parents do their best to provide explanations or respond to children's questions when they're using the Internet, playing videogames, watching TV or using social media, recognizing that engagement with media and technology can be an important part of their development.

But there are real and potential risks associated with children's use of mass media, popular culture and digital media. One set of risks involves the way in which screen media *displaces* other, potentially more beneficial activities. Another type of risk includes *content* risks, as when children are exposed to violent, harmful or offensive content, manipulative advertising and inaccurate information, including sexual, racist or hate material. Another type of risk incudes *contact* risks, including contact with strangers, privacy, cyberbullying, and cyberstalking. Finally, *conduct r*isks involve gossip and misinformation, giving out personal information, illegal downloading, gambling, hacking and more.[35]

Most parents and teachers are familiar with how the use of television and film reshapes or displaces other activities. Educators and parents have also been cautioned about how the noise from TV in the background of family life may decrease children's language development.[36] Pediatricians and medical professionals have examined how screen time contributes to childhood obesity. Children's irregular sleep patterns are associated with family use of media and technology. Concerns about focus and attention problems, decreased academic performance, socialization and language development are also linked to media and technology use. Indoor screen activities may displace time for fine motor, creative, imaginative and outdoor play as well as reducing time interacting with peers, siblings, parents, and other adults.[37]

Since 2000, the Federal Trade Commission has discovered that movie companies engage in "explicit and pervasive targeting of young children" by advertising for PG-13 and R-rated films on television shows and on Internet sites likely to reach teens.[38] Movie studios target violent PG-13 films to children under 13 both through advertising and cross-merchandising tie-ins with fast food, snack food and toys. Studios place ads for violent R-rated movies on television shows and Internet sites highly popular with children under 17. They post "red tag" trailers for R-rated movies, intended for age-restricted audiences, on the Internet without age-based access restrictions.[39]

On TV, controversial programs like *South Park, The Boondocks*, and *Family Guy* are designed to appeal to teens and adults, but the animation design may also attract younger children.[40] Characters in *The Boondocks* use the n-word frequently. *Family Guy* episodes have featured characters dressed in S&M gear and activities like lighting farts on fire and sitting naked at a table with a plastic inflatable sex doll. The writers frequently flout network standards and practices guidelines. For example, one episode

featured a couple shown kissing on a picnic blanket with the music lyric, "You're going to have to do her with your ding-a-ling – because you can't say penis."[41]

While some parents set limits about the types of programs and the amount of time that children may view, both parents and teachers are much less likely to be familiar with the risks associated with the Internet, videogames and social media. For example, researchers have found that as many as one-third of children will experience unwanted sexual contact while using the online games, the Internet or social media.[42] Chat rooms have different levels of supervision; some are open rooms with no one supervising. Others use digital monitors where "dirty word filters" censor specific words. Still other sites have human monitors who preview what people write before anyone else gets to see it. Many teachers and parents are unfamiliar with how different types of chat rooms may protect children from or contribute to online risk.

But when we asked kids themselves, many are highly aware that, among the different communities that exist online, some may be more or less "appropriate" for children. This is true even for those social media websites specifically designed for children, such as Webkinz, AnimalJam and Club Penguin.

For example, one girl who plays Club Penguin describes several of these risks when writing about her experience with the game: "I love hanging out at Club Penguin with my friends outside of Club Penguin and I also love meeting new ones. But I find as I learn more and more things about Club Penguin that this isn't the best website I could be at, and has to do with the users. What I mean by this is that there is a great amount of cyber bullying, lying, working around the rules, and cheating on this website. By cyberbullying, I mean there are many cliques, and it seems that you are not cool if you do not wear black and aren't a member. By lying, I mean users have made up some kind of adoption center at the pet shop where penguins adopt "baybees." If you want to adopt a baybee and don't have flashy clothes and act like you are rich, they will reject you in a mean way."[43]

In another chat game space, Habbo Hotel, the dirty word filter replaces explicit language with the word "bobba." But users develop elaborate work-arounds in order to engage in sexual talk online. It's common to see phrases like "I wanna bobba you," or "Bobba me good." One young user wrote in frustration, "I walked in to a room and they were like, 'Oh I can't wait for you any more, *lifts up shirt* *kisses stomach* *goes lower...*' And it's just so stupid."[44]

As expected, children may respond to such experiences in a variety of different ways. Some might get angry while others experience feelings of confusion, shame or guilt. British researcher Sonia Livingstone and her colleagues, in a major study of 25,000 children and their online media use in Europe, found that children whose parents are less educated or do not use the Internet themselves are more likely to be at risk online or more upset when they encounter online violence, sexual material or bullying. The study also found that disadvantaged children tend also to be the least likely to get access to information and guidance about living a safer life online.[45] Therefore, to address the

negative aspects of contemporary media culture and take advantage of the empowerment potential offered by digital media and technology, a constellation of life skills is needed.

As every elementary school principal knows, cyberbullying begins in grade school. We asked children to tell us if they have had any experiences with "being mean" or "others being mean to you" while in online social interaction. As Table 2.2 shows, children are more likely to experience this, as both victims and perpetrators, as they grow older. In about half of the cases, children indicated that they knew the perpetrator. In the suburban elementary school we worked in, one in three Grade 5 students report having been a victim of some form of online bullying.

Just as adult supervision on the playground decreases the incidence of face-to-face bullying, the presence of watchful adults in cyberspace can decrease the incidence of cyberbullying. When we conducted parent workshops, we were often dismayed to find that some parents feel out-of-control and helpless to intervene in any aspect of their child's engagement with media and technology. Parents who struggle with technology themselves or who feel disengaged from online participation in social networks may choose to ignore it. Other parents who use computers and the Internet for work or informational purposes may be insensitive to its value for entertainment or social interaction, just as parents who use TV or movies for entertainment may not recognize how their children are learning from the stories presented via mass media.

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PLACE TABLE 2.2 HERE

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Parents sometimes worry that dangers facing their children are far greater than the children themselves can imagine. In the "if it bleeds, it leads" orthodoxy of mass and local news media, news outlets often present a warped vision of the world in which child kidnapping, child pornography, and human trafficking are common effects of risky internet communication. Such a perception of online safety has greatly distorted those very real but rare threats of harm done to children by strangers online, creating an aura of paranoia among adults that often blinds them to children's more modest but meaningful mistakes and risky behavior.

Media Talk at Home

At one parent workshop Renee that offered, a parent confessed, "Everyone says, 'Talk to your children about media, videogames and the Internet.' But I don't know what to talk about. I feel so uncomfortable." The awkward conversations went nowhere, she said. "What am I supposed to do?" For us, the answer is obvious: Ask questions! Good listening and lots of "why" questions encourage children to elaborate. Rather than starting the conversation by telling children your opinions about various TV shows,

movies and celebrities, it's important to find out first about children's feelings and opinions. Children often have strong feelings and ideas about movies, videogames, books and music. Children who feel comfortable expressing their ideas are more confident learners. They're also more willing to acknowledge adults' ideas about media and technology when they feel their own ideas are respected and valued.

BEGIN TEXT BOX
Asking Questions about Videogames

Descriptive Questions

- What's this game about? How do you play it?
- Who are the characters?
- What kind of action can you take?

Evaluative Questions

- What do you like about this game?
- Are there any parts you don't like?
- What other TV shows, movies or games are similar to this game?

Representation Questions

- What's realistic and unrealistic about this game?
- What would it feel like to do this action or be this character is real life?

END TEXT BOX

There have long been cable channels, specialty videos, and of course children's books that specifically target children from infancy to adolescence and into young adulthood. However, media saturation takes on decidedly more interactive, exploratory, and messy characteristics as we move into an age in which no child has ever known a world prior to the Internet, cell phones, pocket camcorders, and mobile media.

Within living memory of most of us, the family dinner table was an oasis of respite from the noise and distraction of household media. In its idealized form, the communal dinner table enables families to communicate about any number of topics: the events of the day, in-school and out-of-school learning, problems and concerns, jokes to be shared, and any number of other subjects that help bring together parents and children, siblings, other family members, friends, and the whole social world of the family.

Even for those families who ate together in the presence of communal media like a family room TV set or listening to the radio, a common space offered a place to interact: discussing favorite characters, reacting to unexpected twists of a plot, even the endless search for the "right channel" that each member could abide until dinner was over. In fact, co-viewing practices with television shows, books, movies, videogames, and other media can be a strong tie that binds families, as any parent who shares a love of a particular show or movie with their children knows.

Now rules for "media at the table" are more complicated. Should we turn off our cell phones, as we're instructed to at the start of a film? Do we encourage videogame playing in the restaurant or insist upon table talk? Should all mobile devices be placed in a special box when at home or at school, as many school administrators instruct students to do at the beginning of each school day? In an era in which videogames can be surreptitiously tapped at quietly under the table, a "no media zone" may require robust regulation.

How Parents Handle Media and Technology in the Family

Some parents adopt a laissez-faire attitude about media and technology. They do not feel the need to regulate children's media in any particular fashion, trusting that their children will figure it out on their own. Another camp, the protectionists, strictly limit children's media use from a young age, dictating rules for content and time spent in front of a television or computer. Still another group, the empowerment parents, put digital technology in the hands of their children as tools for learning, self-expression and communication.

In our research, we found empowerment parents, laissez-faire parents, and protectionists in both urban and suburban communities. But children from poorer families were more likely to have laissez-faire parents than those in more affluent, suburban schools. Children in poor communities report that parents rarely engage in monitoring media and technology use while parents in affluent communities are more vigilant in either playing an active role in teaching them about media and technology, or limiting children's access to media in some ways.[46]

While most children are aware whether or not their parents have guidelines and expectations for media and technology, the actual enforcement of rules varies widely. We have spoken to children in first grade who regularly watch older-teen programming like *Teen Mom* with their parents and siblings. Other children view TV and use the Internet indiscriminately and are drawn to appropriate and inappropriate material alike. Children with few media rules do not seem to draw hard distinctions between appropriate and inappropriate content, instead operating under a "know it when I see it" paradigm. For example, one student, when telling us about the raunchy cartoon sitcom *Family Guy*, explained why it was both appropriate and inappropriate: "It seems like some of it is more for grown-ups, but I think I can watch it, too. But my younger brother, he shouldn't watch it."

Some parents are serious task-masters when it comes to protecting their children from harmful media influence. They may go so far as to make general-audience shows like *American Idol* or *SpongeBob Squarepants* and PG-rated films off-limits to children. Some children who grow up in households with rigid rules have an intense, sometimes almost paranoid sense of what is "appropriate" and "inappropriate." For example, the day after taking a media use survey, one child asked his teacher if he could go back and change a response. When talking with parents about the survey, he had come to the conclusion that even though he first indicated he had seen a violent show frequently,

when discussing the matter at home, he changed his mind: he did *not*, in fact, watch a popular action show intended for teenagers. Clearly the child's family conversation had led him to reconsider his choices.

In many families, rules about *how much time* and what constitutes *appropriate content* are common. In our research with children in grades 3 – 5, we found children were more aware of parental rules for the Internet, establishing a profile on Facebook, and TV shows and less aware about parental rules for videogames or the use of popular music.[47] Although they communicate the rules to their children, parents may or may not place a lot of emphasis on *enforcement* of rules for viewing time and content when it comes to mass media, popular culture and digital media. Only about one-third of children in Grades 3 – 5 report that parents make sure they follow the rules about using media most of the time. By contrast, about one-third of children live in families where rules about media and technology are just not a big deal, stating that rules are enforced a little or never.

Most children report that they have had experiences with inappropriate media content—that is, TV shows or movies "that your parents wouldn't want you to see," like *Twilight* or *Sex in the City*. Children watched a number of programs on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block, which features animated programs targeted at teenagers and young adults. Many children have had experiences using videogames that they believe their parents wouldn't want them to use, with titles including *Grand Theft Auto, Halo,* and *Call of Duty.*

Parents may or may not respond to children's inappropriate media and technology use. When we asked children about TV and videogames that their parents didn't like, they mentioned that parents were likely to turn it off, get angry, ask questions, talk with them, or do nothing. How parents respond when children experience inappropriate content is important, as it represents an opportunity to discuss various interpretations of media messages in light of family values.

About half of students report that parents' most common reaction to inappropriate content is to *turn it off*. In the suburban school, about one in three children report that parents *do nothing* in response to inappropriate content. Children described other responses, noting that parents may *get angry*. The least common parental behavior in both the city and suburban school is to *talk with children* or *ask questions* about media and technology content. In the suburban school; only one in four children in Grades K – 5 report that parents talk about content they consider "inappropriate."

Movies, TV shows and the news can be frightening for children. But differences about "what's scary" or "what's exciting" may vary among children. Sometimes teachers encounter this diversity within the classroom when children are invited to talk about their media experiences. In one first grade classroom that Renee visited, children were asked about the scary movies they had seen. Children mentioned shows like *Scream, War of the Worlds, Twilight, The Shining,* and *The Sixth Sense*. When asked to describe their feelings after viewing, children shared a range of responses. Some felt "excited" or

"thrilled" but but others felt "creeped out," "terrified," "nervous," or even "ashamed." Several noted that the viewing experience affected their sleeping. Some children, however, were less active in this particular discussion. When it came time for one little girl to participate in the discussion, she explained that the scariest show she had seen was *Ratatouille,* the Disney animated film about the Parisian mouse-chef, and the scary part was when he almost got his tail cut off!

Negotiating children's attention to mass media, digital media and popular culture is more of a challenge for adults than ever before. But we would be remiss to paint a portrait of family life in which regulation of media devices trumps adults' abilities to understand and engage with kids' media worlds in developmentally appropriate ways.

Just as parents can bring their children's media worlds (if not their devices) to the actual family dinner table, educators can also bring the "dinner table," with its promise of dialogue, empathy, and bonding, into children's media and technology worlds, by asking questions, making connections, and sharing stories.

CHAPTER 2 ENDNOTES

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[29] The city school was a charter school that attracted more than 400 mostly African-American children from many different neighborhoods in a large urban school district. Using a combination of face-to-face interviews, paper-and-pencil and online surveys, we gathered information about the media and technology habits of children in Grades K – 5. With an average family income of only $35,000, the parents at this school had consciously chosen to enroll their children in a charter school; they worked hard, mostly in retail, service or administrative jobs, to provide for their families. The suburban school also enrolled about 400 children, but in this community, about 45 minutes west of the city school, family income averaged about $150,000, and most parents had graduated from college, with many in professional fields including business, medicine and law. While most children were Caucasian, there were a smattering of African-American, Latino, Asian and South Asian children enrolled.
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CHAPTER 3
Teacher Motivations for Digital and Media Literacy

In this chapter, you'll learn about:

What motivates teachers to use digital and media literacy. Teachers have a variety of motivations for teaching, but what are their motivations for integrating digital media, mass media, and popular culture into the classroom?

Engaging students with cool tools and media. How do teachers incorporate digital technologies and children's popular culture into their teaching practices?

Amplifying student voice. How do teachers foster a learning environment in which children can share ideas both in the classroom and to the wider world?

Teaching about how media is constructed. How do teachers engage younger students in conversations and activities that reveal how media is funded and created in professional environments?

Participation in and out of school. How do teachers incorporate participation and collaboration into learning through civic engagement and digital storytelling?

It's not easy to become a reflective practitioner when it comes to teaching. There is just so much to do. A teacher's day is packed. First there's the planning and preparation, the gathering of resources and materials, getting ready for the kids. Then there's the whirlwind of the day, with its intense social interaction, moments of spontaneous improvisation, and bodies-in-motion activity. For many professionals, the drive home is decompression time, pure and simple, followed by a new round of activity: addressing the needs of family and friends. Next day, we start all over again.

Some of us squeeze in time to learn new things by reading books (such as this one), taking online courses, or surfing the web to find lesson plans. And although resources that offer new ideas, instructional techniques, and research are plentiful, our time and attention is limited.

One of the reasons why teachers enjoy social media tools like Amy Mascott's We Teach (www.weteachgroup.com) and Jim Burke's English Companion (www.englishcompanion.com) is that these online communities give educators an opportunity to reduce the isolation they can experience as part of the job. Online communities like these are a fantastic opportunity for professional development. It's ironic that a teacher's job is simultaneously so highly socially connected and yet so socially isolating. We teach in front of students and yet out of sight of colleagues.

This means that we must engage in reflective practice, where we consider the choices we make in the classroom and strive for continuous improvement. But the process of becoming an excellent teacher is not just a matter of trying out a new tool or a new lesson plan. In a profound way, the quality of our work as teachers is deeply inflected by who we are as human beings. As Parker Palmer has written, "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher."[48]

Reflection is highly personal and the act of sharing reflections requires a climate of trust and respect. So when one of our instructors, John, reflected on his own teaching, he acknowledged how his own history as a learner had shaped his ideas and values. He wrote in a journal entry: "For me, my effectiveness as a learner and a thinker (not to mention citizen, artist, family member...) is greatly enhanced by my highly wired lifestyle. One-to-one laptop schools are only now starting to emerge as a simple reality of education. Yet, I can't help but feel bad that I am asking my students to think and learn, mostly deprived of the one tool (or multitude of tools) that I find most valuable."

PVK instructor John's identity as a tool-user also shaped the way he thought about various kinds of texts. "Even as a geeky kid, I didn't feel too differently than my students do now," he wrote in his online journal. "Print media are alienating. Written language is the only medium which is purely symbolic, and which actually requires active education for basic comprehension. By contrast, photography, movies, music, and other visual and auditory media (even speech) can be at least comprehended using skills that can be gained simply through enough viewership and participation. For the young, it

can easily feel like print is a secret language, just another reminder of their lack of power."

LaShon's approach to teaching was different. Working each day with young children, she saw herself as learning view the world from the point of view of a 6- or 7-year old. In her online journal, she wrote, "I had an AHA! moment on Monday when one of the students said something to me and I responded with something to the effect of 'similar,' or something like that, and he said "Miss LaShon, what does *similar* mean?" Just that quick I had forgotten that I was not speaking in a vernacular that he could understand. The incident turned into a learning moment to define the word similar, and needless to say, 'similar' has been added to our lexicon. I have definitely discovered a level of patience within myself that I didn't even know existed. If I construct my lessons plans using the students' level of 'expertise'--instead of my own--I garner better results. I have learned that I need to meet some of the students right where they are."

Teachers have lots of motivations for teaching. As Mary Kennedy observes in her study of teaching behavior and motivation, many teachers consider teaching itself to be a kind of avocation, a call to duty.[49] Others view it as a vocation, a career with high demands for workplace professionalism. Some teachers are particularly sensitive to their students' social and emotional development, providing a space for sensitive dialogue about touchy subjects. Some teachers put intellect first, challenging students to think critically and ask deep questions about classroom material. Still others see themselves as catalysts to student voice, bringing out the best of their students' innate talents and abilities.

Although each teacher's identity is unique, human motivations do cluster around a set of specific traits. In this chapter, we detail eight core motivations we identified among K-12 educators interested in integrating digital media and technology into the classroom. We've identified these motivations from our experience in professional development workshops in the United States and abroad, from kindergarten through graduate programs, in workshops, institutes, and other programs designed to help educators learn more about how they can use digital and media literacy in their own teaching practice. In addition, Renee has developed a research agenda with German colleague Silke Grafe to develop quantitative measures of these teacher motivations for media literacy, working with large samples of teachers using survey research data to identify the precise relationship between teacher motivations and instructional practices with digital media.

Different motivations have different results in the classroom—but teachers with very different teaching styles can be comparably effective in the classroom. In this chapter, we share evidence that we gathered in our quest to understand how teacher motivations shape instructional practices with digital technologies, mass media and popular culture. We asked instructors and teachers to reflect on their teaching in two ways: through conversation and writing. In the summer learning program, at the end of each day, we met for 45 minutes for an informal but structured conversation about what we noticed in our own work. We also asked teachers to write, using a wikispace as an online journal, responding to specific prompts once a week or more. Among teachers in

our professional development programs, we asked them to write about their practice at the end of a process where they designed, implemented and assessed a digital and media literacy learning activity.

Our motivations for teaching have consequences for how we do the job. A teacher who values efficiency and coherence may have to make choices about the amount of time she can allow for children's personal reflections and feelings. Similarly, a teacher who makes a deep emotional connection with each student during class may risk "falling behind" in addressing the content knowledge of a particular lesson plan.

We have found that each core motivation also encompasses both *protectionist* and *empowerment* approaches in relation to the world of digital media, mass media and popular culture. As we saw in Chapter 2, educators recognize the potential risks and harms of media and technology while they embrace the value of these tools as powerful engines of learning. Renee likes to help teachers reflect on their "love/hate" relationship with media and technology. She's found that in the heart of every protectionist is a strong desire for students' voices to be valued through thoughtful interactions in the world, while even the staunchest empowerment advocate has considered the limits and boundaries of appropriateness, comfort, and taboo in children's media environments.

INSERT TEXT BOX
Exploring our "Love/Hate" Relationships with Media in the Classroom

Children can talk about what they like and don't like about media at a young age. We find that when we break media into its most basic components, children begin to understand and share their own "love/hate" relationships with different kinds of media.

Using the Four Corners model, in which students visit four stations at each corner of the room, we have students share what they like or dislike about the four major categories of media:

Print ("what you read")
Like: "When my sister reads Harry Potter to me"
Dislike: "When I forget which page I was on"

Visual ("what you watch")
Like: "Avatar: The Last Airbender – I like the characters"
Dislike: "Shows my parents watch -- they're boring"

Audio ("what you listen to")
Like: "Backyardigans and the Fresh Beat Band – silly and fun!"
Dislike: "The rock music my older brother listens to – too loud"

Interactive ("what technologies you use or play with")
Like: "Playing with my Nintendo DS – racing games are exciting"
Dislike: "When my friend doesn't have an app I like a lot"

In Chapter 1, we introduced you to some of the instructors and teachers you'll be reading about in this book. *Instructors* (identified by their first names) participated in summer learning program and we observed them working directly with children. *Teachers* (identified by their surnames) participated in various staff development programs and we learned about their work directly and indirectly, through classroom observations, their talk about their practice, and their project-based learning activities, lesson plans, and their own reflective writing.

Working with a variety of peers and colleagues, we recognized eight types of teaching motivations in many of the people we work with. See if you can recognize yourself, your colleagues, or other teachers you know as you read this chapter. If you are curious about assessing your own motivations, you can take a "Digital and Media Literacy Motivations Quiz" on our website, http://powerfulvoicesforkids.com, to discover which of these eight motivations best reflects your own teaching.

Cool Tools and Cool Teachers: Gadgeteers and Trendsetters

Many teachers are fascinated with the power of digital media for learning. These days, the digital learning movement is gaining a real sense of ascendancy in the world of K-12. Kristin Hokanson, an educational technology expert, self-identifies as someone who enjoys exploring new technology resources. She's up to date with all of the latest technology tools. In one particularly memorable lesson we watched, Kristin demonstrated an infra-red notebook device that records sound as you write your notes. Then you can play back the notes on your computer, and it will replicate how you wrote what you wrote (animated on the monitor) and play the sounds of people talking as you wrote. You remember not only the words, but the way your thoughts formed and the conversations that sparked your writing.

When we need novel ideas for integrating technology into the classroom, we go to Kristin first. She knows about all of the latest software, hardware, freeware, and educational technology. She knows which apps are good for students and which are good for teachers. She tests out new programs, fiddles with new gadgets, and has a passionate sense of discovery around new media and technologies.

Kristin demonstrates many qualities of the **Gadgeteer,** the term we use for teachers who have technology-centered motivations for implementing digital and media literacy in education. Gadgeteers are sensitive to the way technology shapes students' lives, and they teach students how to use technology tools, safely and responsibly, to make their voice heard in the world.

Gadgeteers have their finger on the pulse of rapid technological change. They engage student interests around new and emerging platforms, programs, and technologies that they also love to use in their own teaching of classroom content. But they sometimes can find it difficult to engage teachers and students who do not share their enthusiasm for or confidence in using new technology.

Relying heavily on simple engagement strategies is another challenge of the technology-minded digital and media literacy educator. In our work with K-6 schools, we have seen educators who use SmartBoards—the brand-name term for a touch-screen projector system—as a reward for student engagement, allowing students to blast at math problems, pop word bubbles, and, in one particularly vivid example, explode the contents of a cell into its constituent parts—even in 3-D!

There is no denying the beneficial impact technologies can have on learning. With the push of a button, students have access to untold amounts of online information through libraries, websites, and other databases. Lecture formats and peer interaction can be approximated through distance education. Cameras, recorders, tablets, and other portable devices make media production activities easier than ever before.

But educators would be remiss to allow the hype and marketing promise of new technologies to be the whole story. When we interviewed children from a public elementary school in an affluent Philadelphia suburb about their media use, 17% told us that they *dislike* the SmartBoard technology in their schools. Why? Because, they say, teachers aren't using the technologies to their full potential. Students were asked about their feelings toward using the Internet and other technology at school. About two-thirds of the children we surveyed in Grades 3 – 5 like using the Internet at school and see it as an enjoyable part of their learning experience. Among the other students who said that they did not enjoy using the Internet at school, half said the activities and content were not engaging, and half said that technical difficulties interfered with technology use.

Similar studies with older students show that a majority of students notice a disconnect between their own understanding and usage of Internet technology and the ways that technology is used in the classroom.[50] Without being sensitive to how students use "cool tools" themselves, simply having these tools in the classroom may not be enough to bridge the gap between home and classroom uses of technology.

Some teachers are particularly keen to better understand the popular culture that their students know and love. We call this motivation type the **Trendsetter.** Trendsetters have an appreciation for youth popular culture, sometimes because they have children of their own (we know teachers who have their children's favorite music on their personal iPods) or because they are conversant with the world of popular culture that their children are discovering.

Trendsetters are particularly adept at engaging students. They are often seen as the "cool teachers"—and they often scare others who see themselves as "uncool." In one professional development workshop, we provided participants an opportunity to identify their anxieties about popular culture, including dislike of students' favorite media, lack of knowledge about the world of popular culture, and fear of inappropriate content. During the discussion, one teacher bristled at the very idea of talking about popular culture in the classroom: "I don't want to be the teacher that comes in with a boombox on her head 'getting' jiggy with it.'"

This teacher was evocatively describing the phenomenon David calls *Rappin' Grandma.* Rappin' Grandma, like the proverbial teacher with a boombox, uses popular culture to pander to students. Pandering – a type of exploitation -- is what happens when teachers use students' favorite popular culture in the classroom *just* to get kids' attention or *just* to present themselves as cool and trendy.

As a young teacher with an interest in popular culture, David is prone to Trendsetter impulses. He illustrates the fraught relationship between engaging students through their popular culture and pandering with a story from his own experience teaching in the Powerful Voices for Kids program. In 2010, David created a content-appropriate mix of popular music that instructors could play for inspiration, downtime, or song analysis. It included popular pop, hip-hop, and R&B tracks of the previous year. When he played this mix for a group of third graders as students and instructors ate lunch, he noticed that one side the room was animated, discussing every song, creating impromptu dances, and generally enjoying the music. The other side of the room, however, was silent, and children were subdued. They seemed to have receded from the music-centered activity happening across the room.

David later learned that some children did not identify with popular music at all. For them, it served as an object that aided alienation and feelings of "uncoolness." These children were just as anxious and uncertain about the popular culture of their own generation as some of the teachers we worked with. Of course, David prides himself on being careful not to use popular culture in a way that reinforced the role that it plays in students' emerging sense of social hierarchy, the separation of the 'haves and have nots.' But in this instance he failed—his 'on-paper' motivation, to engage students in connecting home and school, conflicted with a secret motivation to appear receptive to students' pop culture. By wanting to present himself as the 'cool teacher,' he forgot how painful it is *not* to be a 'cool student.'

Popular culture must, first and foremost, serve as an object of inquiry in the classroom. When teachers can ask questions of themselves and their students about popular culture, and when they can be genuinely ready for the surprises and ambiguities that often arise in the dynamic use of popular culture in classroom settings, students participate in a learning experience that connects classroom to culture.

Engaging Student Voice: Motivators and Spirit Guides

Two motivations for digital and media literacy cluster around holistic, child-centric approaches to engaging with students' media worlds. One motivation is represented by what we call the **Motivator.** Motivators use digital and media literacy activities as a catalyst for their students' creative energy. They are springboards for expression and student voice. We call the other the **Spirit Guide.** Spirit guides are sensitively aware of their students as whole human beings —mind, body, and spirit— and want to use every part of their emotional worlds, including their media worlds, to help them become more comfortable in their emerging identities.

Motivators and spirit guides share a strong connection in their student-centered approaches to learning. In the stories we have heard, Osei, our resident performer, happened to be a Motivator, while Mona, our resident songwriter, exhibited qualities of the Spirit Guide. At the center of both instructors' teaching practice was a personal, emotional connection with their students' lives and work. But the two had different agendas in forming these connections. While Osei wanted his students to direct their voice outward to the world, Mona wanted her students to feel comfortable sharing *within* the classroom with each other, giving intimate feedback and connecting their media experiences to their developing creative spirit.

In one lesson, Osei was working with two boys—both of them occasional trouble-makers in the classroom—to teach them how to construct the more complicated rhymes that the rappers they knew and loved used in their own work. He pointed out that when rapper Eminem says a line, he often has multiple syllables and internal rhymes—that's what gives his flow the "patter" that it has. For example, in "Not Afraid," a popular 2010 song that Osei's students took as an inspiration for their work, Eminem raps:

> You can try and read my lyrics off of this paper before I lay 'em
> But you won't take the sting out these words before I say 'em
> 'Cause ain't no way I'ma let you stop me from causing mayhem

Eminem uses parallel structure in the first two lines to strengthen the rhyme at the end, adding "before I" prior to both "lay 'em" and "say 'em." In all three lines, the "ay" sounds at the beginning of a phrase echo the rhyme at the end—"paper," "take," and "ain't"/"way" predict "lay 'em," "say 'em," and "mayhem," respectively. The way Eminem emphasizes these vowel sounds throughout adds to the forcefulness of his rapping style.

As Osei explains concepts like internal rhyming, polysyllables, we couldn't help but observe the look on the boys' faces. They are absolutely mesmerized in this lesson, hanging onto Osei's every word. Osei is physically engaging, making hand gestures to accentuate particular syllables and keeping intense eye contact with both boys. It is as though he is letting them in on a secret that the three of them will share through the songwriting process. As he goes to work with a different group, the boys are noticeably inspired. They begin to excitedly write new lines into their composition notebooks.

Mona had a different experience with her students that revealed her deep sensitivity to their inner lives. They too were studying poetry and lyrics in popular music, but it was in preparation for a poetic public service announcement they would write (the anti-littering PSA featured in Chapter 4). First she wanted students to express whatever came to mind. Many students made rhymes with common school-sanctioned constructions like, "I had a cat; it was lying on a mat."

But when the class brainstormed the theme "never give up" for a subsequent poem, several boys began to incorporate violent imagery into their poems:

A guy pushed me
He had to pay a fee
I stabbed him
And jabbed him

And another student:

I slapped him with a kick.
He cost me my life
Then I cut his head off with a knife.

What a dramatic contrast to the simplistic rhymes of the basal reader! Because these rhymes were surprising to Mona, she wasn't sure how to respond. There are many different ways teachers might handle this. She might have explained that talk about violence was "inappropriate." Perhaps classroom rules about content might have prevented such language from being used altogether. There are also deflection strategies that might allow a teacher to be dismissive, sweeping such an incident under the rug.

But Mona knew that this imagery was a complicated part of her students' everyday lives and media experiences, and she was careful not to make them feel either uncritical or ashamed of their writing. Upon reflection, Mona tried to understand why her students were so drawn to violence. In an interview, she observed, "When we think of 'never give up,' sometimes we think of never giving up because life is amazing. But it can also mean, 'Never give up through your hardships.'" Quick to think not just of violent media her students absorb or tropes they learn from popular music, Mona assumed there were important and genuine feelings underlying her students' reliance on violent imagery.

Her students had other opportunities in class to discuss hardships, feelings, pleasures, and fears, often through responding to popular culture that activated emotion. The intimate space for sharing that Mona created allowed her students to reveal vulnerable parts of themselves, and to therefore more honestly reflect on their thoughts and feelings.

Student voice is a particularly fraught topic in elementary education as younger students begin to explore who they are, what they believe, and why they believe it. Teachers who are motivated to act as a springboard for student ideas need to also be sensitive to when students have trouble, whether developmentally or otherwise, articulating those ideas. As we will see in the following chapters, students sometimes need structure to be truly creative. Before students can create media about a social issue like homelessness, for example, they first must gather information by reading, listening looking at online documents and building their background knowledge on a variety of subjects.

What we call "voice" is, in a sense, the foundation for human communication—and not all communication is equally desirable in a classroom setting. This is where

teachers motivated by the social and emotional wellbeing can have both the biggest strengths and the biggest challenges. Mona was successfully able to redirect her students' immediate connection to violence as a means of problem-solving helping their community by creating a PSA. She also had to address communication that surprised and concerned her, but to do so in a way that did not affect her students' self-esteem or sense of self-worth. Expression often thrives in structured environments, but it also seeks freer rein. The balance between order and chaos in the classroom is most apparent, and perhaps most difficult, in those situations in which student voice is most valued.

Media Systems in the Elementary Classroom: Watchdogs and Demystifiers

Working with new instructors and experienced teachers alike, we have found a particular motivation for digital and media literacy teaching that focuses on the economic, social, political, and technological systems through which media is produced. Coming from the cultural studies and *critical literacy* tradition, this approach offers an ideological critique of mass media and culture and an examination of the politics of representation, including race, gender, and class, as well as social control, resistance, and pleasure. [51]

Some elementary educators introduce a critical literacy perspective to young children in exploring the genre of advertising. In working with instructors in the Powerful Voices for Kids program, critical analysis of advertising was, in fact, the only subject that literally every instructor explored. By pointing out how media is constructed to *persuade*, instructors also found that young children's budding skepticism of truth claims in commercials was a hook to engage students in thinking about how and why ads are constructed.

When teachers explore the techniques and effects of advertising, develop students' sense of consciousness and conscience about buying, selling, and ownership, they are demonstrating a moviation we call the **Watchdog.** Many elementary teachers make their first forays into digital and media literacy by introducing an examination of print ads or television commercials into the classroom,

Ms. Capaldo, a Grade 5 teacher, designed an activity that asked students to ask critical questions about fast food websites. Fast food sites, like many other child-oriented websites, contain a good deal of interactive and gaming activities. These *advergames* feature popular characters from companies like Kraft, Froot Loops, and countless others, and never explicitly advertise a product. Rather, advergames immerse students in an interactive world of a product, so that they associate online fun with a particular brand.

Ms. Capaldo was concerned about the lack of transparency in these websites, particularly given the notoriously unhealthy content of fast foods. But, like many other teachers, Ms. Capaldo knew that directly challenging McDonalds, Burger King, or Taco Bell's motivations for attracting young consumers might backfire in the classroom. When children feel passionately about a brand, restaurant, or celebrity, challenging their pleasures in the classroom can cause some students to opt out, or at least "pretend" to

give a teacher-appropriate response. Even young children have learned to say "McDonald's is bad" when in fact they may eat there three times a week.

Instead, Ms. Capaldo wanted her students to discover the way that techniques of attraction are connected to ownership and profit themselves, by exploring the websites and looking for information. Students were frustrated on a Burger King website that allowed them to cater their experience with customizable options for "fun," "food," and "BK®.". If you want interactive games, you slide a bar toward the "fun" side. To see menu options, you slide the bar toward "food." If you want coupons and special deals, you slide it toward "BK®." No matter which column they chose, though, students found it difficult to research important aspects of fast food like ingredients and nutritional information. It's as if these companies don't *want* us to know what's in their food!

Place Figure 3.1 here

Identifying media mystification: Exploring fast food websites

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This kind of spontaneous learning, Ms. Capaldo found, was more effective than a more top-down Watchdog approach in which she simply *told* students that Burger King intentionally makes it difficult to find nutritional information. As they searched on their own, students themselves became Watchdogs, experiencing a sense of frustration that they wanted to share with the class and, later, with younger students in school.

In other instances, teachers are motivated more broadly to "pull back the curtain" on the constructed nature of media messages and technology tools. We call people with this motivation **Demystifiers.** Demystifiers emphasize the process of moving from ignorance to awareness. The Demystifier is adept at creating "aha moments," when students get a heightened awareness of the complexities of how media is created.

Demystification can result in profound and unforgettable learning experiences. Working with kindergarten children, PVK kindergarten instructors Nicole and Raph helped students as young as five years old become aware of the construction of advertisements, cartoons, and other media. In one memorable lesson, Nicole took her group of kindergartners on a field trip to the PBS Sprout children's television studios in Philadelphia. There they learned about how puppets "talk." They watched adults handle puppets and record their own voices using a lavalier (wireless) microphone. As one child explained, "They [the puppeteers] make them talk. They have a microphone that runs up their leg to their shirt." For students who sometimes confuse cartoon and live-action reality, understanding the mechanics of media construction helps them to understand that stories on TV come from authors, just as stories in books do.

Younger children live in a magical world where differences between between "real" and "fake" are blurry. Developmental psychologists have studied children's beliefs in the reality of supernatural beings (like Bugs Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, and Santa Claus) and their tendency to label certain events as "magic."[52] Should teachers aim to clarify these distinctions with 5- and 6-year olds? Raph led group discussions with her kindergarten students in an effort designed to activate their reasoning skills. Children were asked to hold up a "red light" for things they thought were fake, and a "green light" for things they thought were real, explaining their responses. Raph showed them different characters from books, news media, TV shows and movies. Children liked playing the game and explaining their ideas but often weren't sure about the reality of the characters shown. For example, one student who wasn't sure if Robert Downey Jr.'s character in *Iron Man* was real or fake said, "Iron Man isn't really real, but they could make a suit like that with technology."

Raph's lesson plans, including this one, revealed her to be a classic Demystifier. But Raph admitted that she couldn't tell whether the concepts had really been learned. As they made self-portraits, puppets, and learned to hold a portable camera, students often seemed to become chaotic. Perhaps, she thought, all of this stuff was going over their heads. How much of the complicated reality of media, full of digital special effects and hidden seams, could young children really understand?

After the program was over, David and Renee happened to administer our Authors and Audiences card sort test (described in more detail in Chapter 9) to one of Raph's students, who we will call Sean, to train graduate students in data collection for the research we described in Chapter 8. During the program, Sean seemed to get the *least* out of Raph's lesson plans. He repeatedly seemed to zone out in class, occasionally throwing temper tantrums and causing trouble with other children.

But when David placed ten cards in front of Sean and asked him to sort them by identifying the author's purpose, he glanced at the cards and within seconds had quickly sorted them into two piles. He pointed to a pile he'd put together that consisted entirely of live-action programs from television. "Real," he said. Then he pointed to a pile of cartoons. "Fake."

David was about to spread the cards out for the second sort task when Sean happened to pick up one from the "fake" pile, a screen shot from the animated series *Family Guy*. "This one's a cartoon. I watch this one sometimes. They have actors that talk into the microphone that makes them talk. It's not real." He looked at the next card, a screen shot of a commercial for a *Sesame Street* toy. "They make that one talk, too," he said. "It's just a puppet." Sean, it seems, had become a Demystifer. We he did not learn to identify the purpose of media messages (to inform, to entertain, to persuade), he been able to transfer the learning he had observed in seeing how media professionals work to create unreal realities and used what he learned to comment on TV shows he watches at home. Now that Sean had an understanding of how animated and children's TV shows actually make fuzzy puppets talk, magical explanations were no longer needed.

BEGIN TEXT BOX
Admongo (www.admongo.gov) A free interactive online game for children ages 8 – 12. Washington DC: Federal Trade Commission (FTC) with Scholastic, Inc.

The centerpiece of the Admongo program is an elaborate online edutainment game, visually resembling the online multiplayer game, Poptropica. Children create an avatar and then begin their journey by finding advertisements hidden throughout the game. Along the way, they collect coins in a search for ads in the outside world and in the home. The program also offers three complementary lesson plans designed for use in school:

(1) **Ad Awareness**, where children find many different types of advertising in their home and community, including catalogs and ads on busses

(2) **Ad Targeting and Techniques**, where children learn strategies that are used to attract and hold attention

(3) **Ad Creation**, where children discover how specific strategies are matched to meet the interests of certain demographic groups. To conclude the learning experience, there is also a final reflection activity and quiz. Each lesson relies on some classroom discussion, but also provides simple worksheets, a sample of "fake" print, TV, and online ads, and a vocabulary list.

Civic Engagement and New Literacies: The Activist and Reader/Writer 2.0

There is an increasing amount of interest in both academic and educational communities in the concept of *participation.* When people participate, they take on roles in a community. Participatory culture is normative in online environments, where the line between creators and consumers (or between media-makers and their fans) is blurred. Today, people may watch a YouTube video and get inspired to create their own video, embedding their video response to the original.

Many children now grow up in participatory cultures online, often using YouTube as a "celestial jukebox" to connect to other fan communities or creating responses to their favorite media. Groups like the Digital Media and Learning community, funded by the Macarthur Foundation, is committed to finding ways to understand the affordances of learning in light of the realities of participatory culture.[53]

Closely tied to participatory culture is civic engagement and democratic participation. How can we make students' participation in media meaningful in and out of school in a way that contributes to a healthy democracy? Scholars note that by the time they reach high school, many students can become politically cynical because they do not believe that the world of politics is relevant to them. But digital and media literacy, as we will see in Chapter 6, can help students see themselves as citizens even at very young ages.

In a tradition that stretches back to the work of Paolo Freire, some educators see themselves as **Activists.** Activists are concerned with students seeing themselves as participants in democracy by addressing the real needs within a community. Though they may teach students media systems, like Watchdogs and Demystifiers do, their foremost goal is to get students participating in activities that make a difference in the world.

Activists are drawn to digital and media literacy because of the power embodied in media technologies as they amplify the voices of particular communities, including the authentic concerns of young people and the disenfranchised. When Aggie, one of our instructors, taught her students about the news media, she wanted them to use their voices to talk back to mainstream news reports about violence. Nuala, another instructor, wanted her fifth grade students to understand how the media shapes our understanding of the world through the representation of gender, race and ethnicity. To accomplish this, she used youth media texts, from films to music, to inspire her students to take action.

However, elementary schools can be a difficult context in which to connect students to civic causes. Some educators and school leaders are hesitant to engage children in the exploration of political and social issues, including homelessness, climate change, and issues like poverty or social injustice. Sometimes educators who explore these causes merely "go through the motions" do not ask deep enough questions of their subject matter. When David engaged his sixth grade students in studying green roofs and environmental issues in 2009, he imagined that traditional civics would be an appropriate lens through which to think about the issues. But students were more familiar with these social issues in relation to personal actions, like recycling and littering. They had not yet explored environmentalism in a broader social or political context, despite already learning the basics of government, democracy, and taxation.

Conversely, sometimes teachers' concerns can be too complex for elementary students. When students have no personal stake in civics issue, or lack sufficient background knowledge to make informed opinions, they may compensate by parroting teachers' opinions. Mr. Fitzgerald struggled to get his students to understand the soda tax, a hot-button issue in the Philadelphia community, before they made editorials about it. But Mr. Fitzgerald also had strong feelings about the issue himself, and his framing may have led some students to mimic his own views and argument style rather than figure out what they thought about the issue.

Another approach to participation comes from the educator who is motivated by new ideas about literacy in the 21st century. The **Reader/Writer 2.0** is the teacher with an understanding of ways of imagining "texts" as a broad category including visual, audio, visual, and interactive media. These teachers make connections between film adaptations and their literary sources; they have their students create digital storytelling projects that manipulate words, images, and sounds to create new meanings; they are as likely to use photographs, films, and websites in daily warm-ups as they are an on-the-board exercise.

BEGIN TEXT BOX

What is a Text?
The term "text" refers to any type of message or communicative act in which a sender expresses information, ideas, emotions, and life experiences to a receiver (i.e., a user, reader, listener, or viewer) using some type of symbol system. Language, images, sounds, gestures, and audiovisual forms are all types of symbol systems.
END TEXT BOX

Today, teachers at all levels of experience are pushing the boundaries of what counts as a text in the classroom. Gunther Kress and other scholars have observed that most of the symbolic material we encounter in everyday life skillfully blends different types of symbol systems together. Textbooks, newspapers and other print media have words, photographs, illustrations and graphics, working in combination to express ideas. To make sense of them demands an understanding of how to read different types of messages.[54]

The key factor that inspires teachers who affiliate with the Reader/Writer 2.0 motivation is an understanding that the classroom is itself a space for culture to be enacted and embodied. Though these teachers may not be motivated by specific social or political causes the way that Activists are, they likely see teaching itself as in need of a kind of transformation, one that expands both teachers' and students' conceptualization of what it means to be "literate" in a digital era.

Like other motivations, participatory motivations to bring digital and media literacy to the classroom have their strengths and its challenges to student learning. Our work on teacher motivations, thus far, is purely descriptive. We cannot yet claim to know if there are any "best" motivations, or which motivations produce which kind of learning. Over time, an understanding will emerge through the research process.

It is our belief that approaches to teaching must first and foremost connect to an individual teacher's strengths. Without recognizing that all teachers teach differently and are motivated by different possibilities in the classroom, we reduce digital and media literacy, and any other form of teaching, to an exercise in technique. What is most important is for teachers to reflect on their motivations, particularly in conversation with other teachers, to develop their understanding of the many ways students can build their knowledge, skills, and voice.

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CHAPTER 4
Connecting City and Community to the Classroom

In this chapter, we'll learn about:

The connections between digital media, mass media, popular culture, and learning goals. How can teachers use all of the resources and opportunities in children's culture—including their media culture—to enrich learning experiences?

Promoting intellectual curiosity. Children's talk in the classroom leads to surprises—but how can teachers structure conversations to spark students' intellectual curiosity and reading, viewing, and listening skills?

Getting community leaders and media professionals on board. How can teachers, community leaders, and professionals work together to help student experience the power of collaboration, communication, and civic engagement to make a difference in the world?

Imagining the city as a classroom. How can teachers use access, analysis, and creative activities to help answer children's complicated and difficult questions about the world around them?

Mona had been exploring poetry and rhyme with her Grade 3 students. As an aspiring singer-songwriter, Mona wanted her students to appreciate language and recognize how sound and rhythm work together. After reading poems and music lyrics, children had created their own written poems. Mona regularly played her guitar for children, helping them set their words to music to learn more about rhythm and rhyme. But it was an unexpected visit from someone from outside of the school – Caroline, a media professional -- who inspired Mona to use the power of poetry to take on a community-action project about littering.

Many teachers in the Powerful Voices for Kids program created some type of learning experience that supported children's civic engagement. As we explained in Chapter 3, many teachers know that a person's sense of responsibility for self, family, community, and nation and her or his capacity to act civically are strongly associated with early socialization. The practice of civic engagement in the elementary grades often takes the form of learning about social services offered within a community, participating in fundraising projects, and taking on simple social action initiatives that are sometimes tied to disaster news or other relevant news and current events. Through these activities, children develop skills and habits of mind, including tolerance for cultural difference, building community, and supporting collective action on common goals.

Not surprisingly, robust classroom dialogue turns out to be strongly associated with the quality of young people's civic engagement—as well as their overall success in school. However, among high school students, only about 50% of students report that teachers often encourage the class to discuss political and social issues in which people have different opinions, and fewer the half have written a letter to someone they do not know.[55]

In his book *Democracy and Education*, philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey argued that we must not take for granted the formation of the habits and virtues required for democracy.[56] These habits of mind are developed by participating in democratic communities—places where groups of individuals join together around community interests and where there is dialogue among those holding differing views.

The Powerful Voices for Kids instructors had been encouraged to reach out to community leaders and media professionals specializing in the Internet, advertising, journalism and film to come to the school to meet with children who were learning about the media. Some teachers reached out to friends and colleagues while others made cold calls to those who worked in city government, local non-profit organizations or media businesses.

One day, Caroline, a creative services professional from LevLane, an advertising agency in Philadelphia, came in to the school. David had encouraged her to talk to children in Mona's classroom about the city's new "Unlitter Us" campaign. In 2010, the City of Philadelphia's Recycling Office sponsored the largest-ever anti-litter campaign using spoken word poetry compositions and street poet performances. Along with TV

public service announcements, the campaign included street poetry events, Facebook and Twitter presence, and block-by-block community mobilization.[57] Caroline worked with children to brainstorm poetry about why a clean city is important to them. She and Mona led children in an activity where they explored the idea that litter diminishes a community's emotional well-being. Could children inspire others by sharing their emotional response to litter, and, in the process, activate behavior change and help create new social norms where littering is considered not acceptable?

When Caroline emailed the children after her class visit, she encouraged them to produce their own public service announcement video, which could then be used as part of the "Unlitter Us" campaign. Mona read aloud the email that Caroline had sent. As Mona remembers it, "The students practically had a mental breakdown when I read them Caroline's feedback. They were so excited! They got really pumped up about creating the ad."

Outlining the whole production process, Mona explained the sequence:

- Get a clear understanding of the persuasive goal
- Brainstorm and compose the words to the poem
- Edit the poem, keeping the audience and purpose in mind
- Select specific locations to match the message of each line
- Practice setting up the camera and check the sound
- Rehearse by reading aloud in front of a camera
- Edit to include only the best shots
- Send the completed video to the advertising agency

As she explained this process, Mona decided that she'd take personal responsibility for editing the video, to keep the total classroom time to only two days. She was familiar with iMovie software, she explained. But the children would need to be responsible for everything else.

First children needed to understand their persuasive goal. After watching some video examples from the "Unlitter Us" campaign, Mona asked the children, "What kinds of feelings do you get after watching these videos?" Responses included, "I feel sad," "I want to encourage other people to keep the city clean," and "This makes me want to change something." Mona explained that their poem would need to activate the same type of feelings. Were they ready?

Of course they were. Children worked collaboratively with a partner to compose rhyming lines of poetry. Figure 5. 1 shows the poem they wrote. Each student got to read a line, and the last line was spoken in chorus by the whole group. Mona explains what happened next, "We decided on shots, went out into the city, and they shot videos of each other. When we went back in class, we watched all the footage they took, and they actually critiqued each other!" It was a magical moment, as Mona remembers it. They offered meaningful peer feedback and coaching. The children were working as members of a team, so proud to be able to create something for that would be visible to their family

and community.

BEGIN TEXT BOX

Unlitter Us
Video Public Service Announcement
Written by Grade 3 Powerful Voices for Kids Students
www.powerfulvoicesforkids.com

We need a big help or our city will yelp
This is our home, it can't be all gone
If it doesn't matter, our memories will shatter
If we don't take a stand, there will be no land

Come on, let's pitch in, don't you want this land to win?

If we don't litter, our city will glitter
If we're not mean, our city will be clean
And it will seem to gleam like a perfect dream
Keep Philadelphia clean! Unlitter us!

END TEXT BOX

In the process of producing this particular video public service announcement, Mona's students were encouraged to think more deeply about both language and littering. This project was just right in scale, tone and scope for young learners. Some researchers have found that when teachers experiment with digital media projects in the elementary classroom, they may design and implement projects that can be quite complex and time-consuming, often as a result of their lack of experience with the medium. In a large-scale production, teachers may encounter technical difficulties that decrease their motivation to continue to experiment with new digital tools.[58] For these reasons, the "Unlitter Us" project was a good model for an elementary-level collaborative media project that accomplished key civic engagement goals by tapping into an existing community initiative, using careful structuring of the production process by the teacher, and taking advantage of support from community leaders and media professionals.

How Children Become Citizens

Only veteran elementary educators can fully appreciate the long-term impact of their influence on the children they serve. For years after Renee's mother, Rosemarie, retired from her job as a sixth grade teacher at a Michigan elementary school, she would receive occasional visits, phone calls and emails from her former students, now adults, who reached out to tell her the good news about their lives, their jobs and their families. Some of the adults were children she could barely remember after 30 years of teaching, while others were instantly recognizable. In every case, the former students offered the

same message: You changed my life for the better. Such visits were truly humbling, as she recalled. As a teacher, who can really know the scope of the impact that we make on the lives of others?

Recent research has confirmed that educational interventions in childhood that aim to address children's social and emotional competence can have profound effects as children grow into adulthood. In one study, researchers studied a group of young adults in Seattle, ages 24 – 27, a full fifteen years after they completed an education program designed to address conflict resolution and problem-solving by providing effective communication skills. Those who had participated in the special program when they were in Grades 1 – 6 reported better mental health, sexual health and higher educational and economic achievement than a control group of young adults from the same community who didn't receive the intervention.[59]

When most elementary educators consider how to introduce children to the nature of civic education, they use the model of the ever-widening world. Children begin by learning about families and neighborhoods, and then they move to understand cities, states, nation and the world. This approach has a number of advantages in that it mirrors the child's own developmental growth. But there is an alternative model, developed more than 70 years ago by Harold Rugg, a professor at Columbia Teachers College and a co-founder of the National Council for the Social Studies, which is even more compelling. It is closely related to the approach we used in developing the Powerful Voices for Kids program.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Rugg created educational materials for young children in the elementary grades that explored contemporary problems and their historical backgrounds.[60] At the time it was thought to be "radical" in that it encouraged children to consider the real-world problems of the world around them. It is sometimes called the "democratic-method-in-action" model with a focus on the fundamental practice of citizenship: gathering information, weighing the evidence and making decisions, and participating in collective community action. Today, this means that children learn about the real-world problems and issues that face our community at the local, national and international levels. For children in urban schools, concerns about poverty, violence and homelessness may be salient. For children in rural and suburban schools, drug abuse and unemployment may be topics of concern.

For all children growing up in a multicultural society, issues of immigration and cultural difference are important. Children deepen their cultural understanding of others through the use of mass media, photographs and digital learning experiences. Renee and her graduate students created a variety of learning experiences to promote cultural understanding of the peoples and cultures of the Middle East. With support from an in-school mentor, Grade 3 and 4 children:

- Identified inaccurate visual stereotypes of the Middle East that are embedded in children's films, advertising, news and entertainment media
- Asked critical questions about a message in order to analyze the author

and purpose of the message
- Gained knowledge about the many nations and cultures of the Middle East through the use of library resources and online databases.
- Viewed and discussed narrative films to understand contemporary life in the Middle East and increase a sense of emotional connectedness to families in Iraq
- Created simple videos to represent their own cultural heritage to others
- Participated in an online asynchronous chat with young people from Kuwait in order to form social relationships across difference.

In measuring the impact of these experiences on young learners, we found that both students and teachers decreased their reliance on cultural stereotypes and increased their knowledge and appreciation of the peoples and cultures of the Middle East.[61]

Other researchers have used photographs to promote acceptance of diversity in elementary classrooms by leading discussions with children using photographs of disabled, Muslim and poor children from around the world. In this study, students were able to form connections between lives and experiences. But several students felt threatened by the image of someone who was different. Some children lacked the frame of reference to understand the children in the photographs. When asked what he would say to a person who was culturally different from himself, a third grader answered that he would "tell them to get back where they came from. I don't want them here."[62]

No doubt about it: this work is challenging. Many classroom teachers are not used to classroom talk that activates children's exposure to mass media and popular culture. Children have complicated responses to topics including war, terrorism, and violence. Some classroom teachers are clearly not comfortable when their students use examples from contemporary film and television, especially if they lack knowledge about the specific references that children were making.

Teachers with firmly held beliefs about the "innocence" of childhood may feel the urge to protect children from certain media depictions. For example, in our work on exploring stereotypes of the Middle East as depicted in contemporary media, most Grade 3 children were eager to discuss the film *Iron Man*, a 2008 superhero film directed by Jon Favreau and starring Robert Downing Jr as an engineer who builds a powerful exoskeleton and becomes a technologically advanced superhero. Even though their teachers were well-aware that most children had seen the film its PG-13 rating meant that the even the trailer could not be screened in class, not even as a means to stimulate discussion of Middle East stereotypes. The school had a strict policy: no films above a PG rating were permitted.

Teachers who are unfamiliar with children's daily exposure to mass media culture may have low expectations about what kinds of film and media texts children may be able to use and understand. As we will see in the story we share in below, media texts enable children to access and explore important concepts they may not be able to access through written texts.[63]

The City as Classroom

Elementary children naturally view their school neighborhoods as a place of discovery. When digital media is used to explore and represent their neighborhood, the unpredictable events of daily life can inspire teachable moments that can have lasting value for learners.

With her Grade 3 students, Rachel was determined to find a way to get children out of the building as part of a multimedia learning experience. She had begun exploring a simple media production software called Comic Life, where users combine language, photos and drawings to create graphic panels. Working with a small team, students had gone to Logan Square (sometimes called Logan's Circle), a small park only steps away from their school. They took photos of the historic Swann Memorial Fountain, a fountain sculpture by Alexander Stirling Calder, which features large Native American figures to symbolize the area's major rivers: the Delaware, the Schuylkill and the Wissahickon. Numerous bronze animals, including frogs, turtles and swans spout water toward the large water geyser in the center.

During one visit to the park, students took their Flip cameras to capture some final photos of the fountain to complete their narratives. While there, Delia, age 9, approached Rachel and pointed across the square. There was a homeless man, sleeping on a park bench, and just behind him, a shopping cart from a local grocery store filled with his clothing and other belongings. An elderly woman was digging through the bags in a furious manner while the man slept. "What's going on, Miss Rachel?" Delia asked. "I think that lady is stealing from that homeless guy there."

Rachel looked over, and indeed, the incident did seem a bit unusual. As a somewhat new city dweller herself, Rachel realized at that moment that she actually tended to avoid looking at the actions of the more downtrodden residents on the streets of Philadelphia. But children have not learned to avoid such incidents. Delia's eyes were riveted to the scene, and she kept saying, "Look, Miss Rachel, she's stealing from him!"

What should Rachel do? In the flash of the moment, Rachel had little time to ponder her options. She was feeling the burden of teacherly authority to make sense of the situation for her students, many of whom were now also looking at the curious incident. She could tell the children to look away and ignore the ongoing scene--- but then, wouldn't she be encouraging her students to be callous bystanders? She didn't want her students to see the world as a place where we just turn our heads when we encounter other people's troubles.

Impulsively, Rachel went over to the homeless man's encampment in Logan Square and asked the lady who was digging through the shopping cart what she was doing. She said she was the wife of the homeless man and that she was trying to find her cigarettes. "He'll be OK in a couple of hours," she said about the man lying on the park bench.

Rachel returned to where the children had gathered and they walked back to the classroom. The children had so many questions: Why was he sleeping in the daytime? Was the lady really his wife? What was in the shopping cart? Could it have been dangerous for Rachel to approach them? Why are they so dirty? How do people get to be homeless? These were difficult questions indeed.

As she reflected on the situation, Rachel wondered if she had in fact done the right thing. With her students listening with rapt attention, Rachel acknowledged to her students that she couldn't answer any of their questions because she didn't understand the problem of homelessness herself. At the end of the day, she announced to the children, "Maybe we can learn more about homelessness tomorrow."

The class launched into an exploration of homelessness. Rachel found a variety of resources for children to examine. They learned that on any given day, there are about 4,000 homeless people in Philadelphia, and across America, about 15,000 people every day, including thousands of children.[64] What causes homelessness? When people lack jobs, housing, and health care, when they are victims of domestic violence, or have problems with alcoholism, substance abuse, or mental illness, homelessness may occur. Of course, these were difficult subjects to talk about but children seemed to recognize the seriousness of the subject matter and were eager to learn. Also, while they had a lot of questions, they also had a lot of information to share. One child talked her mom who told her that homeless people could sometimes be dangerous if they didn't have proper medications for their mental illness. Another student thought that even people with a good education could become homeless because he had seen the movie, *Pursuit of Happyness,* where Will Smith plays the part of an entrepreneur whose bad investments financially break the family part, leaving him and his young son homeless, sleeping in a subway station and a homeless shelter. In the movie, we see that he is able to get a job and find a house for his family.

For several days, children's questions about homelessness became the organizing frame for the classroom, as Rachel helped them learn more about homeless by using a variety of print, media and online sources. She didn't feel comfortable having students use the "open Internet" to explore this topic—and she thought it would slow down the momentum of this particular project-- but she did give students a variety of materials to choose from.

When she invited an advocate for the homeless to come to the school to be interviewed by the children, he brought along a children's picture book about a snail who loses his shell. Actually, the book was a little "young" for children who had, by this time, already delved quite deeply into the topic. The homeless advocate had not anticipated that children would have already learned so much about homelessness and was surprised at the quality and depth of the children's questions.

When children were ready to share what they had learned, Rachel assigned children to work with a partner, selecting partners so that children with different kinds of

ability were placed together. Each pair was responsible for composing a comic page about one of the topics children had developed through their inquiry. One group explored the issue of media stereotypes about homelessness in the movies. Another group looked at why people are homeless. Still another group examined ways children can help those who are homeless.

During the production process, Rachel used a process of encouraging warm and cool feedback to help children discover how their work was being understood by other readers. *Warm feedback* offers information about features of the creative work that are valued and appreciated by readers, listeners or viewers. *Cool feedback* offers ideas and interpretations about confusing or unclear elements of the creative work, enabling the creator to revise his or her own work. When warm and cool feedback are incorporated as a regular part of classroom instruction, it promotes awareness of the interpretation process and motivates the revision process.

Helping children understand and value revision is a fundamental early literacy competency. When the writing and revision process is understood as merely making written comments on texts, it is possible to overlook the context of the relationship between the author and the audience.[65] The particular quality of the caring relationship, as Nel Noddings has shown, influences how feedback is produced and interpreted. Promoting a climate of authenticity, respect and trust is essential to nurturing the reciprocally-dependent relationship between author and audience that supports the multimedia composition process.[66]

BEGIN TEXT BOX
A Teacher's Journal
Producing a Comic: "A Day in the Life of a Homeless Person"

Day 1. Wednesday. We talked about our many questions about homelessness and some of the children described their previous experiences with homeless people. We discussed how the comic form can tell fictional stories or tell true stories and I showed examples of different types of comics and graphic novels. We then brainstormed ideas to create a homeless comic that would teach people about homelessness. Children worked in groups and wrote down some things that they were interested in learning about the homeless. After reviewing the entire list, teams of children decided what topics they wanted to explore in their section of the comic.

Day 2. Thursday. Each group read or viewed a short book, article or video that I found for them. Each group took notes on the material and began writing ten sentences (with their partner) to capture the main ideas. We discussed the similarities and differences of the materials we were using to gather information.

Day 3. Friday. We finished writing our ten sentences and then did a whole group feedback, edit and revise session. We made sure that sentences did not repeat ideas or say trivial things (half of the groups had at least one sentence saying: the homeless don't have homes). Students then attempted to make story boards, but this went very badly due to

lack of preparation on my part. I didn't structure it well and it's not a good idea to start something like this at the end of the week.

Day 4. Monday. I found about 30 images online of homeless people and projected them for the class to see. We discussed them and children selected which ones they wanted to be in their comic. I asked, "why" questions to help them reflect on their preferences. All the children wanted to have their own drawings in the comic as well as photographs so today we began drawing the images. The rules for drawing images: no narration, no speech bubbles, because both will be added in when we put the whole thing together using the Comic Life software. They gained a sense of pride in learning to use the software tool to create their comic panels. The class was split into groups for this - so half the class drew while the other half worked with me on the board thinking up questions to ask the homeless shelter representative. We also worked on some simple story boarding, where the students were asked to draw out the panels they wanted on their two pages, and put narration boxes in the panels, and plan out what image they looked at or what drawing they were going to use in the panels.

Day 5. Tuesday. We met the representative from Project H.O.M.E. who read a story about a homeless snail and then children interviewed him with the questions they wrote yesterday. It went well. The representative had some good things to say, and the kids were able to expand on their questions a little by carefully listening. We then continued to edit our sentences so that they reflected some things he had told us (especially about what we can do if we see a homeless person who needs help). Then children completed the drawings from Monday and began working in Comic Life to put together the comic.

Day 6. Wednesday. Children work on producing their comic panels.

Day 7. Thursday. As a large group, we look at all the children's panels and do a feedback, edit and revise session. Children are working hard to make their panels compelling and attractive. We decide to add author information at the top of each page so the child are visually represented as the authors of their pages.

Day 8. Friday. We develop the cover page by thinking about our target audience and our purpose and then deciding on a title and a central image. Children practice reading aloud from the 14 pages of the comic, standing in front of the image projected on a screen, as they prepare to give a final presentation about what we learned.

Day 9. Monday. We discuss the concept of target audience and predict how parents, teachers and other adults will respond to the comic. Children offer each other warm feedback about what they valued about other members of the team. It was a very warm session. Each child receives a copy of the completed comic to share with family members and children place copies of the comic in the mailboxes of the school leaders and teaching staff.

Day 10. Tuesday. Children make a short presentation about their comic in an all-school assembly.

END TEXT BOX

Five features of this instruction made the learning experience powerful for children:

- An improvisational decision to use the teachable moment to structure a full-fledged unit of instruction
- The teacher's openness to address children's difficult questions
- A clear focus on the information-gathering process
- Well-structured use of collaborative teams in the process of writing, creative media production, feedback and revision
- Composing in a medium that combines language and images in sequential order with an easy-to-use software tool

The resulting pages came together in a comic entitled *The Life of a Homeless Person*, which uses a combination of photographs, original drawings, dialogue and writing. This collaboratively-produced student multimedia project -- a 14-page nonfiction comic book, created with a digital camera and a simple multimedia production software -- was shared with their families, civic leaders, and the school community.

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Place Figure 4.1 here

The Life of a Homeless Person

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The production of the homelessness comic helped children to recognize that informational messages can come in many forms: fiction and non-fiction books, TV documentaries, video stories, and even youth media productions. Children developed an understanding the role of research and information gathering. The cycle of feedback and revision was absolutely central to the success of the homelessness comic. Through using warm and cool feedback, children understood the role and skills of the editor. They felt more comfortable taking creative risks in front of their peers, supporting student confidence and self-esteem.

Most importantly, they had frank conversations in order to understand some complex social problems: poverty, mental illness and substance abuse. They contributed their ideas to a meaningful issue that many people choose to ignore. Children increased their feelings of empathy and reduced their fear of homeless people. The experience had emerged as the result of an accidental encounter, witnessed by students, between their teacher and a mentally-ill homeless person. In the process of activating children's curiosity, gathering and analyzing information and representing what they learned, children were empowered to see the city as a place where learning happens. They

exercised civic agency by individually and collectively engaging in society in order to address an issue of public concern: the causes and consequences of homelessness.

In this chapter, we've shown that media literacy classrooms are places where a great deal of child talk goes on. When learners do most of the talking, learning is dynamic and unpredictable. One of the reasons why media literacy pedagogy is so revolutionary in elementary education is that it creates rich, original moments of child-centered talk which makes it impossible to use the so-called "recitation script" where brief recall answers and minimal (and often superficial) feedback are the norm.[67] We think this form of dialogic pedagogy is especially important in counteracting these unproductive routines, helping teachers find the sweet spot of student motivation and engagement, as children discover the explosive rush of delight that occurs when they to think for themselves, using the city and community as inspiration for authentic learning that promotes civic engagement.

BEGIN TEXT BOX
Supporting Children's Learning about Homelessness through Multimedia

Children's Literature
*Monkey Island.*by Paula Fox. A realistic story about a middle-class family whose lives are torn apart by homelessness.

Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen. By DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan. Volunteers who serve people in need at the neighborhood soup kitchen make a difference to homeless people.

Photography
Shooting Back: A Photographic View of Life by Homeless Children. By Jim Hubbard. Children in Washington DC capture images of their life experience.

Non-Fiction Book
The Homeless. By Elaine Landau.
Short chapters define and expose the problem of homelessness, revealing the personal and emotion-charged stories of people who are homeless.

Feature Film
Pursuit of Happyness. Starring Will Smith and directed by Gabriele Muccino.
Will Smith was nominated for an Academy Award playing Chris Garnder, a saleman-stockbroker who finds himself struggling with homelessness in the company of his son, played by young Jaden Smith.

Documentary
Hard Times Generation: Homeless Kids. By 60 Minutes. Available at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dK_RnxYdrqU
A look at the children who live in motels after their families slide into poverty due to the economic recession.

Youth Media

Voices of the Homeless.
Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shiXCC9CaP4
A 10-minute film about homeless people in New York City revealed through personal stories, created by high school students enrolled in Downtown Community Television Center.

Sweet Lemonade. By Skylab Youth Development Center. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGyXRe7QmmI&feature=player_embedded#!
A 10-minute narrative created by children who compete to make the best lemonade, produced by children at Serna Village, a community center that supports recently homeless families.

Civic Videogames

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CHAPTER 4 ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER 5
Making Media

In this chapter, you'll learn about:

New ways to make media in the classroom. How do teachers create learning environments that enable children to make and distribute their own media messages by combining images, language, and sound in playful, multi-sensory, and meaningful media projects?

Finding your comfort levels and pushing your boundaries. There is no "magic bullet" technique that can replace exploration, practice and gaining familiarity with technology tools. But how can teachers, regardless of their media production expertise, use their interests, passions, and strong learning goals as a foundation for simple media production activitites?

Copyright confusion and copyright clarity. When and how can students combine, repurpose, and use media created by others creatively and legally? Why is the *reasoning* process not just good learning practice, but good legal practice, too?

Mr. Fitzgerald, a veteran Grade 6 teacher, was struggling with his PowerPoint presentation. He couldn't change the font size or figure out how to embed an image. As he worked to complete his own project, he noticed that his younger colleague was using transitions —with words whizzing and whirring by in a stunning visual sequence. How did he do it, Mr. Fitzgerald wondered. The process of adding transitions to a PowerPoint presentation was beyond his comprehension, let alone his technical ability.

Mr. Fitzgerald was focused on generating good ideas for his presentation. As part of a professional development workshop, teachers were invited to create a six-slide PowerPoint presentation about their own love-hate relationship with print, visual, sound or image-based media. As an avid news watcher and lover of classic TV news editorials by Walter Cronkite and Edward R. Murrow, Mr. Fitzgerald wanted to use his slideshow to discuss the varying points of view of CNN and FOX, two different 24-hour cable TV news stations. His younger colleague was exploring the action film genre. But for the colleague, the assignment was really just a springboard to create animated transitions and sound effects.

When teachers presented their slides to the group, the younger colleague's presentation certainly got a few laughs and some mild wonderment at both the choice of topic and the razzle-dazzle features. But Mr. Fitzgerald's presentation on the differences between CNN and FOX, which was functional, plain, and reliant on simple statements with well-chosen still images, sparked a real dialogue between participating teachers. Teachers had a lot to say in response to Mr. Fitzgerald's presentation. His work also made clear the "so what" of this activity. Media productions have the power to make us laugh, certainly. Of course, at hour two in a three-hour professional development setting, we could use the laugh! But more importantly, Mr. Fitzgerald had created his message for a purpose: to make us reconsider, reflect, and learn more about the changing nature of broadcast news.

Today, the distinction between author and audience is being erased as nearly everyone, young and old, is engaged in both sending and receiving messages. While once upon a time, it was only a small number of creative professionals who created media, today non-professional creativity is becoming one of the defining features of contemporary society, something the futurist Richard Florida has called *the creative class*, as more and more jobs and cultural practices involve knowledge production or knowledge sharing.[68]

Balancing Creativity and New Technologies

Every generation's creative work reflects a legacy that's quite specific to the time period and historical context in which it takes place. Only a few generations ago, writing composition was hardly evident in the curriculum at all. That why, when Mr. Fitzgerald was in school, he never imagined that he would write a book. But the ability to craft a five-paragraph essay gradually became a prized, school-sanctioned form of expression. In 2012, Mr. Fitzgerald's young students now highly value the practice of making videos

and composing music. In their young eyes, to accomplish this is to make something of cultural value.

New forms of expression continue to emerge because everyone in the society, not just a select elite, can participate in creating and sharing messages using digital tools and technologies. According to some scholars, the ease of both creating messages and accessing them has led messages to become more multi-sensory, multimedia, chaotic, unapologetically mimetic and playful.[69]

When people comment on a blog, videotape a conversation and post it to YouTube, or send Twitter messages about their favorite pop star, their participation in media culture reconfigures the relations between authors, industries and audiences and between message production and consumption. Today, the increased representation of ordinary people as authors (and, occasionally, temporary celebrities) has led to a whole generation of *do-it-yourself* (*DIY) media makers*. As digital media's ease of use makes it more democratic, making media becomes a part of everyday cultural life, and part of the way we express our identities and our lived experiences to ourselves and the people around us.

Take for example the concept of *digital storytelling*, a concept that first emerged in 2007 to describe the process of involving children and young people in the creation of narratives built with words, pictures and sound, built into a linear sequence. Digital storytelling is a workshop-based composition process by which ordinary people create their own short autobiographical or narrative films that can be streamed on the web or broadcast on television.[70] When young children make digital stories, these are generally around one to two minutes long, using written scripts which are recorded as voiceovers, combined with pictures or photos, usually drawn by hand or brought in from home. Using a video editing application such as Adobe Premiere or Apple's iMovie, it's possible for nearly anyone to produce a digital video that is of sufficient technical quality for web streaming, broadcast, or DVD distribution.

Jean Burgess, an Australian educator, explains that the simplicity of digital storytelling, with its formal constraints, "leads to the production of high-impact stories by people with little or no experience, with minimal direct intervention by the workshop facilitator. The personal narrative, told in the storyteller's unique voice, is central to the process of creating a story and is given priority in the arrangement of symbolic elements. Narrative accessibility, warmth, and presence are prioritized over formal experimentation or innovative 'new' uses for technologies."[71]

As K-12 educational technologists continue to display the latest tools and technologies, it can be energizing or overwhelming to classroom teachers. The thing most worrying to all educators is the *style-over-substance* problem. Jamie McKenzie warned about the emergence of poor instructional practices that may be enabled by the ease and simplicity of digital tools. In one classroom he observed, two fifth graders were presenting a PowerPoint report on tigers that employed "every known transition and special effect" the software offered. There was very little content however, "even less

information than we have come to expect from one of those time-honored encyclopedia-based reports." But the special effects were impressive. Unfortunately, it seems, the children were unable to find a picture of a tiger. So they substituted a picture of a lion. Even more remarkable, he noted, no one seemed to notice or care, not even the teacher. The bells-and-whistles of the moving images on the screen had interfered with everyone's attention to the informational content of the message.

For these reasons, teacher-librarians have been an absolutely indispensible resource in elementary education. A large number of research studies have shown clear evidence of the connection between student achievement and the presence of school libraries with qualified school library media specialists.[72] That's why it's one of the deepest sources of shame that the funding for elementary librarians has been deeply compromised in so many schools. Unfortunately, U.S. Department of Education data reveals that in the 2007–08 school year, 40% of elementary school libraries had no full-time or part-time professional staff and only about half of the 3,560 public charter schools had a school library.[73]

Whenever we have had the fortunate opportunity to work with school librarians, we realize how deeply intertwined their goals are with the needs of children, teachers and families. School library media programs ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information. Teacher-librarians help people get intellectual and physical access to materials in all formats. They stimulate intellectual curiosity and independent learning through reading, viewing, and using information and ideas. By guiding children toward self-discovery and self-direction, teacher-librarians help children develop skills and attitudes that are essential to academic and personal development.

The Never-Ending Learning Curve

It's not easy to keep up with the continual changes in media and technology tools. Most of us learn only the technology we really need to use, learning email, word processing, shopping or keeping track of friends on Facebook. Many people are not deeply invested in creating messages using digital media. For these reasons, when we work with teachers in professional development settings, we find that learning new technology and media production skills can be a formidable barrier for some. For all the changes wrought by the transition to a digital and online media environment, comfort with changing technologies and modes of communication remains the most noticeable—and the most varied—among most elementary school teachers.

Some teachers adamantly refuse to learn new forms of media-making like digital comic creation, video editing, or podcasting, throwing their hands up in defeat before they've gotten their feet wet. Others have technological skills that far outpace our own mastery of certain forms of communication and media production. Just as with the differences among students that we described in Chapter 2, we've found vast differences between teachers' skills as well. For example, while we're helping one teacher figure out how to save a file to its appropriate folder, another teacher is creating custom templates and transitions, skills that even confound us on occasion.

Learning to use new technology takes time. There is no automatic way to learn to use digital tools, no "magic bullet" technique that can replace a teacher's ability to explore, practice, and gain familiarity and comfort with technology. We have our tips and tricks (and you will find a few of them embedded in this chapter), but we also don't want to be disingenuous: media production with technology tools in the classroom depends heavily on the comfort level of the teacher using them.

However, teachers don't always need to be experts with digital media to create meaningful digital learning experiences. Some very simple production activities can have quite a powerful educational impact with very young children. One of our instructors, Kate, wanted to develop a video production activity with her first graders. But they weren't ready to use iMovie—most of her students had only minimal familiarity with a computer. So Kate focused instead on the pre-production process as her young students completed a final video, "How to Take Care of Your Pet." She helped children understand a particular *genre* (the public service announcement—"a persuasive message that helps people"), the *target audience* they wanted to reach (young pet-owners), and the *messages* they wanted to convey. Each child developed a particular piece of advice to young pet owners, illustrating the many tasks involved in taking care of a dog or cat. Children had some important discussion about whether they could bring their own pets to school to film certain scenes; they ultimately decided to use stuffed animals to represent their pets because they understood the problems that could result by using real animals in an in-class production!

When it came time to upload the footage, edit the video, and export the film to DVD and the web, Kate completed the project in the evenings and on weekends, behind the scenes, editing the video herself and showing her students only the end result. Because this project was simple, Kate was successful in accomplishing it without too much trouble. But when teachers aim for more ambitious and complex production activities, they can flounder, we've found. It happens most often when a preoccupation with the newest technologies interferes with creating clearly defined instructional goals.

Teachers succeed in media production when they acknowledge and "own" their existing comfort with technology, are willing to make themselves vulnerable to learning new skills—sometimes in real-time during instruction—that connect to their lessons, and who enroll their students in a learning process that blends the use of technology tools with enriching opportunities for learning. Kate's story illustrates a fundamental tension: people's lack of experience with media production may lead them to have higher expectations for what they are capable of achieving, resulting in new demands on teachers and program staff.

Multimedia Composition as 21st Century Writing

There are a set of general communication competencies that are activated when children create messages using media tools and technologies. It begins in early childhood, when we create learning environments where children can communicate a personal

reaction and point of view, speak to an individual and demonstrate listening skills, and use writing and images to inform, persuade and entertain.

But for each medium of expression, there are also a set of specific competencies that are needed to be an effective communicator. As Table 4.1 shows, to compose a photographic image, you need to select, crop and sequence images for a specific purpose and target audience. To make a video, you must use a video camera to record images and sound, and then select and sequence images, language and sound to accomplish a specific purpose and reach a particular target audience. To create a performance, you must use heart, voice and body to convey feelings and ideas, demonstrate creativity and imagination, participate as a team member or leader in a performance, and use time well throughout the process of idea development, planning, rehearsal and performance. Both general and medium-specific skills are acquired together through the act of creation.

Because teachers have a wide range of experiences, comfort levels, and access to technology in using media production in the classroom, we profile teachers who are exploring media composition practices at the simple, intermediate, and advanced production levels. At each level, there are opportunities and challenges to encouraging students to think deeply about the content, messages, feelings, and effects they want their written, filmed, recorded, and programmed work to convey. At the heart of all of these lessons is an overriding attention to learning goals—the "so what" of media production not just as a technical skill, but as a means to communicate thoughtfully and meaningfully in a variety of media forms.

BEGIN TEXT BOX
Composition Competencies

GENERAL COMPOSITION SKILLS

- Communicating a personal reaction and point of view
- Speaking to an individual and demonstrating listening skills
- Speaking to a large group and responding to feedback
- Using writing and images to inform, persuade and entertain
- Composing in a variety of formats, including email, review, reports, film scripts, music lyrics, webpage, nonfiction, fiction and other literary genres
- Composing for a variety of audiences, including peers, family, educators, special interest groups, government leaders, and members of the general public

MEDIUM-SPECIFIC SKILLS

Performance as Composition

- Using heart, voice and body to convey feelings and ideas
- Demonstrating creativity and imagination
- Participating as a team member or leader in a performance
- Using time well throughout the process of idea development, planning, rehearsal and performance

Image Composition
- Creating a photographic image
- Selecting, cropping and sequencing images for a specific purpose and target audience

Audio Composition
- Using technology to create an audio recording
- Being highly aware of sound, noise and tone while recording
- Selecting and assembling audio and musical excerpts

Video Composition
- Using a video camera to record images and sound
- Selecting and sequencing images, language and sound to accomplish a specific purpose and reach a particular target audience

Social Media Composition
- Thinking about audience and purpose while composing
- Respecting privacy
- Being socially responsible and sensitive to others

Digital Media Composition
- Using software tools to create messages in a variety of forms (wiki, blog, podcast, interactive multimedia, etc.)
- Learning how to learn programming software and understanding how it works
- Using a process of iterative problem-solving throughout the creative process
- Sharing information appropriately and respecting privacy
- Understanding copyright and applying the fair use reasoning process appropriately

END TEXT BOX

Basic Media Production: Screencasting

One of our instructors, Emily, was finding it difficult to deal with what she would later recognize as the "fourth grade slump"—a phenomenon in which fourth grade students decide whether or not school is "for them," and exert intellectual effort accordingly. Many of her students had unsuccessful experiences in Grade 3 and had been selected for academic remediation in the summer of 2010.

The fourth-grade slump has been attributed to a focus on textbook reading, where children get fewer opportunities to read materials of interest to them. When children can self-select what to read and write about, they increase fluency and vocabulary and become more confident in reading more challenging materials.[75] For these reasons, print

media like magazines and newspapers and online digital resources can be powerful learning tools for young readers and writers.

Emily struggled to get her students to read and write on a regular basis. But she also found that engaging them in popular culture, particularly talking about favorite music and celebrities, opened up opportunities for critical thinking. For example, children enjoyed the opportunity to read magazine articles and discuss the then-controversial trade of NBA player Lebron James to the Miami Heat. Students listened to popular music and talked about how it made them felt, what the lyrics meant, and how the production, beats, and rhythms moved them. But when it came to writing, the students were hesitant.

Emily was effective at opening up space for students to share, reflect, and think aloud—but these conversations often seemed to stop there, at conversation. Was there a simple way to engage students in conversations in a way that also enabled them to practice their writing and communication? She knew that merely recording the conversation wouldn't be sufficient. Having experimented with the writing process, she could see that for many children, writing on its own did not capture the full depth and complexity of their ideas. Emily wanted children to feel powerful, proud and confident in expressing themselves using language.

Emily decided to use *screencasting*, a process through which anything on a computer screen can be recorded, with or without a simultaneous voiceover. Examples of screencasting software include Jing (http://techsmith.com/jing), a free tool created by Tech Smith, which also makes the screencasting tool Camtasia.

The effect of a screencast is that of director's commentary of a film or television show. You can hear the creator's commentary while you see whatever is on their computer screen. Since her students were interested in exploring classic hip-hop music videos, like Queen Latifah and Public Enemy, Emily asked children to analyze these, first spontaneously through conversation, then in an extemporaneous form, where their short speeches, timed to accompany the visual images of the music video, were planned and organized in advance. Students had detailed written notes, but their responses were not written out word for word.

This activity took less than an hour, and by the end of it, the simple media production had yielded some interesting analysis and added value to the conversations students were having in class. For example, one group of boys noticed the socially empowering message in Queen Latifah's 1991 music video for her song "U.N.I.T.Y.":

> Andrew: I got from this song that women should stand up for themselves and don't let men abuse them.
>
> Byron: I did not like how men were hurting the women. If you put your hands on a woman, you are a punk.
>
> Charles: I like how Queen Latifah was boosting up girls' self-esteem.

It didn't take long to create these screencasts. First came the brainstorming to find the best ideas. Then an informal script, or set of talking points, was written. There was a rehearsal process, and then the screencasts were performed and recorded in a matter of minutes. Students were able to translate their spontaneous analysis of popular culture to a clear product that also required a bit of formal writing. Because they were not intimidated by an essay format, students could translate small but powerful ideas between written and spoken forms.

When screencasts are demonstrated to teachers, it's usually depicted as a "top-down" technology, a way for the teacher or expert to convey or deliver a message to learners. Many of the videos in the Khan Academy (www.khanacademy.org) are like this, simple screencast tutorials by good teachers who explain concepts like addition or multiplication in an engaging way. Recently, screencasting has inspired educators at the high school and college levels to explore the "flipped classroom," where students view instructor-created screencast lectures or slide shows at home, as homework outside of class, so that classroom time can be used for answering questions, working with small groups, and guiding the learning of each student individually.

But we like screencasts for a different reason: they offer opportunities for students themselves to simultaneously strengthen their communication and critical analysis skills through media production.[76] Screencasting requires students to observe and listen carefully to the media they hear, see, and interact with, and comment on it in both spontaneous and planned ways. It captures structured dialogue between students, but can also be used as a formal mechanism to introduce even young children to identifying a variety of different components of video messages.

Creating Pro and Con Screencasts to Explore the Politics of Nutrition

Mr. Fitzgerald, the teacher who struggled with Powerpoint, wanted to increase his own comfort with technology tools by using screencasting in his classroom. Mr. Fitzgerald had previously taught students in middle and high school settings who dealt with drugs, violence, and other harrowing community issues on a daily basis. He was keenly aware of the sensitive politics of teaching diverse urban students about complex topics. In recent years as an elementary school teacher, he had turned his attention to childhood nutrition. He closely followed reports about initiatives by Michelle Obama to publicly address childhood obesity at the national level. He had begun teaching his students about the intersections between nutrition and public policy, discussing high-profile local issues like the implementation of a soda tax to benefit Philadelphia public schools.

To his surprise, Mr. Fitzgerald's students returned to school the day after a discussion on the soda tax with an idea of their own. While watching the local news, students had learned of a group called Corporate Accountability International that was putting pressure on the McDonalds corporation to stop using their colorful clown mascot, Ronald McDonald to sell unhealthy food to children.[77] Children had strong reactions to

this news story. Some students thought that “little kids” (their younger brothers and sisters) were attracted to Ronald McDonald and Happy Meal toys without realizing that McDonalds might not be a healthy choice. Others believed that it was up to parents to feed their children with healthy options, and that getting rid of Ronald McDonald and Happy Meals would be devastating for kids who loved those aspects of McDonalds.

Mr. Fitzgerald used two strategies to capitalize on students' engagement. First he split the group into a “pro” group and a “con” group. One group would do some online research to develop an argument about why McDonalds should consider retiring its mascot and Happy Meals. The other group would develop an argument about why McDonalds should be able to keep those components of their marketing to children. Students who were unsure of which position they agreed with, or who wanted more structure in the assignment (e.g., “I agree with it, but I'm not sure why”) were given a specific position to research—a city council member, a concerned parent, or a McDonalds company spokesperson.

This project required students to make use of online research and the screencasting tool with which Mr. Fitzgerald was relatively inexperienced. But his fears about the project started to recede as children began their search for simple news reports, newspaper articles, and websites that supported their position. Mr. Fitzgerald realized that what they were doing was a digitally-enhanced version of a timeless debate activity, where students use role-playing and personal opinion to guide the research process. When viewed that way, the technical requirements seemed less daunting.

Where it differed from a standard debate, and in ways that Mr. Fitzgerald did not foresee, was when it came time to for students to translate their research, which they had written in the five-paragraph essay form, to meet the demands of a screencasting production activity. Because children had selected media texts like newscasts and commercials that illustrated their ideas in short segments, many found that their five-paragraph essay structure did not transfer perfectly to a 30-second oral presentation. As they read their scripts, many students were frustrated that what they were trying to say didn't seem to fit. Students decided, independently of formal instruction, to revise their essays, cutting words, sentences, even paragraphs that didn't concisely get across the points that were most important.

When students heard their own voices recorded on the first take of the screencasts they had created, they had still other ideas about word choice, argument structure, and delivery that might strengthen their presentation. Though a few students decided ultimately to read their original five-paragraph essays in their original form as their screencast exercise, others revised their pieces radically, creating something more like a brief position paper or editorial. Mr. Fitzgerald, who grew up with news editorials that were [marked] as such and separated into their own section of news broadcasts, was pleased to see that his students' work had begun to transform into a classic television format that, he felt, had been lost in the evolution of 24-hour cable news cycle.

Because his students felt safe exploring, testing, and revising, Mr. Fitzgerald himself felt more comfortable approaching his curriculum the same way. And he also knew that, though he wasn't technically a technology expert, his own brand of expertise in helping students engage with a meaningful contemporary public debate had far more impact on the children's learning experience than the specific technology skills required for production itself.

Many educators in higher education, including Cathy Davidson of Duke University, have explored using blogs, video, and other simple technology tools to develop students' writing. Davidson notes that the quality of writing her students sometimes produce in blogs exceeds the quality of their formal research papers, in part because of their more natural engagement translates to students writing more than they may think they are writing.[78] The potential of simple media production may be even more pronounced as students are just beginning to develop their confidence in their print writing skills. Screencasting allows students to match the passion of their extemporaneous arguments to an informal writing style, and actively encourages students not only to write, but to revise and re-write to improve their work.

Intermediate Media Production: Playing with Remix and Parody

As children get nearer to puberty, they face new pressures to depict themselves in ways that are aligned with the norms presented in the culture. Many boys get more interested in demonstrating their competence in sports and girls seek to be thin and wear trendy outfits. Children recognize that getting attention through music, performance and athletic performance is highly valued in American culture. At the end of the school year in 2011, many children and teens were talking about an unknown teenager from Orange County California who unexpectedly became one of the most popular new celebrities in the pop music scene despite having no performing experience, record label, or any connections to the world of professional music production. It was a kind of a "fantasy-turns-reality" that Andy Warhol once predicted when he noted that, in the future, everyone would have 15 minutes of fame.

When Rebecca Black turned 13, her mother paid a company called Ark Music Factory—a cross between an amateur music production team and a pop singer fantasy camp for young women—to write, produce, and create a music video for her daughter to have what we might call an immersive digital and media literacy experience.

It's likely that Rebecca Black's mother had some key media literacy questions for her daughter in mind: What is it really like to produce your own pop song? How hard is it? Can just anyone really be famous? The result of the collaboration between Rebecca Black and Ark Music Factory was "Friday," a song that became an overnight internet sensation, getting as many hits on YouTube as some of the most popular music artists in the world. In the weeks after it was released, Rebecca Black became a genuine celebrity, appearing on talk shows, news broadcasts, and in cameo roles in professional music videos for the hottest contemporary pop stars.

But not everyone liked the young girl's foray into stardom. Within only a few days after the song's release on YouTube in March, 2011, it became the most-talked-about topic on Twitter, receiving more than 3 million "dislikes" as compared with 450,000 "likes." Rebecca Black's so-called "haters" took delight in being critical, making remarks like, "Worst singer ever" and "I hope you cut yourself and I hope you get an eating disorder so you look pretty." Some even sent her death threats![79]

Mr. Marino's students, a group of sixth graders, had divided and intense opinions about the song. Many found its chorus to be catchy and memorable, a legitimate addition to their own personal canon of favorites. Others found it irritating—they disliked the vocals, the production, and the lyrics. They protested to their teacher, "*We* could make a better song than that."

It was the end of the school year, a time when it's hard to start any new "serious" work as the rising 6th graders were in their last days at the elementary school. Mr. Marino saw in his students' engagement with the Rebecca Black debate an opportunity for an activity that, he thought, they could feasibly complete in a week or two, using little of the time set aside for formal instruction. Students could identify what aspects of the song they might change to create their own message and then remix the song, using the original music to sing their new lyrics over the old beat.

As something of a tech expert, Mr. Marino was eager to figure out how to produce this type of project. He immediately imagined the technical components of the project: purchase a karaoke version of the song, which had already been created in response to the song's popularity and was available on websites like iTunes; use a microphone connected to a classroom computer to record students singing at the tempo of the original song; edit the vocal and music together in a simple audio editing program like Audacity or Windows Media Maker. Voila!

What Mr. Marino could not foresee was the ways in which this seemingly simple technical exercise would take on new, meaningful dimensions for students as they navigated the production process, even in brief sessions that did not conflict with classroom instruction. The entire process took them through the entire production cycle—the pre-production phases of *brainstorming*, *planning*, and *writing*; the production phases of *recording* and *re-recording;* and the post-production phases of *editing and revision*.

In their first brainstorming session, students quickly thought of the subject matter they wanted to address in their remix: they would change the title of the song from "Friday" to "Wednesday," referring to their last day of classes as elementary schoolers, which was quickly approaching in a little over two weeks. Lyrics came quickly as students repeated verbatim from memory the song's original lyrics and then modified them to be specific to their own school culture. They had informal but engaged conversations about rhyme schemes, syllables, using an economy of language to get across their ideas in the song.

Next, students discussed the production of the song—what is usually referred to as the beat or the music. Here opinion was divided: lots of students enjoyed the original beat of the song, but others found it amateurish and corny. Mr. Marino and his students decided to devote their final few music classes to work with their music teacher to re-create the music for their own purposes. The music teacher used a combination of electric and live piano and a computer-generated beat to create a simulacrum of the original song. Throughout the process, students offered specific suggestions about how to improve the beat: the drums and cymbals shouldn't be so loud; a real piano should be used instead of a keyboard; could it be a little faster?

Finally it was time for students to record their own voices over the recorded beat provided by the music teacher with the lyrics they had written in class. They learned about singing directly into a microphone, and saw what the sound waves of their voices looked like in the free audio editing program Audacity. They played with effects, observing how their voices sounded with more reverb ("it's like an echo!"). They listened to the song in their headphones and, confident that their song would sound exactly as they imagined, they began to sing. But when the music and words came together, students were frustrated. A chorus of voices echoed:

"Why do our voices sound like that?"

"That's not on the beat!"

"You can't even hear our part!"

"Please, can we do this again?"

Their attentiveness to its quality surprised Mr. Marino — these were students who rarely excelled in peer critique of written work and often had little warm and cool feedback for each other's work. But for this performance, nearly every student had an opinion—noticing a missing detail here, a mistake there. Students *insisted* on revising their performance.

Teacher-librarian Sue Dahlstrom refers to this phenomenon as the *best work test.* She finds that, unlike many formal writing exercises, children between the ages of 7 and 12 are keenly aware of professional standards in media production. This awareness provides an opportunity for educators to ask their students, "Is this your best work?" When asked in this fashion, children almost always opt for revision, sometimes revising entire projects from conception to completion.

Writing composition teachers are enthusiastic about the promise of digital media because they've discovered that learners value the revision process when they're working with familiar genres. When students are engaged in media production activities, they often show a willingness to think critically about their work in a way that can be difficult in forms of media with which they are unfamiliar. When students write book reports, letters, informational brochures, and other forms of print media that are embedded in to

the elementary curriculum, they often have little basis to judge the quality of their own work. But children are highly familiar with the codes and conventions of popular music, television, films, websites, and videogames. They can use this knowledge to make real-world comparisons to their own work. Mr. Marino's students were easily able to respond to an existing work and create a parody by activating home and cultural knowledge.

But educators must interrogate the value of parody in terms of its educational value. David Buckingham warns that sometimes children's parodies can serve as an "easy out" to a more nuanced understanding of issues, particularly issues surrounding popular culture.[80] In all media production exercises there is a balance between fun and learning. As we see it, Mr. Marino's project was a classic end-of-year light activity, good for strengthening student engagement, but not as useful for critical thinking. Simple engagement with "cool tools" and fun media production projects is often an attractive option for teachers who use media production in the classroom. How can teachers balance learning goals with the inevitable exploration, troubleshooting, and fun that go into most media productions?

Balancing Play and Learning in the Multimedia Composition Process

What is the best approach to create an inquiry-based learning activity with digital media? Inquiry learning is a process where students are actively involved in their own learning. Students formulate questions, investigate widely and then build new understandings, meanings and knowledge. This new knowledge may be used to answer a question, to develop a solution, or to support a position or point of view. The knowledge is usually presented to others and may result in some sort of action. The work of one of our summer instructors provides an illustrative example of how to achieve the balance between play and learning that is critical to the success of inquiry learning.

One of our instructors, Osei, was a professional rapper. He had long worked with disenfranchised teens in creative media production activities, generally in informal learning environments. But he had never worked with elementary school students prior to the Powerful Voices for Kids program. He went through the same process as Mr. Marino — students talked about some of their favorite songs and then identified a theme or message that interested them. In Osei's class, the students had decided that their overarching theme was "Stop the violence in the Philadelphia community," based on discussions the students had about the differences between how the world is represented in popular music and how they experience it in their lives.

After deciding on a theme, students recorded a new vocal track over the instrumental for a popular song, "Hold Yuh" by reggae artist Gyptian. To do this, they need to compose lyrics, which included both singing and rapping. This is where the most substantive learning took place. Students had to think carefully about both the formal and content elements of their piece. What did they want to say, and how did they want to say it? How would they rhyme their words—would they use multiple rhymes per line, like many of their favorite rappers, or keep it simpler? And what kind of stories did they want to tell in their own song?

Of course, to record the song, the teacher needed some familiarity and comfort with editing sound with music software tools. As a musician himself, the teacher was intimately familiar with other hidden hurdles in music production. Issues like like microphone quality and placement, sound effects, and equalizing volume levels can be challenging for novice teachers to address. Fortunately, children who possessed natural singing talents enjoyed sharing their vocal gifts with the class, while students who had never rhymed or rapped before found newfound talents and new ways to express themselves. The lyrics that students worked on over the course of the week were evocative, poetic, and powerful:

> Why be a victim, a criminal, a drug dealer?
> You could be a hero instead of a stealer
> You rob and you shoot people, you think you bad
> That ain't nothin' compared to the life we've had
> Where I'm from, people shoot first, ask questions later
> Block block, chop chop, like a zombie slayer
> If you get in his way, you're gonna catch the worst of it
> And please, promise me you'll never forget.

When other teachers listened to the song, they were struck by the poignancy of the message: these children were singing about the various representations and realities of life in tough urban neighborhoods, warning others about the dangers of the gangster lifestyle. Children had decided to select a specific instrumental track of music and develop a new message through the writing and revision process. This process led to quite an exceptional song: in both its form and content, it's difficult to imagine that a group of 11-year olds created it.

What we noticed after the program, though, was that this media production experience encouraged students to continue writing lyrics and poetry in their *spare time* as well. Evidence from one student's journal shows her and a friend trading turns writing new rap lyrics for songs that did not yet exist. Their writing was playful but well-constructed. It could have been mistaken for an "off-task" excursion in frivolous note-passing unless you take note of some of the same formal principles Osei taught to his students in action, as they numbered each rhyme and compared the construction of their song to lyrics by the OMG Girlz, a girl group that includes the daughter of rap star Lil' Wayne.

> 1. Ciara and Jamelia they call us CJ Productions
> 2. We fly and we ballin I'll tell you about my passions
> 3. Yeah we the best I'll tell you about my fashions
> 4. 1st of all we in charge salute to your captains
> 5. We walk up in the spot we be amazin you
> 6. We number one but you can be number two

Students' uses of media can be intuitive, and more research is needed to better understand how the process of transforming favorite media into their own creative work can support the underlying competencies of digital and media literacy education. We have only anecdotal evidence that lessons learned in this activity translated to other creative writing work from students in their spare time. At its core, however, Osei's songwriting project was not a technology activity. It began with a need to "stop the violence." In expressing this need through song, children gained a sense of themselves as advocates for change. You can listen to the song on the Powerful Voices for Kids website at www.powerfulvoicesforkids.com.

Advanced Media Production: Making Videos and Videogames

Some teachers must use their own advanced knowledge and skills as media producers themselves in order to develop a particularly challenging media production. John Landis was one Powerful Voices for Kids instructor with a wealth of expertise in media production—so much, in fact, that he later was hired as the Technology Coordinator for the Russell Byers Charter School. Mr. Landis knew that videogames and computer programming were increasingly important skills for students to be aware of and develop. He was familiar with the academic field of videogame studies, where scholars like James Gee made the case for videogames as an integral component of new literacy practices[81] and Douglas Rushkoff went so far as to claim that students, by about age ten, should learn to program their computers or "be programmed" by them.[82]

Mr. Landis knew that actual programming, like learning how to type or write in cursive, requires technical skills that can take months if not years to develop. He wanted his students to understand not the technical language of computer programming, but rather the features of videogaming that create meaning in his students' lives. He identified the opportunity for players to *make choices* as essential to that understanding.

In the summer of 2010, Philadelphia schoolchildren were being told by guidance counselors, administrators, teachers, and parents that they needed to make "better choices"—especially when it came to forming *flash mobs*, impromptu gathering of teens in public spaces. Media outlets portrayed the 2010 flash mobs that were spontaneously occurring in Philadelphia as violent mobs. They focused on vandalism, property damage, and in some cases, arrests of young men and women who participated.

Mr. Landis's students had another perspective. They were too young to participate in the flash mob events, but old enough to know people, including family members and neighbors, who might be involved. They knew that some people made poor choices, but that flash mobs were a complicated phenomenon. Some kids went because their friends pressured them to. Some might get in trouble with their parents if they did go, but would be in *worse* trouble with their peers if they didn't. What kind of media would help them express these complicated points of view on the subject?

Mr. Landis used his knowledge of computer programming to teach the students Scratch, an open-source videogame software developed by the MIT Learning Lab.

Scratch used a kid-friendly jigsaw design to help students understand the *process*, but not the actual code, through which they might create a videogame. For instance, a student might imagine a scenario in which a character has to choose whether or not to go to a flash mob. *If* you click "go," you end up at the flash mob. *If* you click "don't go," you end up in your bedroom.

The hardest part of this process, Mr. Landis discovered, was not the programming itself. During summer instruction, he had ample time to let his students explore the software, and what's more some of his more avid gamers in class used spare time to intuitively figure out more about the software. What was more difficult for *all* students, though, was the level of pre-production required in developing the videogame. Students created flow charts and other organizational tools to help them visualize the world of their game on paper before they began to work with the software. Mr. Landis had to unexpectedly re-do a lesson on flowcharts when, after their first lesson, some students were still struggling to develop the choices available in their game.

He knew what his media production activities were *for*—he wanted his students to think not about programming in and of itself, but about ways of making media that told stories not only in its content, but in its very structure. When students created their flash mob videogames, they were deepening their understanding of how choices work in interactive media and reflecting on a pertinent social issue.

Professional media-making abilities can be both an asset and a liability in the classroom. Renee has written about common issues in youth media productions at the middle and high school level, including superficial use of mass media tropes, unfinished projects, more time spent on "the look" than content, and other common pitfalls of media production programs.[83] In some ways, these concerns can be even more acute for elementary educators, who have to deal also with students' developmental strengths and weaknesses in maintaining interest and passion for long-term projects, whether they are history reports, science experiments, or media productions.

Copyright and Fair Use in Elementary School

One teacher we spoke to at one of our partner schools was mortified to watch some of the media production work students had created in work quite similar to the vignettes provided in this chapter. In creating their own work, students frequently make use of other people's copyrighted materials, from images they found online to popular music to screen captures of online content. This, in the teacher's view, was grossly irresponsible — what would happen if someone *found out about it*?

It's so easy for students and teachers to copy, alter, and transform existing media, whether they are posting a favorite song to a YouTube page or copying text from an informational website in their own academic reports. Teachers are also frequently confused by the distinction between *plagiarism*, involving the ethical expectation not to pass off another's work as your own, and *copyright infringement*, involving the legal rights that owners of copyrighted materials have to control their work and the legal rights

that users of copyrighted materials have to use that work in new and transformative contexts.

The issue of using copyrighted works is one that is increasingly a normative part of children's experiences. Some children claim that they simply get their music "from the Internet," often unaware of where it was posted—or, sometimes, who made it. Dave has witnessed young children using video streaming sites like YouTube and Vimeo just as older generations used a radio, surfing channels to find songs they recognize while being surprised by songs they haven't yet heard.

Copyrighted material, at the most basic level, is created when people compose messages *in fixed and tangible form.* This book is copyrighted, but so are your lesson plans and the creative works of your students the moment they are written or recorded. Most everyone in our culture today is confused about copyright law, holding on to a number of misunderstandings about it. Renee has found that generally, teachers fall into three camps when it comes to using copyrighted materials in the classroom. Some teachers "see no evil," refusing to learn more about copyright law as it applies to education. Some teachers "close the door," using copyrighted materials like newspapers, magazines, videos, and websites in ways that they find educationally appropriate but not sharing or distributing this work.[84] Teachers might have their students make collages from magazines but keep the artwork posted inside the classroom walls. They might analyze a Disney film for the way it represents ethnic characters without thinking of sharing this practice with others online. Or they might have students write new lyrics to a popular song without distributing the resulting remix.

Other teachers are "hyper-compliant," abiding by some limited understanding of copyright law based on the so-called "educational use guidelines" established in the 1970s, 80s or 90s. These guidelines, including the "30 second rule" and others were developed as negotiated agreements between lawyers representing education groups and media organizations. These negotiated agreements are not the same as copyright law. If you have employed a 10-second rule for music and video clips, a spontaneous use rule that allows you to use today's newspaper but not yesterday's, or a 30-day rule that says you must destroy recorded media used in the classroom after thirty days, you may be hyper-compliant, conforming to standards that are *not* the law.[85]

These three approaches are limiting for teachers who naturally may want to engage with students' media worlds in classroom contexts. But even more importantly, these approaches are limiting to *students*' work.[86] When students know that what they are making is "just for the classroom," they may have trouble imagining a target audience that they know they can never really reach. When students know that using copyrighted materials like their favorite songs or movies is forbidden, they may not be engaged to re-imagine new messages in some of their favorite media.

David and his co-teacher Angela empowered their sixth grade students to understand principles of *fair use*, the rights that users of copyrighted materials have to use copyrighted material in a wide variety of transformative contexts, as embodied in the

Copyright Act of 1976. Children's understanding of their rights under existing copyright law helped them make important connections between their home uses of media and our in-school learning that they wouldn't have made through discussion alone.

In 2009, the biggest movie around was *Transformers 2*. But in David's class, the biggest issue around was *green energy*, the potential to use clean energy sources instead of ones that relied on fossil fuels that harm the environment. To connect these two passions, one a school-sanctioned activity and the other a personal pleasure, students created a remix of the teaser-trailer for *Transformers 2*. Teaser trailers are currently a Hollywood industry standard in which action movies are cut down to one and a half minutes free of dialogue. This allowed students to create a simple voiceover that imagined the heroes and villains of the film (the Autobots and the Decepticons, respectively) as "green energy" and "dark energy" forces.

The resulting lesson required children to articulate their understanding of why it was OK to use, re-cut, and re-purpose the original copyrighted trailer — including publishing it online for our friends, family, and the wider community to see. Children learned that by changing the message and purpose of the original, they were *transforming* it, just as the Transformers change from vehicles into humanoid robots. Further, this particular use of copyrighted material was *socially beneficial*, because the purpose was designed to educate viewers about green and non-green energy. They used exactly the *amount* of copyrighted material they needed. And the resulting work did not function as a simple copy-and-paste of the original trailer—indeed, no one could mistake the new trailer for the original.

Afterward, when students reflected on the experience, students felt armed and ready to defend their use of copyrighted material to create their own highly engaging original work. David and his co-teacher Angela acted as interviewers and had the following conversation with students:

> Angela: What if [*Transformers 2* director] Michael Bay called up Jonathan on the phone, and said 'Jonathan, you used my movie.' What would Jonathan reply?
>
> Jonathan: No, we used the trailer. We didn't use it exactly what the movie was intended for. We used it as fair use, because we changed the subject.
>
> Angela: But I'm gonna take you to court, Arielle!
>
> Arielle: You can't do that, because we did it in a classroom, which is one reason it's fair use already, for education. Second, we changed the subject to about being green and alternative energy. So you can't do that!

This wasn't just a creative or academic activity, though it connected to David and Angela's curricular focus on alternative energy. They also knew that they wanted to foster skills that were applicable not just to students classroom lives, but to their lives as

creators in a variety of media forms, including artwork, writing, and digital design that uses the vast resources of copyrighted media that make up our media worlds.

Focusing on the intellectual reasoning process behind fair use also helped David and Angela to re-frame children's understanding of copying and pasting in their writing. By asking students to defend their choices of texts under what they understood to be a "legal" definition with real-world consequences, it also made their academic and creative choices more meaningful and more thoughtfully chosen. They had to ask questions like:

- Why am I using *this* source instead of a different one?
- Did I use exactly as much as I needed to get my point across?
- Am I transforming the original text, or am I just copying it for the same purpose as it was created?

None of these questions should seem controversial to classroom teachers who expect children to think critically about how and why they write about any number of classroom subjects. And yet applying the same questions to media and technology like online images and video clips may have an air of unnecessary controversy around it. Fair use gives teachers and students power to apply these questions to all forms of media, including ones that seem off-limits but, it turns out, can be lawfully used and as valuable for teachers and students as any other text.

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CHAPTER 6
Asking Questions about Popular Culture in the Classroom

In this chapter you'll learn about:

The role of improvisation in teaching digital and media literacy. How can teachers feel more comfortable responding skillfully to the here-and-now dynamics of intense social interaction among students and teacher?

Dealing with the unpredictability of media. What kinds of practices can prepare teachers for the often uncomfortable and unpredictable aspects of bringing media into the classroom?

Taking risks. When teachers connect to students' popular culture, they help create bridges between students' in-school learning and out-of-school lives. How can teachers engage, rather than ignore or deflect, the reactions and learning opportunities that arise when popular culture enters the classroom?

Dee was proud of how she supported the speaking and listening skills of her Grade 3 students. She had experienced the power of talk and dialogue to stimulate and extend children's thinking.[87] She offered praise to children who responded to questions in full sentences and to those who offered novel or unexpected ideas. She had recognized that the experiences children have at home and out of school are highly significant to their development. As an African-American teacher working with children of the same ethnic background, Dee appreciated the complex lives and cultural experiences of her students – these children were diverse individuals living in families from many different neighborhoods in Philadelphia, and they were certainly not reducible to simple socioeconomic or demographic categorizations.

When Dee asked her students questions in order to promote speaking and listening, she distinguished between more routine forms of question-and-answer sessions or the listen-and-tell storytelling that is common in elementary classrooms. She knew that language development is fundamental to all learning and that, as children aim to make sense of their lives, active support from teachers and collaborative peer learning can promote metacognition, where children think about their own thinking through sharing, listening, reflection and taking action. So when children spoke, Dee listened actively, asked specific follow-up questions and probed children's understanding.

Dialogic teaching is one approach to pedagogy with a long and distinguished intellectual history stretching back to the ancient Greeks. Teaching through dialogue and action was an approach advocated by Jerome Bruner, who was among the first of the 20th century developmental psychologists to recognize that human development is a continuous process, not a series of fixed stages. He believed that language enables and supports cognitive development and that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current and past knowledge. By selecting and transforming information, learners construct hypotheses and make decisions. Cognitive structures like language, symbols, schema and mental models provide people with the tools to organize their experiences, enabling people to make inferences to "go beyond the information given."[88]

For these reasons, pedagogy is not fixed and static, but instead must reflect the social context and lived experience of the learner. We define *pedagogy* as Robin Alexander has put it, as a "cultural intervention in individual human development which is deeply saturated with the values and history of the society and community in which it is located."[89] Every type of pedagogy described in this book consists of some form of talk and action -- talk that "mediates the cognitive and cultural spaces between adult and child, between teacher and learner, between society and the individual, between what the child knows and understands and what he or she has yet to know and understand." [90]

Asking Questions First

In our view, the act of *questioning* is what makes dialogue different from mere conversation-- and what's especially important to consider is what follows from *answers*. As literary critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin has written, "If an answer does not

give rise to a new question from itself, then it falls out of the dialogue."[91]

When children learn to engage in dialogue, their questions will generate unexpected topics and situations – and sometimes these may flummox even the best of teachers. For example, one day, in Dee's classroom, the topic of Tiger Woods came up. As the highest-paid professional athlete in the world, Woods earned $90.5 million from winnings and endorsements in 2010.[92] Dee's students had a lot to share on the topic. But she did not expect what happened next. First, Tyson asked, "Did he hit his wife or something?" Then, another boy chipped in, saying, "And he was so scared." One child added, "And his wife was screaming at him until he cried."

Dee was startled by the children's comments as she did not anticipate that her students would be following the particular news of the case. But Dee recognized that this was a topic that would be familiar in households where sports celebrities were recognized and respected. On February 19, 2010, Woods delivered a televised speech from the PGA Tour headquarters in Florida, where he admitted that he had been unfaithful to his wife. He apologized for the hurt his behavior caused to his family, friends, fans, and business partners.[93]

In part to move the discussion forward, Dee offered additional background knowledge to the children, saying, "Recently in the news, Tiger Woods has been getting media coverage for something bad he did. He cheated on his wife. Now he has never cheated in the game of golf, which is what he's known for. He did this cheating in his personal life. But since Nike gave him a lot of money to be a spokesperson, they wanted him to apologize. Being a spokesperson is a lot of responsibility." Dee was in uncomfortable territory and, as a result, she was structuring an interpretation of the event on behalf of her students. She just didn't feel right letting her students share what they knew and felt about this topic.

Zaiah piped up with a unexpected question, "Did he want to apologize?"

Now this is a fascinating and important question. Zaiah wanted to inquire about the motivation and internal mental state of Tiger Woods, an act of imagination that may have elicited a lot of sharing of opinions and ideas, including questions about personal integrity, motives and social responsibility. But Dee was not comfortable. These children were so young! What should she do?

Ignore, Deflect and Engage

So much of teaching is a form of *orchestrated improvisation*, a concept we define as the practice of navigating through a learning experience by skillfully managing the ordinary here-and-now dynamics of intense social interaction among students and teacher. It has to be. If the classroom is overscripted by the teacher, then students cannot co-construct their own knowledge.[94] Here, in the split second of improvisational decision-making in responding to the student's question, Dee faced the opportunity to engage, deflect or ignore the child's question. If she had *engaged* with students on this

topic, she would have asked children to weigh in on Tiger Woods' complex motives in making a public apology. If she *deflected*, Dee might have shifted the conversation to the moral issues that underpin this issue, perhaps asking children to share their more general real-life experiences and observations about people's motives for lying, the consequences of lying, and the costs and rewards of admitting the truth. But instead, Dee *ignored* the opportunity, and quickly changed the topic of the conversation altogether. Zaiah got the message loud and clear: this part of the real world was not an appropriate topic for school.

As this vignette reveals, each teacher must decide for himself or herself how much and what types of current events and popular culture references should enter the classroom. There's no "right" or "wrong" answer. Many of these decisions are made at a moment's notice. But it's one of the seven great debates of media literacy, actually: How should teachers respond to children's interest in mass media, news and entertainment, and popular culture?[95] Because teachers can't perfectly predict how a discussion will turn out, decisions like this are made in the context of the particular moment. In blindingly quick moments of orchestrated improvisation, a teacher considers the needs of the children, the goals of the lesson, and the teacher's own motives and values. Learning to navigate the unpredictability of the media literacy classroom is an important skill that requires pedagogical practice. But as we will see in this chapter, when teachers take calculated risks with popular culture and mass media in the classroom, the rewards can make meaningful connections between students' in-school learning and out-of-school lives.

Celebrity and Popular Culture in the Classroom

In a study of Australian children's hopes and aspirations for the future, Emily Bishop and her colleagues found that many young children want to be famous athletes, actors, singers or models. In a survey of 1170 school age children aged 5 – 12, about one-third made reference to popular characters, both real and fictional, to craft their identities and hopes for the future. Celebrity culture offers children cultural "resources for hope" in the future. For some boys and girls, a future in music or sports will enable them to have personal power, money, influence and attention.[96] And who could be surprised by children's aspirations? Over the past fifteen years, celebrity culture has become more unpredictable -- even accidental. Reality television and the rise of the gossip press as a veritable media industry have elevated unlikely "everyday" people like Jon and Kate Gosselin or the subjects of documentary series *Teen Mom* to celebrity status.

Now more than ever, it is important to imagine popular culture not just as a site for *content*, but as a site for *questioning*. That is, popular culture can no longer be perceived by teachers as an inconvenient hurdle to learning in the classroom, precisely because students have so many meaningful and difficult experiences with and through the popular culture they use. When popular culture is limited to a handful of television shows that are shared by mass audiences—the so-called "monoculture" of the 1950s through the 1980s—popular culture serves as a shared site of recognition, something that everyone can casually nod to (or wave away) in the classroom.

In the digital era, popular culture connects students immediately and directly to adult situations and, in some cases, provides potential to take an active role in popular culture itself, as is true of students who create videos that go viral or create classroom work featured, for better or worse, on national news programs.

Popular culture is also disparate and factional, as students can create entire worlds of popular culture in different genres and social contexts based on interests, tastes, and incidental friendships in real life and online. The child whose parents do not listen to pop music, limit television use, avoid big-budget Hollywood releases, and read King Arthur stories to their children at bedtime will have a different cultural experience than the child who plays Angry Birds, watches Nick's *Victorious* and *iCarly* and gets to see PG-13 action adventure films. Not all popular culture objects are shared, which means that teachers who assume one monolithic youth culture are doing a disservice to the diversity of media options that children and their families have.

Because popular culture makes some teachers feel vulnerable, we sometimes shy away from using it as a component of our teaching practice. Or, when we do use it, it is as a "break" from normal instruction or as a form of entertainment. In one Massachusetts school, Renee was surprised to find one of her own children, as a third-grader, watching "The Mouse and the Motorcycle" in a room with 80 children. There had been no pre-viewing or post-viewing discussion. It was simply a matter of "plugging in the kids" on a rainy afternoon. This is a classic "non-optimal" use of media in the classroom, where the full potential of media to engage students in dialogue or rich and meaningful learning experiences is missed.[97]

But students have deep feelings of identification with the popular culture they use. Popular culture creates new meanings about students' personal identities and relationships with others, and can be both educative and potentially harmful to children's sense of well-being, and even their safety. We had students in the Powerful Voices for Kids program who, while mimicking pro wrestling moves, put other children in real danger.

Teachers have a wide range of anxieties about children's popular culture.[98] They see the impact that popular culture has on children's sense of fashion, taste, identity, and even values and beliefs, but they don't know how to, or don't care to, broach the topic with students. David has found that teachers have distinct anxieties around popular culture:

(1) *Inappropriate content in the classroom.* Some teachers are concerned that children will want to talk about sexuality, violence, bad language and the questionable moral content that is a part of mass media and popular culture.
(2) *Lack of knowledge about popular culture.* Some teachers are simply not tuned-in to the popular TV shows, movies and music that their students enjoy.
(3) *Dislike of popular culture.* Some teachers actively dislike pop music, reality TV and other media that their students value.
(4) *Alienation from popular culture.* Some teachers feel that they have nothing of real value to contribute to the conversation when talk turns to popular culture.

(5) *Fear of retribution from parents or administrators.* Some teachers are concerned that, when classroom talk includes references to popular culture, some children may misinterpret the point of the activity and share information with parents in ways that could lead to complaints.

All of the concerns that educators have about popular culture have some merit. Especially in elementary grades, a sensitivity to adult content, violence, sexuality, and language are important not just for students' well-being, but for teachers' well-being when parents and administrators are offended. There are real risks associated with using popular culture in instruction. Similarly, teachers' ignorance, antipathy, or alienation from popular culture are deeply connected to their own identities not only as teachers but as people.

This is why the question-asking process is so absolutely crucial to using popular culture in the classroom. As we saw in Dee's example, children naturally have complicated questions about the world of celebrity and popular culture around them, and teachers can make it their responsibility to use interactions with popular culture just as they would other interactions in the world. Not only do such interactions have an impact on students, but teachers themselves can be a positive force in shaping the very way that students conceive of and use media in their everyday lives, as our subsequent example should make clear.

Presenting Yourself Online

Many teachers at the Russell Byers Charter School recognized that Facebook was playing a major role in children's lives in Grades 4, 5 and 6. Mr. Landis, the technology coordinator, noticed that many of his older students had their own Facebook profiles, often in their own name (but also, frequently, under pseudonyms). He wanted to engage them in a conversation about what kinds of information they might be able to trust or not trust on Facebook, in the same way they were expected to reflect on the credibility of results from search engines. But students who were already using Facebook, he found, seemed to separate what they said about the site in class from how they seemed to use the site in their spare time.

"What information do you feel OK putting on Facebook?" he asked the class in a lesson about online privacy. His goal was to have an open discussion about boundaries and limitations that students might employ to limit the amount of personal information they shared to a large online community. But the discussion didn't feel open. It felt like kids were giving him the *expected* answer.

For example, one child said, "You shouldn't put *anything* on Facebook. You shouldn't even be on Facebook, really."

Mr. Landis knew this child had her own Facebook account. "Why not?" he asked.

"Because someone could stalk you. They could know where you live."

"Yeah, it's really dangerous," said another student who was also an active Facebook user, "because like someone could know everything about you and then they could even come and *kill* you."

Mr. Landis' first impulse in situations like this was to ask the class, "Do you *really* think someone would ever go through so much effort to murder a complete stranger?" He never acted on that impulse because of the disruption it might cause, but he sensed that students' responses were informed more by horror films—and horror stories both rumored and, though rare, occasionally real—than by any real experience online.

Mr. Landis wanted to get his students thinking about a *real* online experience so that they could take comparably reasonable actions. He was hoping to replace the superficial conversations about the Internet—the ones that only happened in school and focused on a common "stranger-danger" approach to Internet safety – with a more reflective and authentic conversation that directly applied to their online lives.

Mr. Landis's students were still developing their online presence, and were also developing their sense of comfort and boundaries with online communication. Although even at age 11 his students had obviously started to expand to social networking sites, blogs, and gaming sites, they were still struggling to figure out how they felt about being online, what concerns they had, and what actions they would take to address those concerns.

In many ways, the whole concept of online safety can be reminiscent of other sensitive subjects in elementary education, like health education and anti-drug education. Often two conversations happen about those topics, too—one in the sanctioned confines of a conversation "appropriate" for school, and one more complicated, perhaps even transgressive conversation outside of those confines.

Most teachers are aware of the extent to which their students talk, in free time, about their favorite media. How many times do young students debate the best superheroes, quote or sing along to popular songs, reveal all the cheat codes to their favorite videogames, or talk about the coolest new websites? In each case, students are thinking about their home media use and shaping how they feel about it in conversation with their peers. But when left unstructured, this talk can often be heard as so much meaningless chatter, something off-topic. How can teachers make student's home uses of media, in all of their messiness, fodder for a meaningful conversation, and an opportunity for students to genuinely reflect on how media touches so many aspects of their lives?

Teachers like Mr. Landis can feel isolated in schools where the standard response to children's interest in popular culture is to ask them to refrain from such conversation in the building, to "take it outside"--that is, to avoid making references to mass media and popular culture during class time. Mr. Landis had commiserated on how difficult it was to talk about Facebook with other fifth and sixth grade teachers, who generally expressed common and understandable anxieties about broaching the topic of students' popular

culture with their students. Many teachers feel unequipped with the appropriate knowledge or context for discussing students' popular culture. Others are concerned about inappropriate material, including material that, though it may be developmentally appropriate for a class, makes teachers themselves uncomfortable. Some feel alienated from popular culture, thinking that it simply distances them from their students. Others are afraid of administrative or parent disapproval, and accompanying headaches. They take a "see no evil" approach to popular culture, leaving discussions of it to the playground.

But students are in need of a means to express their complicated feelings, beliefs, and ideas about various forms of popular media. When David talked to a first grade class at a Philadelphia school about documentary films—films with "real people" in them—for a Career Day, one six-year-old was quick to tell him that her favorite show on television was *Teen Mom*, a reality show about the lives of teenagers who are pregnant in high school. When one teacher polled her second grade classroom informally during their recess in preparation for a short lesson in online safety, she found that nearly half of her students had access to Facebook through parents' or siblings' accounts.

Going Online on Paper

Mr. Landis wondered what would happen if he tried teaching about online communication to students much younger than his fifth grade students. What if, instead, he talked to first and second grade students about online communication? Though they undoubtedly had some experiences online—the first grade teacher in his school had instituted a rule that they could not use Google in the classroom for fear of inappropriate search results—were these experiences enough to create the kind of artificial reflections he was seeing from his older students?

He decided to ask children to use their background knowledge to draw a website on paper. He created a worksheet that outlined the "four things that every website has": (1) a TITLE, (2) an ADDRESS [URL], (3) MEDIA [words, pictures, games—anything you can imagine], and (4) LINKS. These elements were chosen for their foundational status in websites. He knew that mobile media and social networking websites were starting to threaten many of those elements—for instance, students frequently "clicked around," using hyperlinks without noticing web addresses, and often knowing only one or two web addresses by heart (usually search engines).

Students took to the drawing activity with great enthusiasm, planning out websites about their favorite pets, about their favorite shows, and about their own lives. On paper, anything was permissible—including full names, addresses, family members, or phone numbers. Then they wrote the name of one other student in the class on the paper—this was their "link." When students shared their websites in front of the class, rather than call on the next student, the previous presenter would "link" to the new speaker. Students' websites were highly inventive and often modeled on complicated gaming and popular culture websites the children used. When they were done with their presentations, they "clicked" their links ("Jazmyne!" "Rodney!") and other students presented their work.

After each student, Mr. Landis asked students to give *warm and cool feedback:* what did you like? What would make the work even better? Because many students did have background knowledge about websites, they also had opinions about the quality of their peers' sites: “I really like your picture of a dog. I think that if you had more kinds of dogs, even more people who like different dogs could click those and they would like it, too.”

Then Mr. Landis presented the idea of *sharing work* with an audience. If you wanted to share this work with someone else you didn't know, what would you want them to know, and what wouldn't you be OK with them knowing? Here students had a more genuine conversation about limitations than what Mr. Landis had experienced with his fifth graders. You shouldn't put your home phone number, but what if there's a number you want people to call? Can you put that? You shouldn't put your full name, but what about your first name? There are lots of Rodneys, why couldn't I still be Rodney?

The class collaboratively came up with some guidelines. No last names. No home addresses or home phone numbers. No information that might tell people where you live or where you go to school. (“But can we say we're from Philly? Don't we want people in our city to know about it?”) Other than that, what was important was what you felt *OK* sharing. Now they were given new pieces of paper—these were their “profile pages.” On your profile page, students were asked to put things they would be OK sharing even with strangers. One child did not feel comfortable sharing her own first name, so she decided not to use it. One child did not feel comfortable using his dog's real name, so he changed it. Most students ended up putting names on their profile pictures that referenced their favorite celebrities or activities—like “Spongebob” and “Kittenlover.” Others used their real first name, but not their last name.

After the revision process, Mr. Landis asked if everyone was OK with everything that was in their new website. They were. “OK,” he said, “now I want you to flip your paper over. If you want this website that you've just drawn to go online *today*, as you made it, I want you to write 'yes.' If you do not want this website that you've just drawn to go online today, I want you to write 'no.' Either answer is fine—remember, this is what you feel OK about.”

Mr. Landis was surprised to find that about half of his class of second graders were *not* OK sharing their work online. Students who had created elaborate designs for their websites with crayon, marker, and pencil were perfectly content with it staying away from the digital world. The other half of the drawings he scanned into separate image files and uploaded on the class website, which he created in a free, educator-friendly blogging platform online.

Insert Figure 6.1 here

Example of a student profile page on paper

The following week, students in class had their very own websites—their first foray into developing an online presence, carefully scaffolded and structured by adult support and supervision. But there was something strange—when they looked at their class website, they saw the list of usernames—Avatarang, Beyoncay, Spongebob, etc.—which, when clicked, took them to the hand-drawn profile pages they recognized.

"Who am I again?" asked one student.

Mr. Landis reminded them that they had to remember what their *Internet* name (their username) was going to be. Here Mr. Landis was drawing from his own personal history participating in online communities, which went back twenty years. In those days, you couldn't just sign up to a blogging system, social network, or other website with your own name and email address. You created a persona that sometimes was identical to your real identity but was often a pseudonym. He wanted to give his own students the choice that many online systems were denying them, to reflect on whether or not they wanted to use their own names online.

Next, Mr. Landis told the class, we need to *comment* on each others' work. "When you comment on someone's page," he said, "it's just like giving warm and cool feedback in class. Except this time you'll give your warm and cool feedback with your Internet name."

Students were assigned a page to comment on, and quickly light bulbs began to go off.

"Wait a minute," said one student, "which one of you is Spongebob?"

Mr. Landis put up his hand, "Hold on—you don't need to answer that. Only tell people your real name if you want to."

"That's OK," said Jason, "I'm Spongebob."

"Mr. Landis," asked another student, "does that mean that we won't know whose page it is when we comment on it?"

"Not if they don't want you to know. That's their decision, just like it's your decision what information you want to use."

Students gave their comments verbally ("Your Spongebob drawing is great!") before the end of the class period. Afterward, one student, who had asked for Mr. Landis *not* to share her information, approached him at the door. "Mr. Landis, can I change my answer? I want to put it online." Mr. Landis told her that, if she felt comfortable, he would put her page online for next week's class.

Pleasure, Taboo, and Disruption in the Classroom

Finally, it would be irresponsible for us not to acknowledge that opening the floodgates to popular culture and mass media in the classroom isn't also associated with ambiguity, frustration, and confusion. Children's media worlds are complex places where they go to try out new identities, indulge in unknown and sometimes forbidden pleasures, and have raw experiences with the world that are often inappropriate for other settings. David has fond memories of hiding graphic popular comic books in stacks of books in the bedroom. Today, many children have constant Internet access on portable devices that are difficult for parents to monitor, even with filtering systems.

The fact that popular culture can be a catalyst for what some teachers perceive as transgressive behavior is not something that can merely be wished away with classroom management techniques or rules. Transgressiveness, whether it comes from inappropriate media content or inappropriate student responses, is closely tied to how we take pleasure in some of our favorite kinds of media, as when we "root for the bad guy," participate in the *schadenfreude* of watching embarrassing home movies or YouTube videos, or indulge in guilty pleasures in private. It would be unreasonable to think that transgressive media—the media that pushes or crosses the boundaries of accepted classroom material—will not bring with it transgressive behaviors from students.

However, dealing openly and honestly with transgressive material, student disruptions, and the complicated pleasures that students take in their media worlds requires both a teacher's sensitivity to how students make sense of media and a teacher's mind for improvisation. These are essential skills of any elementary classrooms. Teachers must think on their feet constantly when lessons don't go as planned, when technology malfunctions, and when students provide unexpected or unwanted responses to classroom content.

In a digital environment, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep transgressive material and student disruption at bay even under the strictest conditions. When Mr. Fitzgerald's class did research for a school project in which they planned to make a commercial for the book fair, they watched an IKEA commercial while reading its original shooting script to gain familiarity with the formal conventions of television ads. The commercial was developmentally appropriate and hardly controversial—two women talk about their closet space as though they are talking about cars like mechanics in a garage. The implication is that IKEA allows women to "geek out" about closet organization in the same way that men do about cars and tools.

The intention in the lesson was to talk about target audiences and the assumptions that the commercial might make about its target audience. What is IKEA saying about men and women, and how might someone interpret it differently or ask questions about its values? Then students would read the initial pitch and script for the commercial to see what the author's intentions were during the brainstorming phase. They would discuss whether or not the ideas the students generated matched the intent of the original author.

But even in this classroom exercise, Mr. Fitzgerald did not account for a feature of YouTube, which suggested "recommended videos" after the initial video finished. The videos ran the gamut of inappropriateness. One video, "IKEA GAY," had students snickering and shouting out uncontrollably. Another featured controversial imagery ("IKEA banned commercial!"). Still another, "IKEA HUNDSTOL, Dog high chair" was a unique challenge to order in a fifth grade classroom--it featured an absurd picture of a yellow Labrador sitting in a baby's high chair.

The unpredictability of mass media and popular culture is both its biggest strength and biggest liability in the classroom. When teachers take risks they can find both challenges and rewards in the classroom, as Dee did in acknowledging Tiger Woods in the classroom, as Mr. Landis did in introducing Facebook to his students, and as, in other chapters, Rachel did in tackling the homelessness issue or Mr. Fitzgerald did in letting students bring in controversial news stories. Like all good teachers, they model for students how to bring learning home with them, and in the process, children gain an enriched understanding of the world around them.

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CHAPTER 7
Literacy as Social Practice

In this chapter, we'll learn about:

Taking action in the world. How can teachers link literacy practices to the social world and help their students discover the power and social responsibility of taking action in the world?

The role of literacy in social relationships. How can educators create digital and media literacy learning environments where students trust and respect one another and feel comfortable being themselves?

Using shared popular culture in the classroom. How can teachers use children's interests in TV shows, movies, musicians, athletes, and celebrities to activate their communication and critical thinking skills?

Teaching news and other informational texts. How can teachers use informational texts to create emotionally rich learning experiences for children that are relevant to their lives?

When a Philadelphia 5th grader wrote a letter to the President of the United States about her experience being bullied, it was a surprise to most of the children and educators we knew. Most children who experience harassment from their peers don't tell anyone. There's a lot of shame associated with the experience of bullying: it takes courage even just to talk about it to a close friend.

But Ziainey's experience of the pain of teasing and name-calling she had experienced in school inspired her to write to the President when she learned about another student who had committed suicide after suffering from years of bullying. Her dad mailed the hand-written letter to President Obama – and lo and behold, the President wrote back to her, thanking her for the letter and offering encouraging words that inspired Ziainey to start a support group with other children at her school. By these simple actions, Ziainey had discovered the power of literacy to change oneself—and the world.

Literacy is a concept that has a lot of different meanings. To a few, it means reading and writing – a technical skill of learning to crack the code to connect a printed symbol with a sound. But as we have been using the term in this book, literacy is *the sharing of meaning through symbolic form.* There are two powerful elements of this definition. One is that meanings are shared through many types of symbols – nonverbal elements like facial expressions, tone of voice and body language, spoken and written words, but also images, graphic design, moving images, sound, rhythm and interactivity. Literacy is also framed as a social practice – we share meaning through symbols in order to get things done in concert with others. Literacy is tied up with our social relationships with people near and far. When children recognize how relevant, useful and powerful literacy practices are in relation to their daily life experiences, they are motivated to want to develop those skills to use them to gain social power and influence. [99]

That's why the everyday practices of literacy – speaking, listening, reading, writing, analyzing messages, and sharing meaning using images, language, and technology tools – are so fundamentally linked to ethical conduct. Ziainey Stokes used writing to take principled action to address an unexpected problem in her own life. There was certainly something powerfully therapeutic in describing her troubling experience in writing, but there was also some substantial unpredictability in how others would respond. That's why the act was so courageous.

Her parents, for example, could have berated her for not being "tough enough" to withstand the social pressure inflicted by the bullies. Her siblings could have humiliated her for expecting to receive a response to her humble letter. Or her actions might have received no response at all, disappearing into invisibility. Any of these options (and numerous other possibilities) could result from Ziainey's simple literacy practice. As Hannah Arendt has explained, when it comes to taking action in the world, there is a "boundlessness" to it, because we can never fully know the relationship between actions we take and the reactions that result.[100]

Our belief in the value of digital and media literacy is based on the provocative gap to be explored between teaching children both about the world *as it is* and the world *as it*

should be. The natural idealism of youth is a renewing force in the world. As children discover the power of literacy, they gain courage in taking communicative action.

One of the most important competencies children learn during the elementary grades is *self-disclosure*, the practice of letting another person know about our own wishes, desires, hopes and fears. When watching children struggle with their complicated emotions, we sometimes say, "Use your words" because we want them to have the courage that self-disclosure requires. When children encounter literature, poetry and music, they can be invited to consider how much courage it takes to make oneself visible by using symbols to share meaning. Self-disclosure is a fundamental dimension of being an author.

But because literacy practices are inextricably bound up in a web of social relationships, it's important for educators to create learning environments where trust and respect are the norm, where learners feel comfortable being themselves. When children have the expectation that they will be respected, they gain confidence in self-expression. They become more willing to take the risks that are an inevitable part of the creative process.

So when PVK instructor LaShon Fryer saw the newspaper article about Ziainey Stokes, she brought in the article for children to read. It launched an intense discussion about bullying. Children had a lot of strong, emotional reactions to the story. One student, Caleb, decided to write his own letter to President Obama. After composing it, he practiced reading his letter out loud.

Inspired by the suggestion that a YouTube video about bullying might help other kids gain confidence in sharing their stories, Caleb finally presented his letter as a formal video presentation, where, looking directly into the camera, he said, "Dear President Obama, I would like to talk about bullying. Kids get bullied almost every day, in every school. Bullying is a real serious matter. When I was in third grade, I used to get bullied. One boy used to tease me about my head, my height and my teeth. Another friend used to hit me for no reason. My friend Joshua has a problem with bullying and he told his mother, but she didn't do anything about it. Bullying should not be in school or outside. If a child gets bullied, they should tell an adult. I would like to stop bullying." Caleb's powerful voice was clearly evident in his well-organized message, effective choice of examples, confident delivery and earnest tone.

The Social Context of Language and Literacy Development

As we noted earlier, children's literacy skills do not develop in a vacuum but exist in relation to the specific dimensions of the particular social world around them. The contemporary social world is deeply inflected by media-related experiences—watching TV, reading books, listening to music, playing videogames, and using the Internet. Literacy scholars note that two key components are most strongly associated with reading comprehension. The first is *oral language* skills (listening comprehension and vocabulary). Early childhood educators know that *talking* is central to literacy

development. Varied experiences – including music, reading and art activities, nature walks, field trips, author visits, games and dramatic play, and a variety of screen media messages – provide children with the content for talk. By telling stories, asking questions, offering opinions, and explaining what they know, children develop oral language competencies. Word play and rhyming helps children notice the patterns in sound-letter relationships. Talk also helps children develop a good sense of the rules of social interaction, including the habits associated with active listening and turn-taking.

The second literacy component involves a deep understanding of both the alphabetic *code* (letter-sound recognition) and the *structure* of texts (page turning, left-to-right reading, page layout, sentence and paragraph structure). But these components don't just apply to children's understanding of the function of print texts. Children also need to understand the codes and structural characteristics of all forms of symbolic expression in their daily life: books and print material, pictures, graphics, film and video, websites, apps and games, and social media.

For these reasons, it's a shame that some literacy educators neglect the power of mass media, popular culture and digital media to promote children's literacy development. A number of elementary educators are suspicious and fearful about children's engagement with mass media and digital media. Some educators seem to treat non-print texts as second-class citizens in the early childhood classroom (for example, by emphasizing the superiority of the printed word in relationship to photographs or illustrations). Too many teachers dismiss or trivialize children's use of television, for example. When emphasizing the importance of making connections between home and school, these educators ask parents to provide children with plenty of books and urge them to restrict or limit their exposure to film and television. They don't point out to parents the value of talking with children about their favorite TV shows and movies as a means to support oral language development.[101] While we are sensitive to concerns of educators and parents about the volume and scope of children's exposure mass media, children and their families do spend hours watching television, playing video games, listening to music and using the Internet. Because these practices are meaningful and significant, they deserve to be explored through inquiry.

Many parents are unaware of how family social interaction promotes literacy development. In 2010, the American Institutes for Research conducted extensive focus groups and survey research with low-income families in the 20 target public media markets. Because most parents are focused on supplying basic needs for their family, not all parents see themselves as their children's teacher. Most parents have very little time to be involved in their children's activities. Many poor and low-income parents do not know that simple behaviors (rhyming and letter recognition games) can help their children get ready to read. Many parents do not read to their kids every day because they do not have time, do not read well, or cannot read English. However, parents are willing to try activities with their kids if they can easily fit them into their schedules.[102]

Researchers tell us that television viewing may support the development of listening, reading achievement and attitudes that promote literacy. Preschoolers who

watch *Dora the Explorer, Blue's Clues, Arthur, Clifford,* or *Dragon Tales* increase their vocabularies and have higher expressive language scores than children who don't view these programs.[103] The impact of viewing on specific reading skills such as inference-making, comprehension, and vocabulary acquisition has also been explored resulting in the conclusion that television viewing is a situated social practice embedded within family life and as such, needs to be carefully examined within the context of a child's environment.[104] In many families, television, the Internet and other forms of media expand children's knowledge and exposure to story genres. In fact, media and technology use may foster children's interests in different topics in ways that can support literacy development. Encounters with multiple perspectives through media can support critical thinking. Rather than being in competition, the entertainment and educational purposes of television, videogames and digital media may have a complementary, synergistic relationship in enhancing children's literacy and learning.[105]

One-Minute "Mediatorials" Support the Process of Active Reasoning

LaShon wanted to better understand her Grade 3 students' experience with television, movies and videogames and provide them with an opportunity to talk with confidence about something that was important to them. So she created a weekly activity she called the "Mediatorial," where children made simple one-minute videos where they talked about their favorite TV programs, musical artists, and books. Gradually, children gained confidence in sharing their ideas, offering increasingly polished on-camera performances to describe their in-home media use preferences:

> Caleb: Hi my name is Caleb. My favorite artists are Usher and Michael Jackson. My favorite TV show is the Boondocks but I'm not supposed to watch it because it's a little inappropriate."
>
> Zaneerah: Hi my name is Zaneerah. My favorite artist is Justin Bieber. When I first heard him, I cried. When I grow up I want to be a singer because I have a beautiful voice.
>
> Kaila: Hi name is Kaila. My favorite artist is Alicia Keys because I like her songs and she seems like a good person. My favorite book is the *My Weird School* series because they make me laugh.

In an activity she called "Humanizing Celebrities," LaShon found images of 20 celebrities her students had named as important to them. She posted these images around the room. Each day, she stood near one of the images and read to children a short 2-3 minute article about some aspect of the celebrity that featured their childhood or adolescence. At the end of the week, she created a competitive quiz game for children to play. She had written 20 statements about the celebrities on index cards. To play the game, she placed the index cards face down on one of the desks and two teams competed to answer the most number of questions correctly. For example, "Who am I? I was teased incessantly in grade school about my big ears." As LaShon explains it, this fun activity gives children a chance to practice skills of listening comprehension, work as a team, and

respect the ideas of their peers, and. Plus, it contributes to a certain level of de-mystification of celebrities. As LaShon puts it, "All of the questions are aimed at humanizing the celebrities who are oftentimes put on pedestals by children."

Active Reasoning: A Precursor to Media Literacy

In our work with young children, we have always noticed some important differences between children in how they talked about television, music and videogames. Some kids were virtual blabbermouths, with plenty of ideas and information to offer about why they liked certain shows, certain musical artists, movie genres and videogames, while others said very little. With colleague Michael RobbGrieco, Renee conducted research to better understand how children develop metacognitive thinking about media. We asked two groups of children to respond to a simple prompt: "What is your favorite television show, videogame or song, and why do you like it?" We compared a group of gifted and talented African-American children ages 9 – 11 with a group of regular students who were not so identified.

What we found was that high-achieving students use *reasoning* instead of just *reacting* to media messages. When writing about their favorite television programs, videogames and music, children demonstrate active reasoning: they seem to be thinking about media's content and form. When children use reasoning like this, they may or may not be "critical viewers," but they are able to articulate ideas about what they enjoy and value. For younger children, this ability is likely to be a precursor skill associated with media literacy.

For example, when asked to explain why they like their favorite TV show, examples of children's active reasoning responses included:

> "I like Naruto because it is about a boy who will follow his dreams no matter what. It has a lot of action."
>
> "It is about a teenager who is a rock star and it shows me that even a kid can be famous and a star. It was her dream and even if it was hard, she accomplished it. It shows me that I can do that too."
>
> "It's funny and the cartoons can sometimes be so clueless and at other times can be so evil."

When asked to explain why they like their favorite videogame, one child who used active reasoning offered the following thoughts:

> "It has awesome graphics, great characters, and cool super attacks."
>
> "I like it because it feels like you are really playing sports."

When describing why they liked their favorite popular music, a student who used active reasoning responded with this answer:

> "I like the beat of the song and I like the theme and setting of a hospital."
>
> "It is appropriate and does not have any profanity in it. It's more of a gospel song than a rap song."

These types of answers stand in sharp contrast to other answers from children who simply reacted, generally offering a status label or a simple emotional response. Many children in our study did not demonstrate active reasoning. These children responded to the question about why they liked their favorite show, videogame and music by generally writing, "It's funny." Other answers were descriptions of how frequently they watched, played or listened. When asked to explain why they liked various media, many only claimed:

"It's my favorite."

"It's cool."

"It is the best."

We found that high-achieving 9, 10, and 11-year olds show more active reasoning about favorite media than regular students, offering more well-elaborated answers in responding to a question about television programs, videogames and music. Of course, it's possible that the gifted children simply had better control over language and were thus able to offer more rich description about their media preferences. But it's also likely that the capacity of individuals to use reasoning and evidence to support ideas and opinions is a central component of critical thinking as skill that emerges differentially in childhood.[106] As we discussed in Chapter 6, these competencies generally develop in a dialogic environment in which children are encouraged to talk and listen, where they use language to provide support for their ideas, conclusions and choices. And while most students have the ability to develop reasoning and argumentation skills, children need guidance and a supportive environment where reasoning is valued and appreciated.

Parents and teachers both play a crucial role in the development of these competencies. Children's use of reasoning and argumentation in relationship to everyday activities in the family, like media consumption and technology usage, may be leveraged to support success in the classroom.[107] We believe that all students have some knowledge and expertise related to popular media that can be used to stimulate and engage the sort of active, engaged and analytical thinking that schools would like all of their students to develop.

Reading Advertising

Children are constantly reading and comprehending visual and media texts, often without even knowing they are doing so. In an informal learning situation when children were learning about advertising, PVK instructor Aggie asked her students to find food advertisements in magazines. She handed children a large pile of magazines to explore. They do so with evident pleasure, enjoying the opportunity to handle the magazines, reading and looking at them. When a child found a food ad, Aggie asked the child to read the ad aloud and discuss the words used. And while children enjoyed this fun activity, it also served an important purpose. Aggie reflected in her journal, explaining, "As children read aloud and interpret, they begin to understand how text and image work together. They understand that words are conveying a message, that they are serving a purpose, that they are a part of the larger intention behind the work."

Such activities help support both reading and writing composition skills. According to Aggie, this work deeply affects children's work as message creators. She wrote, "When children create their own advertisements, they think carefully about which words to use, where to position the words, and how to craft a catchy and pithy slogan that will encapsulate their product's strengths."

Reading and writing skills develop in the contexts of social relationships. Aggie described two of her students, Michael and Quinlin, who were writing a rap to accompany a cereal advertisement they were creating. The boys were working together on a script, explaining, "Try Special Kare. It will make you have a better day. You wanna know how? Let us explain it to you now." Michael wanted to talk about how Special Kare will give you energy because it is made of whole grains. He wrote, "Special K will give you engery. It's made of whole greens."

In reviewing their manuscript, Aggie pointed out that "energy" was spelled wrong. Michael fixed the error. Then Quinlin continued to proofread. He laughed. "Whole greens!? It's whole grains!"

"What are whole grains?" Michael asked.

The teachable moment had arrived because a child asked a simple but meaningful question. At the computer, Aggie and Michael began to search using the keyword "whole grains" to see what a grain looks like and learn a bit about why it is important to eat whole grains. More questions follow and the boys continue to explore: What are the health benefits? What is the production process to turn whole grains into cereal?

Another of Aggie's students, a girl named Jade, had found an ad for Coke in a magazine. This ad utilized a Coca Cola bottle as an image. Aggie and her students were discussing why the shape of the bottle evokes a certain kind of feeling. Students realized that the bottle was probably older than the can and so conveyed a more "classic" feel.

Jade asked, “When was the Coke bottle invented?” and kids seemed curious about this question. Jade enthusiastically offered to search for it, which meant she had to generate proper search terms and sift through several websites, reading for comprehension enough to discover the answer. After some time exploring, she was thrilled to discover an article about Cola Cola’s design competition held in 1915 that resulted in the distinctive and unique shape of the bottle.

Jade not only got to practice her research and reading skills: her self-confidence grew by leaps and bounds as a result of this informal inquiry learning experience. Why? The student entirely controlled the learning process—in both generating the question and finding the answer. These kinds of media-rich activities spark intellectual curiosity.

Using Structured Legal Dialogue about Celebrity Culture

Henry, another instructor, used an ongoing celebrity controversy in contemporary popular culture to help Grade 5 children develop confidence in using reasoning and evidence to support their opinions and ideas. He started by digging into a topic they were already talking about informally, during the lunch hour and on the playground: the case of Chris Brown, the chart-topping pop singer who made headlines in the summer of 2009 when he was convicted on charges of domestic abuse for beating his girlfriend, fellow pop star Rhianna.

After analyzing the news event, and working from some of his students’ earlier request to “play judge and jury,” this lesson culminated with a student-produced mock trial. Ultimately, the purpose of the trial was not to determine Chris Brown's guilt or innocence with regards to the assault charges, since Brown had already plead guilty and posted an apology video on YouTube. Rather, Henry challenged the children to understand and analyze the event as a series of media phenomena, each with its own stake in informing, entertaining or persuading an audience. With this understanding, the mock trial functioned as opportunity for the students to evaluate some of the ethical and rhetorical dimensions of this event.

For example, to develop their own mock trial, after discussion of the Chris Brown case, children investigated the genre of the courtroom drama. In order to compare and contrast fictional depictions of courtrooms with actual courtrooms, Henry showed his students examples from episodes of *Judge Brown* and *Judge Judy* and then he invited one of his friends, a law student, to come into class as a guest speaker and offer basic information about the practice of law.

What was accurate and inaccurate about the judge shows on TV? Not surprisingly, children had lots of questions – and lots of misinformation – about the legal system. Most of what children learn about the law comes from their media exposure and incidental information learned from parents and family members. In the process of generating questions about judge TV shows and the Chris Brown case, they learned about the differences between civil and criminal court and the distinction between local, state and federal law. Children discussed the differences and similarities between fictional and

real courtrooms, comparing and contrasting the messages that entertainment media presents about the law to other types of information sources.

Henry then encouraged students to gather some information on the facts of the Chris Brown domestic violence case, a topic that was widely being discussed in the family and community in the summer of 2009. Although every student in the class had some familiarity with the details of the news event, knowledge among students was naturally divergent, with different students having awareness of different aspects of the case.

Henry used class discussion, with a particular emphasis on listening skills, to promote the sharing of knowledge and opinions about the case. The class then watched Chris Brown's YouTube apology. Henry led students in a discussion of the clip, asking the class to identify Chris Brown's purpose in posting this video, and whether or not Brown's words and choice of setting served that purpose. Children were invited to place key phrases from the video up on the board – these were phrases that children recognized were designed to be both persuasive and informative.

Finally, it was time for the culminating activity. Now that they had all this knowledge, children wanted to "put Chris Brown on trial." Henry gave children a template of a trial, complete with "All rise," opening and closing arguments, and other formal dimensions. Children wrote out key statements and then energetically performed the roles of judge, prosecutor, defense attorney, witnesses, and jury, reenacting a jury trial about whether or not Chris Brown abused his authority as a celebrity by offering a false apology.

One student, Farina, got to play the role of Rhianna, and after swearing to "tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth," she responded to questions from both the prosecutor and the defense attorney, using information the children had researched from newspaper accounts. The children pulled out all the rhetorical stops in making their best case to the judge. "My fans have the right to know that I am a good man," pleaded Jon, the student playing Chris Brown. Still, in Henry's Grade 5 classroom, the student judge found him guilty of using the domestic violence incident as a publicity ploy and sentenced him to a $1000 fine and five years probation.

How Digital and Media Literacy Supports Literacy Development

Many parents and teachers recognize the declining interest in reading and the gradual disengagement with school that may occur in the elementary grades. Of course, this malaise is not confined to Grade 4. It may happen as early as second grade or as late as sixth grade. Some scholars think it happens because of the "teaching to the test" mentality that leads to repetitive drill-and-kill school tasks in order to meet AYP goals.[108] Teachers in the Powerful Voices for Kids program also noticed significant differences in the behavior and attitudes of children in Grades 1 – 3 as compared to children Grades 4 – 6. Except for a few children with emotional challenges, the younger kids were

intellectually curious and easy to engage in nearly any activity. But the older children could be more resistant, disengaged or chaotic at times.

As we mentioned in Chapter 6, some critics believe that the fourth grade slump happens because all the fun gets sucked out of reading. Teachers use leveled readers that don't hold much appeal for children, who are intellectually curious about the world and able to process rather information from visual and digital sources without the laborious effort that decoding the printed word entails. And when adults in the home aren't doing much reading, then reading doesn't appear to be a tremendously useful skill from a child's point of view. The consequences are profound: approximately 6 million kids—70% of all eighth graders and 65% of all 12th graders—read below their grade level.[109]

Researchers have found that children's attitudes about reading--- attitudes that lead a learner to approach or to avoid an academic or recreational reading opportunity – are strongly associated with reading skills.[110] Ironically, an "all-reading" curriculum in the early grades, with its focus on decoding and phonics, may leave less time for science, art, music and social studies, which provide exposure to rich content, background knowledge and inquiry learning that supports the development of abstract thinking and vocabulary development. And since primary-level teachers generally rely on narrative (storybook) texts, children may enter Grade 4 with little understanding of the form and structure of other sorts of texts, including video documentaries, websites, newspapers, magazines and other informational texts – especially those they are encountering in the world outside the classroom.

For these reasons, experts recommend these strategies to promote literacy learning:

- Offer young children more exposure to expository texts and discourse, including information from multimedia sources including newspapers, magazines, video documentaries and websites.

- Give children the opportunity to select their own reading materials and use school time for independent reading.

- Use instructional practices that activate students' emotional engagement, participation and social interaction in the classroom.[111]

In this chapter, we've seen that such strategies are effective with children in the elementary grades. Children need *daily practice* in gathering information, knowing how to use keywords and search engines, understanding search results, and critically evaluating information. That's why the U.S. federal government is now supporting the development of new measures of online reading comprehension that reflect the Common Core State Standards Initiative for reading, writing and literacy. Education scholar Julie Coiro and her colleagues at the University of Rhode Island are creating new measures to assess children's ability to engage in what they are calling *online literacy skills.* New

measures like this will help educators fully integrate digital media for teaching and learning into the elementary grades.

We are thrilled that a new generation of elementary educators and literacy scholars both recognize that reading comprehension cannot be confined to the medium of the printed page. Pictorial images, TV shows, newspapers, magazines, websites, music, videogame and social media experiences all involve a type s reading comprehension that, if used well, may activate the full panoply of literacy skills including accessing and analyzing information, composing messages, reflecting and taking action that are at the heart of this book.

CHAPTER 7 ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER 8
A Story is a Story: Digital and Media Literacy with Young Children

In this chapter, you'll learn about:

Identifying and addressing gaps in children's understanding. How can educators help children recognize the nuances of what's real and what's imaginary when it comes to the messages found in movies, TV shows and in other media?

Creating characters and stories. How do teachers learn to create scaffolds and learning structures to best support children's development as authors and storytellers?

Small steps for younger learners. What kinds of learning experiences in digital and media literacy are developmentally appropriate for preschool and primary children?

"When do kids learn that a cartoon is a cartoon?"

Maria's question was posed to a circle of exhausted but talkative instructors, who met after the end of the day to discuss their experiences in the classroom and reflect on their choices as educators. The group reflection experience had become a place where instructors could share ideas and generate strategies for meeting students' needs.

Maria had been surprised earlier in the day when she showed her kindergartners a clip from *Kung Fu Panda*, a slapstick comedy film starring the voice of comedian Jack Black. Her intention was to help children use descriptive language to discuss various media characters. After watching the clip, the young students shared what they liked about the character and the scene — what was funny, what was cool, what was exciting. Then one student commented, "The man in the panda was silly." Thinking that she had misunderstood the child's language, Maria responded, "Yes, the panda is very silly."

"No," said the child. "I mean the man in the suit there," pointing to the screen paused on the Kung Fu Panda. "He's funny." This child seemed to think that inside the animated cartoon was a person.

In the reflection circle, Maria shared her thoughts about how to address this child's confusion about the genre of animation. "I'm wondering now," she said to the others, "When did I learn that a cartoon is a cartoon? The hard part is going backwards and saying, how do I *teach* someone that a cartoon is a cartoon?"

Lots of instructors had experienced something similar to what Maria was saying. Instructors were continually discovering gaps in children's understanding of media and technology. All of the PVK instructors had adopted a hand gesture from their students, a "hang loose" gesture that you point toward another person to connect to what they're saying. As Maria asked her questions, there were connections all around the room.

Kate built upon Maria's experience and reflected on her own experiences as a young child, saying, "I think I understood that Julia Roberts and Richard Gere were actors in *Pretty Woman*. But I refused to believe that they weren't really romantically involved together in real life. I don't know why, I just refused to accept that."

John commented on the ambiguity of animation in an age of special effects, noting the challenges children face in sorting out the *unreal realities* continually presented in film, videogames and on television. "It's that much harder when everything's so realistic. I mean, you watch the film *Avatar* and they're really trying to make it look like a seamless version of reality. That's much harder than cartoons and puppets."

We all must become more acutely aware the need to help even very young students begin to access, analyze, compose, reflect on, and act in the world through digital media and technology. We still have much to learn about working with the youngest, and perhaps most vulnerable, age groups, with a high level of sensitivity to their needs, developmental abilities,

and their sense of magic and wonder in the media landscape, where Julia Roberts and kung-fu pandas can exist in a nebulous space between reality and fantasy.

BEGIN TEXT BOX
What a Difference a Few Years Can Make

Fours and Fives

- Have trouble understanding the visual/auditory code of television: fade, cutting from one shot to another, switching of scenes, zooming from long shot to close up, splitting the screen, faceless narrator, canned laughter, events not shown on screen, changing channels
- Confused about fantasy vs. reality
- May be frightened by fantasy content
- Confused about the difference between programs and commercials
- Pay attention to sounds, bodily movements and special effects
- Frequently don't understand emotions of characters
- May have trouble understanding the central plot

Sixes and Sevens

- Understand the difference between fantasy and reality
- Are more frightened by news and reports of real violence than fantasy violence
- Distinguish between programs and commercials
- Begin to understand the persuasive intent of commercials
- Understand simple and complex emotions of characters
- Increasingly understand adult programs
- Understand the central plot of narrative stories presented on TV

Adapted from Hesse and Lane, 2002[112]

END TEXT BOX

Media and Technologies Change, but Do Children Change with Them?

Market researchers and media producers involved in children's media are rumored to say that they're lucky that "they get a whole new audience every three years." The quote points to a complicated component of teaching digital and media literacy to younger students, particularly those in kindergarten and early grades. When we see YouTube videos of babies intuitively "figuring out" cell phones or talk with a young child who can recite the stories of their favorite films and videogames for hours, we may not appreciate the gaps and misunderstandings that children may have about media and technology.

In working with her five-year olds, Maria saw firsthand the complicated balance between the intuitive nature of new technologies and developmental changes that happen in early childhood when her students, who knew and love many very complicated films laden with digital special effects, still struggled with basic distinctions between reality and fantasy. Developmental

psychologists exploring media literacy had identified these distinctions as crucial to teaching media literacy to young children as early as the late-1970s.[113] Understanding the differences between different visual forms—cartoons versus puppets or live-action television shows, or photographs versus illustrations—was a perennial concern for teaching young children, one that would always reassert itself in new generations of students.

At times, the teaching of visual symbol systems in photography, film, television, and online is referred to as "demystification" of children's media. This may have a negative connotation to many early childhood educators, who associate revealing the how-to of media production with a violation of the magic of children's inner worlds. Explaining to a young child that Bugs Bunny is not a real rabbit might be similar to explaining that Santa Claus is the product of our social imagination.

However, we have found that we can honor children's imagination and creativity and also respect their own boundaries around understanding "real and fake" by providing opportunities for them to understand and create visual stories themselves. Visual storytelling has many advantages for young children who are still learning the basic mechanics of print literacy. The saying tells us that a "picture is worth a thousand words." But a picture also conveys these meanings to us in ways that engage children's *verbal fluency*, their ability to share their ideas in language.

Kindergarten and first grade teachers are particularly sensitive to the developmental needs of their students. Compared with educators who work with older children, educators who teach the youngest grade levels have far more negative views about media and popular culture and are less likely to use media like DVDs, the Internet, and television in their own teaching practices. Kindergarten teachers may distrust exposure to television in particular, often fearing possible negative effects of early television viewing on a developmentally sensitive population. As we discussed in Chapter 2, there are meaningful risks associated with some kinds of media exposure. For example, researchers have found an association between the type of programming preschoolers children watch and their classroom behavior. In one study of low-income 4-year olds, parents were asked to report of media viewing habits and teachers were asked about classroom behavior including hitting and fighting with others, problems with paying attention, being nervous or tense, and being restless or fidgety. Viewing of inappropriate content (defined as watching PG-13 or R-rated videos/movies) was associated with higher hyperactivity and aggression scores and a lower social skills rating.[114]

Still, early childhood educators have taken full advantage of the positive power of media as a tool for learning. One such example is Ready To Learn, administered by the Public Broadcasting Service through a cooperative agreement from the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education in the U.S. Department of Education. Since 2005, at many public television stations, RTL coordinators have conducted 20 or more workshops each year with parents, childcare providers and early childhood educators. The PBS KIDS Raising Readers program has demonstrated significant gains in word recognition, phonological awareness, vocabulary acquisition, verbal expressiveness, and overall school readiness among children ages 2–8. For many low-income children, the program helps to close some of the pervasive achievement gaps between students from high-poverty backgrounds and their peers

from wealthier families.[115] Other research has found that preschool children who watch *Super Why* develop alphabet knowledge and letter recognition fluency skills.[116] Developed by Angela Santomero and Samantha Freeman Alpert, the program features a character called Whyatt who enrolls a group of Super Readers into a story. As the story develops, the characters encounter obstacles, which can be solved by applying their literacy skills to change the story.

Recognizing the Symbol Systems of Visual Media

When children understand visual symbol systems used in illustration, photography, video, and digital media, they begin a process of abstract thinking long before they have the decoding and comprehension skills to understand printed texts. In the same way that children can infer complex meaning from stories that are read to them, they can also makes inferences from pictures they see, videos they watch, or websites that they view.

When Renee worked to introduce digital and media literacy concepts in a preschool classroom, she began by bringing in her video camera. She simply recorded the activities of the morning activities using short 5 – 12 second shots creating a simple in-camera montage about three minutes in length. After about an hour, children gathered to review the video footage, thrilled to see images of themselves and their classroom teacher, entering the classroom, putting their coats in the cubbies, playing at the clay table, making structures with blocks and figuring out the puzzles.

"Did this movie show everything that happened this morning?" Renee asked the children who had gathered around the TV monitor to review the footage.

"Yes," the children said in unison. Renee probed for more. "What did you see?" Children talked about the scenes they had seen in the short film. "I saw Tyrone putting his coat on the hook," one child said. "I saw Wendy playing with the blocks," another said. Renee repeated the original question, "Did this movie show everything that happened this morning?"

Shyly, William raised his hand. "It didn't show *me* putting my coat on the hook," he said. "That's right," Renee acknowledged. Another child said, "It didn't show *me* climbing on the ladder." Renee explained that, when it comes to media messages, *all media messages are selective and incomplete.* By understanding video as a text, created by an author who makes choices, even young children can recognize that video is a representational system.

BEGIN TEXT BOX
Exploring Visual Representation with Young Children

Help students understand visual messages and visual storytelling with these activities:

Inside and Outside the Frame. Children use "I see…" statements to describe what they see in a photograph. Encourage many different responses to appreciate how different people pay attention to various elements of a photo. Then invite children to imagine what's outside the frame. What might they see if they were present at the location where the image was created?

Discuss the difference between probable and improbable possibilities. And remember: there's always a photographer present!

Illustration Versus Photograph. Learn the names for different types of visual representations. When children distinguish between realistic drawings and photographic representations of objects, they recognize that people create images using a variety of different tools. Encourage children to look at a variety of images and then create drawings and take digital photos. Discuss: What is special about a drawing of an object and the picture of the same object? How are they similar and different?

How Puppets Work. Making puppets is a fun hands-on way of talking about how some of young children's favorite characters from shows like *Sesame Street* are made. Discuss: What is the difference between a puppet and a cartoon? How are puppets made? How do puppets talk? Children can create puppets and compose simple dramatic performances.

Animation Versus Live Action. Children enjoy learning about how cartoons are made (many drawings are edited together to suggest movement) versus how live-action media is made (a camera records real people and things). Show a sample of different types of children's media. Discuss: How are shows with real people made? How are cartoons made? What do you enjoy about watching TV shows or movies that have real people in them? What do you enjoy about shows with animation? Children can create simple videos using their own drawings along with dramatic performance of the character voices.

Logos have Meanings. We know that children as young as three years old can sometimes identify the companies represented in "brand alphabets," which consist of popular letter-based brand logos (McDonalds' golden arches "M," the cursive Barbie "B," Walt Disney's characteristic "D") before they can read the real alphabet. Talking about familiar logos is something that even children in kindergarten and first grade can help children make a connection between visual representation and the print alphabet. Discuss: Why does this letter (or picture)—the logo—look the way it does? What company or product uses this letter (or picture)? How does this logo make you feel?
END TEXT BOX

Telling Digital Stories in Kindergarten

Technology specialist Mr. Landis was struggling to figure out how to integrate digital and media literacy with kindergarteners. He had lots of great ideas for projects with older children that developed their computer and digital literacy skills while offering them lots of storytelling opportunities making websites, writing songs, and finding images for class assignments. But younger children had other blocks to production activities that used web, digital, and video technologies. Their manual dexterity was unpredictable. Some of his first grade students had difficulty double-clicking a mouse. And, perhaps most challenging, it was very difficult to pull the thread of a lesson with them when there was a week between each computer class.

His partner teachers, Mr. Ivery and Ms. Al-Muid, had worked together a professional development environment, where classroom teachers developed techniques for integrating digital

and media literacy into their lessons. But they had concerns about the abstract nature of some of the activities that other teachers of older students were doing—talking about Civil Rights, environmentalism, and telling fiction and non-fiction stories were all well and good for third, fourth, and fifth grade students. But what was appropriate for kindergartners?

The kindergarten teachers suggested that students concentrate on inferring stories from images. They were learning about beginnings, middles, and endings of stories, and often used picture books to infer a narrative from a series of drawings. Mr. Landis wondered if there was a way to take this common activity and modify it so that students could create different stories for the same images.

Mr. Landis found himself re-watching some of the children's media that *he* found useful in understanding a variety of media messages when he was a young boy. He was particularly taken with a 1984 clip from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* in which Fred Rogers takes viewers through the entire process of making his television show. A wide shot revealed the television studio. Rogers explained how his puppets were made, and how someone else provided the voice. Viewers were invited to meet the "neighbors" in the television studio—the producers, directors, camera operators, musicians and others responsible for the hard work of creating a television program.

Insert Figure 8.1 here

How could Mr. Landis translate the ideas in this remarkable clip for his own younger students? Mr. Landis identified two key messages that he thought would be valuable and developmentally appropriate for his students. The first was that puppets, like all fictional characters, are constructed by their creators to have particular characteristics and points of view. Different puppets might feel differently about the same topic. Secondly, many puppets and other fictional characters that we are familiar with are framed on television so that you cannot see how they are manipulated. Understanding the *frame*, then, was deeply connected to understanding the process through which people and characters are represented in visual media. With these two ideas in mind, Mr. Landis developed a simple script template that his kindergarten and first grade students would use to create a unique character, develop that character by having it interact with another child's character, and then film this interaction in front of a fixed *frame*.

Step 1: Develop Characters. At ages 5 and 6, young children are still developing manual dexterity. This means that manipulating a computer mouse can be more difficult for some children than others. Mr. Landis gave his kindergarten and first grade students time to explore moving the mouse on the painting program Tux Paint, a close relative of early computer art program KidPix.

When children had developed their familiarity with moving the mouse, using different colors, and, in some cases, using "stamp tools" for patterned effects, Mr. Landis provided them with a gingerbread-man template on which they could design a character. At this point in the process, it was essential for students to learn how to *undo*. Young children can be frustrated when they cannot carry out ideas that they can imagine; the undo function of a computer is an elegant way for students to fix mistakes without having to start over from scratch. In some ways, learning how to "undo" was one of the most useful and important take-aways from the lesson.

To help them design their characters, Mr. Landis told students to imagine giving their character a name. This might look something like [profession] [name]—Bus Driver Tammy, Cowboy Ben, or Princess Latoya. Many children used the names of their favorite characters from popular culture, like Batman, Hannah Montana, and Ben-10. In these cases, Mr. Landis was sensitive to children's need to express themselves through familiar characters—he knew that he could no more prevent children from using Batman or Barbie than he could prevent them from modeling characters on their family members, teachers, and members of their community.

Soon, the class had 24 characters who would enact 12 scripts (one per pair of students). Mr. Landis observed some common characteristics. Many girls chose princesses and girls' dolls like Barbie and Bratz as inspiration for their characters, while many boys used superheroes and athletes. Many children used the names of friends and relatives, while others made up "nonsense names" that they imagined. And some children defied expectations, as when a boy in class created a Hannah Montana character or a girl created a variation on Spider-man. It was important, Mr. Landis thought, to honor the many ways that students both embraced and challenged the expectations from normative popular culture.

Step 2: Write the script. For children still developing basic print literacy skills, any writing can be a daunting prospect. In this exercise, children did a minimum of print writing—limited to writing their character names—but were still engaged as budding storytellers. Mr. Landis developed a flexible six-line script template that all children could understand and change according to their own ideas and their understanding of their character. In the script, one character is sad, and the other character suggests an activity that might make him or her happy again.

When David observed Mr. Landis work with a group of children to produce a set of scripts, it was clear that he not only engaged his students as storytellers—he also engaged them as *audience members*. Mr. Landis helped children think about how different types of audiences might respond in different ways. While the children performed, the other children were asked to role-play a particular kind of audience. A "polite audience" gave presenters a soft golf clap. An "older audience" was encouraged to shout "Huzzah!" after each performance. There was even a "dog audience" who barked or howled with approval after a performance. This kept students engaged in listening attentively as they considered how their new audience role might be epected to react to each performance.

Another feature of the lesson was the way in which established popular culture characters and original characters alike responded in inventive ways to their problems. Superheroes, princesses, and bus drivers could all use a feature of their identity to solve the problem. When a

princess was sad that she lost her tiara, a bus driver offered to drive her to get a new one. When Batman lost his jet pack, an astronaut offered to give him a ride in her spaceship. Established characters took on new features imagined by students through improvisation, while original characters developed personalities based on their profession or, more simply, through the imaginative leaps of their young creators.

No doubt about it: even at age five, children's gender roles and a consumer-oriented approach to solving problems with "stuff" were deeply entrenched in many of the children's emerging understanding of the world. Not surprisingly, children often framed problems as coming from a lack of resources (clothes, food, money, technology) and solutions as the supply of these resources. For example, in children's stories, happy characters comforted sad characters by offering to buy them gifts. Girls were often offered jewelry or clothing, while boys were offered technology and toys. Again, Mr. Landis needed to be sensitive to children's improvisation—though he made it clear that violent solutions were unacceptable, more complicated matters of representation sometimes required Mr. Landis to honor students' lived experience even when their stories betrayed social values that he personally found problematic.

BEGIN TEXT BOX
Scripting Templates for Storytelling

By creating a template script with a *problem* and a *solution* that young children could understand, Mr. Landis ensured that every kindergartner in his class would create his or her own unique story in a simple collaborative process.

CHARACTER 1: Hello, CHARACTER 2 .
CHARACTER 2: Hello, CHARACTER 1 .
CHARACTER 1: I feel sad because _____.
CHARACTER 2: I could make you feel happy again by _____.
CHARACTER 1: Thank you, CHARACTER 2.
CHARACTER 2: You're welcome, CHARACTER 1.
END TEXT BOX

Step 3: Frame and film your scene. The concept of the *frame* is a foundational one in photography and video production. The frame is "what we see" when we watch a television show or movie, when we play a video game or watch a video on YouTube. In the video production process, making a frame determines what aspects of the world around us will become a part of our film. You can make a frame right now: simply form a rectangle between the thumb and index fingers on both hands.

For young students to understand the way framing works, they might consider frames on paper, first. Mr. Landis had created special backdrops with different settings (a rural, urban, and fantasy scene) that he tacked to the wall. He put blue paper tape around the frame so that its boundaries were clearly drawn. Then students placed their popsicle stick gingerbread figures in front of the paper. He instructed them: "Make sure your character stays in the frame."

However, for young children, translating one medium of expression to another can be a challenging cognitive task. It was not necessarily intuitive to all students that what they were seeing on paper would also be the movie they were making once the camera was turned on. Mr. Landis's solution to this problem was to set up a monitor on which they could view their frame in real time. They would see that every movement of their hands changed the way their figure appeared on the screen.

Mr. Landis's students worked on a decidedly less avant-garde production, performing the scripts they had written just below the frame line of their shot. They had to think about several different aspects of production simultaneously. They needed to speak loudly and clearly; they needed to hold their characters still, moving them as intentionally as possible to "walk toward" other characters; they had to be careful not to get their own hand in the shot. When a student's hand did enter a shot, other students in the class would whisper excitedly: "I can see his hand! They need a do-over!"

The project was successful, but Mr. Landis also noted some limitations of the exercise. Young students' imagination seemed to be limited after their initial brainstorming and character drawings. As we noted earlier, media production can be extremely time-consuming when there are 20 to 25 students working together. The possibility of losing students' interest in the tedium of production is a real one—all the more reason why it is so important to develop students' understanding through mini-lessons in areas like framing, creative choices in video-making, and giving a performance during recording.

Playing "Spot the Shot"

Kate, another instructor, also experimented with how to develop the media literacy competencies of very young children. She wanted children to recognize that film and video are constructed of short segments that have been assembled together. She introduced the concept of the *shot*, the duration of a frame between video edits. Shots can also be defined by how close the subject is to the camera: close up, medium shot, and long shot. To depict a romantic relationship, a traditional "shot" and "reverse shot" pattern from classic Hollywood film might be used where we might see Humphrey Bogart's face, then Ingrid Bergman's, then Humphrey Bogart's again—three shots. Christian Metz, a French film theorist, argued that cinema is structured like a language where shots are fundamental building blocks. Unlike language, however, film does not use a strict grammar and syntax equivalent to that of the written or spoken word. Instead, individual cinematic texts construct their own meaning systems.[117] Particular shots derive their meaning from their relationship to the content and the form of the images that precede and follow them.

To help her students understand how all videos contain a series of shots, Kate brought into the classroom some footage she had taken of her pet dog. On a FlipCam, she had filmed the dog in a variety of angles that were clearly different. One was a close-up of the dog's face. Another was the dog walking through the park. A third was the dog's feet moving on the ground. Did children recognize that the images were all taken to represent her dog? Yes, they did.

Then Renee encouraged Kate to play Spot the Shot with her students. In this game, students watch a short video and pay attention to shot changes. They clap their hands together whenever they notice a new shot. In this piece, each shot was a duration of about seven seconds. Shot of the dog's face—CLAP. Shot of the dog's whole body walking—CLAP. Shot of the dog's feet—CLAP.

Kate played Spot the Shot with her students using advertising (47 shots in 30 seconds—whew!) They discussed how a rapidly paced ad, with so many shot changes, would practically force viewers to pay attention. After a few games like this, their knowledge of frames and shots seemed to stick. David was particularly amused to enter the classroom one day to find Kate showing her second graders the final poetic scene in Michelangelo Antonioni's 1969 film *Blow-Up*, in which two mimes mimic a game of tennis. Close-up of the mime's face—CLAP! Wide shot of the tennis court—CLAP! Cut to the face of the protagonist—CLAP! How thrilling for children to get their first exposure to a classic Italian film director in primary school!

Small Steps for Younger Students and Their Teachers

Mr. Ivery and his teaching partner Ms. Al-Muid, two kindergarten teachers, were interested in incorporating visual storytelling with their students after developing ideas in our professional development workshop. The story of how their project evolved is a nice illustration of why digital and media literacy can help students expand their creativity and critical thinking, even at very young ages.

Mr. Ivery teaches his pre-kindergarten students "how to go to school," which is a complex set of social practices that involve speaking, listening, taking turns and creating. For Mr. Ivery, helping students control impulses and emotions, remain calm, and take turns is just as important as teaching them fundamental knowledge about letters, words, and numbers. Like many preschool and primary-level teachers, he takes a conservative approach to the use of media and technology in his classroom. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has reported that this is true for many early elementary educators, who are more reluctant than their colleagues working with older students to use media like television shows, DVDs, the Internet and computer games.[118] When students may be struggling to sit still, or may be developing the fine motor skills necessary to handle scissors, Mr. Ivery doesn't find much value to examine TV shows, videogames, commercials or websites. Mr. Ivery occasionally told us that these kinds of exercises seemed too advanced for his students.

But we knew that when Mr. Ivery taught early and pre-literacy skills, he often used picture books and other visual imagery to activate his students' abilities to tell stories and make inferences. Asking predictive questions ("What might happen next?"), for instance, is equally applicable to both traditional and new literacy approaches—it activates students' abilities to infer information from a text, a skill that supports and may strengthen their ability to read.[119]

BEGIN TEXT BOX
Digital Resources for Young Children

Toon Books

http://toon-books.com
Comics support the literacy skills of emerging readers in this engaging online resource which includes both a "toon reader" and a "cartoon-maker" that enables young children to create and share their own simple cartoons.

International Children's Digital Library
http://en.childrenslibrary.org/
This international website offers a variety of children's literature from all over the world in more than a dozen languages.

One More Story
http://onemorestory.com
Students can access both new and classic children's books digitally in an interactive read-aloud format. Each story has lots of opportunities to pause and ask questions about stories and images.

END TEXT BOX

Ms. Al-Muid, Mr. Ivery's teaching partner, had a different set of strengths in the classroom. An avid popular culture fan and a contributor to Philadelphia's independent music scene, Ms. Al-Muid had an investment in the way that students engage with popular culture and mass media even from a young age. She was excited to use FlipCams, comics, and other media in the classroom with the kindergarten students. While Mr. Ivery's initial plan was to present a visual story and have students put images in the correct order, Ms. Al-Muid had a different idea. Sensing an opportunity to activate students' creativity, she suggested letting different students put images in different orders, so that they would become the storytellers themselves. Dave and Renee were not sure which approach was more developmentally appropriate. Our observations in Mr. Landis's class suggested that, in fact, young children were not only capable of creating original stories of their own, but were but were hungry for opportunities to develop the kinds of personal narratives in school that they did when they played with their favorite toys, dolls, and action figures at home.

As they planned and worked together to create this activity, Mr. Ivery and Ms. Al-Muid decided to use a story that had one image sequence, but they asked students to then change the story in their own words, using the same image sequence to try to tell *different* stories. They used the children's comic book *Silly Lilly*, a volume in the Toon-Books children's series that commissions prominent comics artists to create developmentally-appropriate cartoons and comics for K-6 classrooms. Their learning target for the day was, "I can create a new story by changing the *beginning*, *middle*, and *ending* of the story."

We were pleased to see that these kindergarten teachers had used the professional development workshop to reflect on both the kinds of texts and the kinds of questions they could incorporate into their curriculum. Too often professional development workshops, particularly for teachers with high levels of sensitivity to developmental appropriateness, ask teachers to radically change their classroom practices with media and technology. We were heartbroken to see two experienced kindergarten teachers in another partner school struggling with a SmartBoard that had been installed against their wishes in the middle of their white board space.

These teachers were new to PC technology, and delays and confusion from inadequate professional development support for new technology had a detrimental effect on their teaching practice as they struggled to do basic daily learning tasks like changing a date from one day to the next or record the weather outside. In our professional development programs, we try to honor the small steps teachers in early elementary grades take to find modest but meaningful ways to integrate media and technology into their early literacy instruction.

One reason we advocate small steps is due to the very limited knowledge that is available about the role of media and technology in the lives of young children. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends no screen media time for children under the age of two.[120] There are countless YouTube videos that show parents ignoring this advice, instead displaying precocious children, some still in infancy, exploring new screen technologies. One famous example comes from the young child who tries to "swipe" a magazine like a tablet device, to the amusement of her parents. There is very little evidence to support the value of media and technology that is marketed as educational for preschool children, like the Baby Einstein videos . Part of the conservative stances that early elementary educators take regarding media in the classroom may stem from a skepticism of the value of technologies like LeapFrog, e-readers, educational videos, and computer programs which claim to give very young children a "leg up" intellectually.

We have found that professional development in digital and media literacy for early elementary educators can be most useful, and perhaps most effective, when we trust teachers' expertise of their young students while gently pushing at the boundaries of their comfort levels with media and technology.

We know that some important developing competencies in early literacy—including visual, oral, and early print literacy storytelling in a variety of forms—can be enhanced and expanded when we expand our conceptualization of literacy to include visual, audio, and interactive forms. A story is, after all, still a story, and the many stories that students can imagine and share can be developed across a wide variety of media even in early elementary classrooms.

ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER 8

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CHAPTER 9
Authors and Audiences: Assessing Digital and Media Literacy

In this chapter, we'll learn about:

Understanding target audiences. How can we activate students' potential as authors who make important choices about their own work and audiences who understand and appreciate the work of others?

Making inferences. Why does the use of a variety of message forms (print, visual, audio, digital) help children to go beyond the information given to comprehend the purpose and content of messages?

Direct and embedded instruction. How do both analysis and creative composition activities help young students think abstractly about authors and audiences?

By the time enter school, students are already making sense of the variety of media they encounter on a daily basis—stories are stories, whether children are talking about their favorite TV shows and films, the imaginary situations characters might get into during play, or reading children's literature and picture books. But soon, children also begin to become faintly aware of their roles as *audience members* for their favorite stories and as *authors* of their own original stories.

The relationship between *author and audience* is the most fundamental relationship in any media communication. Authors make creative and intentional choices when they create work, and often have specific target audiences in mind. Audiences have expectations based on their own values and prior experience with media, including understanding genres and purposes.

When we ask children about their favorite media, they often focus on vague ideas of authorship and target audiences for a work. The world of a young child is often magical, and media indulges concepts of magic (as in the "movie magic" of special-effects-laden summer blockbusters). Children react in a corresponding way to the invisible processes through which their favorite books, TV shows, movies, videogames, and websites are created, and the particular audiences authors have in mind when they make their work.

And yet by age 8, we also notice that kids are also far more likely than their 6- and 7-year-old classmates to begin to identify the broad contours of types of *authorship* (writers, directors, singers, animators, programmers) and types of *target audience* (boys, girls, kids, adults). When we ask children in second and third grade about advertisements, they might note what products are being advertised ("That's the one for cereal" or "This one is a toy commercial") or who the ads are for ("My mom uses that" or "That's just for girls").

Though teachers are usually comfortable breaking down story structure, purpose, and point of view in children's literature, we wonder about how analysis reshapes interpretation. Does knowing who the authors of films are and how they're made increase or decrease the pleasure of watching them? Does knowing that ads target specific audience members make young students overly cynical or increase their materialism?

It turns out that most children that we have worked with in early elementary classrooms not only accept new knowledge about authorship and audiences, they have quite a bit to say about it, even as young as eight years old. After all, they spend hours with media of all kinds—watching TV, reading their favorite books, playing favorite videogames, and watching favorite films repeatedly.

Often children have an "aha moment" when abstract concepts of authorship and audiences are discussed in relation to media they are familiar with. Their intuitive and emerging sense of the construction of media ("how did they make that?") now has the power of *reasoning* and *vocabulary* behind it. Just as we often think of 2nd and 3rd grade as prime time to explore the ways in which children's books are made by certain people for certain audiences, we might also expand our definition of texts to include other media producers and the audiences they actively imagine and connect to through their work.

Teaching Authors and Audiences to Younger Students

Kate was frustrated during the second week of working with 6- and 7-year olds. As someone interested in health and gender issues, Kate wanted to help her students differentiate between different kinds of gender role messages that target boys and girls in advertisements for children. She had planned an elaborate production activity in which students would create an advertisement for the "wrong" target audience. That is, they would discuss who a particular product in a magazine was "for," and then reverse those assumptions through a drawing activity. Only afterward, once students were engaged in a meaningful composition activity, would Kate formally name the practice as "targeting" a particular audience.

Kate knew that there were no wrong answers, strictly speaking, when it came to inferring target audience from a text. After all, authors' immediate intentions can only be guessed at, though some guesses may be more useful than others.[121] She knew, for instance, that most of the children in her class identified Barbie dolls as "girls' toys" and action figures as "boys' toys."

What she wanted to see was her students moving away from the simple answers that she had seen in informal conversations about audiences for television shows, advertisements, and movies. Her students frequently said that shows, ads, and films were for "everybody," even though follow-up questions revealed that often only "me and my sister" or "my older brother and my dad" were likely to be interested. Kate noticed that her children frequently drew directly from concrete family experience but had trouble abstracting that experience into a broader category. For instance, students might say, "My mom loves this show, but my dad watches it, too" but had trouble saying, "Women love this show, but men watch it, too." Could children this young understand the abstract concept of audience?

Prior to creating a print ad using crayons and markers, students first identified "who might like" to play with or use Barbie dolls, toy trucks, and perfume. The majority of the class decided on "girls," "boys," and "older women," respectively, and Kate wrote these answers on the white board. Then Ms. Kate asked students to draw a new ad for the same product, but target "someone else"—a group different from the one they had chosen. She wrote other groups on the board—"older men" and "teenagers."

Students then worked in pairs to create these ads. One team drew a perfume advertisement for "older men." Another group decided to draw a girl's truck advertisement. But when children actually began to draw, Kate realized that they were still replicating advertisements they had just viewed—the truck drawing included a picture of a boy, and the perfume advertisement included a picture of a woman. Kate believed that her students had not fully understood the assignment for a variety of reasons. She believed that her own expectations as the teacher were too ambiguous, and that the concepts were still too unfamiliar to students. Kate reflected on this experience, writing, "I realized that you have to be more explicit it what you want. I feel like I had heard from other teachers, about the older kids [in the program], that it was easier to embed the ideas [in an activity]. Maybe to make it less like 'school.' But at this age that didn't seem to work, so I was more explicit."

Kate revised her existing curriculum to include a new activity that would more clearly demonstrate the concept of targeting an audience. First, she simplified the range of potential answers. From conversations with her students, she knew that they were aware of gender differences—often debating whether or not a particular show, movie, or product was "really" just for girls or boys. For instance, one girl in Kate's class argued, "But I play football, too, so football isn't just for boys."

Kate's students were not as clearly able to distinguish between adults, often confusing teenagers and older adults. They seemed better able to think in terms of family relations—grandpa and grandma were "older men and women," mom and dad were "adult women and adult men," older brothers or sisters were "older boys and girls," and little brothers or sisters were "younger boys and girls."

Then Kate created nametags with these categories on them. Each student in the class would wear a different name tag and "act the part"—so a girl playing an "older man" might affect a speech pattern like a grandfather, and a boy playing a "young girl" might teasingly mimic a little sister. Next came the introduction of the "target" tool, a red bullseye made of construction paper. Kate showed her students a print or television advertisement, and then asked them to put the "bullseye" on the audience being targeted.

Students enjoyed role-playing different audiences. An "old man" bent over and acted like he was walking with a cane. Kate explained the instructional process she used in her classroom. "I asked one student to hold a red circle made of construction paper, which was the 'target.' Then I would show the class an advertisement or commercial and ask the student to put the target on the person who was wearing the most accurate target audience label. And then we would discuss it afterwards as a group, to see if we all agreed. It was designed to really get them to understand that a target audience is not just anybody."

By using these types of learning games, Kate was able to reinforce the practice of targeting an audience. Once she began to develop mnemonics, charts, and other ways for her to focus heavily on memorization and repetition, Kate found that her rising second graders could more easily participate in a discussion of abstract concepts. Kate struggled with concerns about introducing ambiguity into her classroom that affect many elementary educators, particularly those working with younger children.

Like Kate, Mona found that her students had a difficult time understanding "target audience." Mona tried to explain the concept to her rising third grade students, but as she recalls, they seemed only to answer with personal examples of audience members like "my dad" or "my friends."

Mona had tried to explain "target audience" during the first two days of formal instruction in Powerful Voices for Kids. But she quickly found that her students better understood the concept when it was "revealed" to them some time at the end of the week. She describes the students' "aha moment," the result of a completely different activity. Kate explained, "It wasn't until we saw the Justin Bieber video for "Baby"— I asked them, 'Who do you think they're targeting?' And they asked, 'What do you mean?' I said, 'Well, who do you

think they're trying to get to watch this video?' Then we talked about it and they were saying, 'Yes, little girls or boys.' I said, 'And *that's* your target audience.' And it was just like, [snaps her fingers] ahhh!"

Mona observed that this pattern of revealing formal terms after embedding the concepts in other activities like view-and-discuss, student composition, and media production, seemed to repeat itself time and again over the course of the summer enrichment program. She was particularly interested in the way that production activities helped her students reinforce formal learning concepts like authors' purpose and target audience. Mona explained, "We talked about [purpose and target audience] when we would listen to music. We talked about it when we were *writing* the song. I said, 'What's your message? What are you trying to tell people?' And they replied, 'We want to tell people to be in charge and kids to stand up for what they believe in,' and things like that. Putting the concepts in practice is when we would talk about author, message…"

Mona found that her most successful activities were the ones that unlocked her students' potential as authors of original works, including songs, commercials, public service announcements, and poetry. When students developed a coherent message and could then find a form through which to convey it, they not only created inventive work, they also "got it" intellectually.

When Mona asked her students to tell her what a "purpose" is ("the reason something was created," e.g. to entertain you, to inform you, or to persuade you), they had trouble articulating their answers. But when they created short advertisements for toys they invented in class, they had a clear understanding of their purpose—to get other kids to want to buy their toys.

Talking about a "target audience" for a given media text was not as successful for Mona's students as it was for Kate's students. Mona's students were able to discuss who the target audience was for a Justin Bieber video they were familiar with, but found it more difficult to discuss target audiences of products they were unfamiliar with, like cars or clothing. But when they created their own poetry, they identified who it was they wanted to reach with their work—other kids their age, the Philadelphia community, or parents of kids their age.

BEGIN TEXT BOX
What's the "Right" Answer?

When thinking about authors and audiences, we always make *inferences* about what we read, hear, or see. There is no one right answer. But there are many questions we might ask of students that require them to think *abstractly* about media based on evidence, such as:

- What do you think the authors' purpose was for making this?
- Who do you think the target audience was?
- What might someone else say about this text?
- What did the authors leave out?

END TEXT BOX

Direct and Embedded Instruction Techniques

Why did Mona feel that her kids didn't "get it" when she taught them explicitly about abstract concepts like "target audience" and "purpose"? And why did Kate feel like her composition and production activities were not nearly as effective as the direct instruction that seemed inadequate to Mona? To a large degree, the answer lies in the comfort levels and teaching styles of the instructors themselves.

Kate was a new teacher who had previously participated in digital and media literacy workshops with teenagers about more adult issues like representations of sex and violence in mainstream media. In adapting her style to an age group with which she was unfamiliar, she frequently relied on more ambiguous projects that, though appropriate for older students, may have confused her younger students. But her direct instruction technique connected with students—by asking them questions that were more sophisticated than what they were asked in print literacy lessons (such as, "Why do you think that commercial is just for boys?" – a question more difficult to ask of more gender-neutral children's literature), she found that they had to stretch their reasoning skills.

Mona, on the other hand, was a poet and songwriter. She had little teaching experience, particularly with younger children. But she knew how to explain her own process as an artist, demonstrating rhyme patterns and brainstorming methods that she used in her own poetry and songwriting. When Mona used direct instruction, it was often in a transitional point in a lesson when students were still grasping the significance of what they had just learned. Her lessons were almost always built around a meaningful composition activity, which means that her children were constantly being engaged as *authors*, not just as students reading others' works.

There are countless debates in the education world about the role of *direct instruction*—the explicit teaching of key concepts—and *embedded instruction*—the learning of key concepts through hands-on activities. Progressive educators have long derided direct instruction as a "transmission" model, in which teachers merely impart knowledge to their students without offering a way for students to take ownership of the knowledge for themselves. Direct instruction does not assume that students will develop insights on their own. Instead, direct instruction takes learners through the steps of learning systematically. When teachers explain exactly what students are expected to learn, and demonstrate the steps needed to accomplish a particular academic task, students are likely to use their time more effectively and to learn more. Teachers who value direct instruction set clear goals for students, making sure they understand the goals. They present a sequence of well-organized assignments and ask frequent questions to see if the students understand the work. Finally, teachers give students opportunities to practice what they have learned. For elementary children, direct instruction designed to help children recognize and construct a main idea from a paragraph or a short passage has been found to be highly effective in supporting reading comprehension skills.[122]

Any teacher who has felt the pressures of high-stakes testing knows that not all concepts "teach themselves," even in a progressive learning environment. Many teachers are distrustful of

long composition and production activities that threaten the momentum of a specific set of learning goals. Education scholar Lisa Delpit has noted the ways in which composition activities that allow students to express their fluency without explicitly developing basic skills often leave vulnerable in contexts in which those skills matter most, like high-stakes tests, college applications, or job interviews.[123]

In our experience, both direct instruction and embedded instruction through production activities have benefits to students. There are developmental considerations: in second grade, many students are just emerging from a period of development in which reality and fantasy are difficult to separate. Abstract reasoning is a cognitive challenge, and one that might benefit from a variety of approaches.

What's more, when we conducted program-end research on students' competencies in media literacy, we found that both Ms. Kate's and Ms. Mona's classes did exceptionally well in identifying the message purpose and target audience of a randomly selected group of images from television. After their direct instruction lessons in target audience, Ms. Kate's and Ms. Mona's 8- and 9-year-olds—most of them students who had been selected for academic remediation—outperformed control group students who were several years older than them.

Realistically, it is important to recognize the power of setting standards for student achievement, even when those achievements are in fields that can be highly complex and ambiguous. We know that there are no "right answers" when we talk about the inferences we make from media. And yet we continue to make inferences, some that are useful (understanding the ways in which some commercials are marketed to boys and some to girls at very young ages) and some that are less useful (gossip and speculation about the personal shortcomings of celebrities).

We found that offering an explicit vocabulary and reasoning process to read and write with a variety of media forms, in a respectful environment that valued multiple interpretations, actually *strengthened* students' abilities to create new and exciting work of their own, and to take their first steps as authors themselves.

Meeting Real Authors and Reaching Real Audiences

Students also benefited from meeting real authors in the classroom through author visits and video chats. When students are able to ask questions to real authors and know that their own work is being seen by real audiences, it transforms their learning from something that just happens "at school" to the kind of learning that has an impact on the world around them.

Kate's students received direct instruction to better understand abstract concepts like "target audience," "purpose," and types of authorship. But they also met a real filmmaker, independent producer/director Barry Jenkins, who took time out of his busy schedule to answer several questions they had about his work. Mr. Jenkins not only answered their questions, but created a short film with a musical soundtrack in which he addressed each child's question and answered it—questions including "who is your target audience?" and "did you make your movie alone or with friends?"

Author visits connect students the real world of all forms of media production, from the process of writing children's literature to filmmaking and web design. But merely meeting an author is not all that students can do to make real-world connections. Students at Wayne Elementary School not only met popular children's author James Agee on a book tour; they also produced their own "remix" responses to his book *The Life of a Retired Kid* to present to him when he visited the school. They interacted with the author's text more deeply by creating their own work after reading the book, and got to hear the author's response firsthand.

Some relationships between professional authors and student authors yield new opportunities to reach real audiences. Mona's students, who worked on several poetry projects during their summer instruction, met one of the advertisers responsible for a popular anti-littering campaign in Philadelphia, "Unlitter Us." The advertiser showed students some rough drafts of several popular advertisements featured on buses and billboards in the city. She also talked about the number of people responsible for designing the look, feel, and message of these advertisements.

When she had finished showing students the process through which she and her team created the Unlitter Us advertisements, she asked students if they might like to create a poem of their own that would tell the people of Philadelphia to keep their city clean. The children were excited to work on a professional product that they knew would have a real audience.

Measuring Digital and Media Literacy with Elementary School Students

Researchers are just beginning to understand how digital and media literacy interventions may affect the print literacy competencies of young children. Research with high school students has found that teens who get a year-long media literacy and communication program as part of English language arts outperform a matched control group of students enrolled in a literature-based curriculum on reading comprehension, writing and critical analysis of advertising and news.[124]

When children who cannot read or write can still recite the plots of their favorite movies, tell you all about the characters in their favorite TV shows, describe their feelings about their favorite music and how it makes them feel, and teach you how to play one of their favorite videogames, they are demonstrating fluency in communicating about their media worlds without necessarily being able to read or write well about them. Some groups, like the National Writing Project, have seized on the power of fluency to tell stories in a variety of forms, encouraging students to be creative through new literacies activities like digital storytelling. People who are still developing print literacy skills may nonetheless be fluent in their native languages, as when people who cannot read and write nonetheless tell stories, share information, and communicate with others through oral language.

Some scholars note, however, that for many disadvantaged children, any attempt to activate young students' imaginations through storytelling must also concern itself with the kinds

of traditional literacy practices that are essential to effective academic and professional communication in the world.[125]

In researching children's inference-making about television programs, we focused on the kinds of inferences that people make when they identify the *purpose* of media, or why someone made it (e.g. "a commercial persuades you to buy products"), and the *target audience* of media (e.g. "this was made for teenagers"). Teacher-librarians in the elementary grades identify these concepts as basic skills for information and media literacy. We wondered if there was any relationship between children's reading comprehension abilities as measured on widely-recognized standardized reading tests and their ability to identify the purpose and target audience of a media message.[126]

Further, we wondered whether or not the Powerful Voices for Kids program had any significant impact on children who participated as compared to their peers, who did not receive summer enrichment. We saw strong observational evidence of meaningful learning experiences, the development of skills in a variety of media production skills, and a greater comfort among students to connect their in-school learning to their home media contexts, as you have seen in previous chapters. But we still wondered about how, in a test-driven educational environment, we might better be able to speak to the immediate concerns of principals, administrators, community and government stakeholders, and teachers by connecting some of our own successes to the kinds of assessment they often value most.

When it comes to digital media and learning, we must begin with the end in mind. Sonia Livingstone asked this question of the digital and media literacy community: "What are digital learning projects designed to enable the learning of?"[127]One thing that seems clear from our research is that our younger students who had exposure to digital and media literacy enrichment—which as you have noticed in our previous chapters come in a variety of forms depending on classroom context—are successful in making inferences that are associated with comprehension and meaning-making.

Some researchers have explored the complex ways in which children make inferences about narrative stories presented on television, finding that children who are exposed to adult commentary about TV shows are better able to make inferences that support narrative comprehension as compared with children who do not have access to adult commentary.[128] But little research has addressed children's ability to make inferences about message purpose and target audience of a variety of types of television content. In our study, we compared the scores of Powerful Voices for Kids participants, all rising 1st through 6th grade students, to the scores of their peers who had not participated in the program. We used a simple card sort task with two parts. Children were given a pile of images from a variety of familiar TV shows and asked to sort the cards. We first asked children: Could they categorize television shows according to their target audience? For instance, an image from a commercial for children's cereal Fruity Pebbles might plausibly be identified as being "for children" while an image of local news show might be seen as reaching adults. Then we asked children to sort the cards based on the purpose of the message—categorizing differences in why the show was made. A child might recognize that the Fruity Pebbles image may be recognized as "to get you to buy cereal" (to persuade) while the local news show was designed "to tell you what's happening in the city" (to inform).

We found that rising second, third, and fourth grade students who participated in the media literacy program out-performed their peers who were not enrolled in the program. This was especially important because 75% of the students enrolled in the media literacy program were children who required academic remediation, that is, they were in the bottom 20% of their class. It appears that, with either embedded or direct instruction techniques, children were able to learn to make inferences about the purpose and target audience of media messages.

For the older children who participated in our study, the findings confirm the differences between the children enrolled in regular instruction and the children enrolled in PVK program. Those enrolled in the PVK program were those at the bottom of their class and were required to attend the program or risk grade retention. Children who participated in the Powerful Voices for Kids program were specifically identified as "struggling" academically through their standardized test scores, which were significantly lower than their control group peers. So we were disappointed, but not surprised, that these children did significantly worse at making inferences than their more academically-talented peers.

Insert Figure 9.1 here

Measuring Digital and Media Literacy Inference-Making Ability

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However, when we looked at the performance of all students, we found that inference-making about purpose and target audience is strongly correlated to assessment of students' reading comprehension as measured on standardized reading but not math scores. Inference-making is a fundamental component of reading comprehension.

One question that we have yet to answer, but are actively exploring, is to what extent engaging students' inference-making abilities about multiple media forms, as Kate and Mona did in their work with children, might have a beneficial impact on their print literacy skills. What the data suggests is that there is a sizeable difference between the performance of students in rising Grade 2 and 3 classrooms compared to their control group peers. Kate's students excelled at a level that was statistically significant, which suggests that direct instruction about the concepts of purpose and target audience may be particularly useful with young children. We wonder whether our results might be a glimpse of some of the potential of introducing digital and media literacy concepts and activities as young as possible.

One thing is certain: exploring the worlds of mass media, popular culture and digital media may motivate some children to apply the effort and practice required to master the skills of reading and writing print texts. Kate shared a powerful story with us about one student, whom we will call Bonnie, who showed particular difficulty with print literacy. When asked to write any words with a pencil, even her own name, she would set the pencil aside and claim that it was lost. When Kate challenged her, she took the pencil and broke it in half. She was given another pencil. She immediately snapped that one in half, too.

Kate came to our daily reflection circle in tears that day. "I don't understand what I can do to help her. She has so much to say in class, she's so smart—*so* smart—but she just can't write it down." We all strive to help children like Bonnie overcome her anxieties about print literacy. We believe that there are a variety of forms of writing and communication that will add to Bonnie's toolkit. Some of these will help Bonnie to use her mind well. As we have shown in this chapter, digital and media literacy education uses a variety of forms of media tie children's creativity directly to the many competencies involved in acquiring print literacy.

ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER 9

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Chapter 10
Transforming Practice

In this chapter, you'll learn about:

The digital and media literacy learning curve. How do teachers deal with their wide variety of skill and comfort levels with mass media, popular culture, digital media, and new technology?

Student-centered learning. How can teachers harness their creativity while managing time and order in the classroom?

Professional development for digital and media literacy. How can professional development models help inspire educators to try out new approaches to teaching and learning?

When Henry explained to friends, family, and other professionals that he would be working at Powerful Voices for Kids during the summer of 2009 as a media literacy teacher, they responded by saying, "Oh, like teaching computers and stuff." Henry tried to explain that it was a bit more complicated, involving not just training in computers and emerging technologies but "helping children make sense of the full range of mass media and popular culture in their lives, using media and technology as a resource to teach traditional literacy skills, and gaining information about social issues and other topics unrelated to media and technology."

Henry was about to get a deep-end dive in the media literacy education pool. On the first day of the Powerful Voices for Kids program in 2009, there he stood, along with eight other nervous-looking young teachers (most of them graduate students) all in their 20s or early 30s, in their bright blue t-shirts with the Powerful Voices for Kids logo, standing in the lobby of the school, waiting for 77 children to arrive. Few had worked with children younger than 12 although most had at least some experience as an instructor in summer camps, after-school programs, religious education or other informal learning situations. It was a time of great expectations.

The first day of class was exhilarating and exhausting. Here's how David reflected on his first day of teaching: "Wasn't sure what to expect, but I thought that the kids were a lot smarter in ways I wasn't expecting; for one thing, they know technology like crazy, and I'm guessing they won't need very much time with technical instruction." When he asked children bout their media preferences that first day, there was a lot of talk about Michael Jackson, *The Transformers* movie, and Teen People magazine. Children talked about musical artists including Lil Wayne and Cold Flamez."

David could see right away that children weren't sure about what was "appropriate" or "inappropriate" to share when it came to talking about TV shows, movies, and especially music. He recognized that the regular teachers at the school "probably think that even the Teen Vogue stuff is risqué." While some kids are devoted to the Disney Channel, others are listening to gangster rap and heavy metal. As David wrote in his journal, "In other words, they're twelve!"

Creating Powerful Learning Communities

Today, educators have an increasing number of options to advance their knowledge and skills through both face-to-face and online professional development programs, including seminars, workshops, conferences and other gatherings. Teacher online professional networks, where educators can share and learn from each other, are especially useful in helping inspire teachers to see themselves as lifelong learners. In recent years, there has been an explosion of interest in helping teachers use digital technology tools in supporting the professional development of teachers. In many types of professional development programs, the power of the specialist with external expertise is emphasized. Teachers may watch an online interview of a well-known expert, for

example, or attend a conference where that individual is speaking. Some of these professionals inevitably get raised to "guru" status as their efforts are perceived to make a valuable contribution to the continuing education of teachers.[129]

But as everyone knows, access to an educational guru alone will not create transformative change. Some combination of external expertise and peer support networks is thought to be most effective in supporting teacher growth and development.[130] Our approach to professional development is rooted in the formation of a learning community, where through a combination of demonstration and modeling, experimentation, collaboration, and reflection, educators gain confidence in exploring new pedagogies that meet the needs of their students.

There are a number of processes used to encourage, extend and structure a professional dialogue about teaching and learning. Such dialogues begin by explicitly identifying core values. In this regard, our work is aligned with the approach developed by Ted Sizer and the Coalition of Essential Schools. As you have seen from the vignettes and examples described in this book, both in-school and out-of-school learning environments are places where all students learn to use their minds well, activating head, heart and spirit through encountering people, places, events and ideas in all their complexity. In the Powerful Voices for Kids program, we used mass media, popular culture and digital media to create an educational program designed to make connections between children's home cultures and their needs as learners. We wanted children's interests and developing understanding of the world to be privileged as a driving center of inquiry, not the pots of knowledge specified by the subject matter.

To accomplish this, we aimed to personalize teaching and learning so that the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies are placed in the hands of the educational staff.[131] By accessing, analyzing and evaluating, composing, reflecting and taking action, students do the work of learning, with the teacher coaching and provoking students to "learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves."[132] We wanted students to be able both to display their knowledge and also to use it in responding to culturally-meaningful aspects of their life.

But when we step back a little, we must inevitably be humbled, because as educational historians have revealed, there's a pattern to the way in which media technologies get addressed in the context of public education. First, there is a great flourish of expectations and enthusiasm about the new avenues for educational innovation. Then, research fails to establish any appreciable differences between traditional classroom teaching and learning with new technologies. As one researcher puts it, "Gradually, it becomes clear that the technologies go along with some practical inconveniences and complications that hinder teaching rather than support it. Sometimes the learners or their parents express their objections. After a while it turns out that application of the new technology in educational practice remains quite limited. In the end everything remains unchanged, while the opponents (mostly teachers) and supporters (innovators and governing bodies who made the investments) end up in mutual accusations."

Core Values of Teaching Practice in Digital and Media Literacy Education

By now, you're probably wondering how educators acquire the knowledge and skills they need to integrate digital and media literacy into the elementary curriculum. How do teachers learn the practices of digital and media literacy? Some teachers, as we have seen in this book, just naturally seem to adopt the habits of mind and instructional practices that support inquiry about children's experiences with mass media, popular culture and digital media. Some teachers benefit from the opportunity to observe the work of other teachers. Guided conversations about practice enable teachers to recognize how theoretical concepts get articulated through classroom practice. Still others need time to engage with children directly, encountering individual learners and probing to identify their needs, then experimenting with a variety of instructional approaches.

In recognition of this diversity and to better understand those factors that shape learning progression among teachers, we used a variety of different models of professional development with instructors and elementary teachers over the course of the project's three years. In this chapter, we share some of the practices we developed to meet the needs of teachers and share what we learned. Then, we consider the implications of our experience as it relates to the larger agenda on educational reform and technology integration in urban elementary education.

Because we were thinking about the needs of teachers as learners themselves, we made efforts to carefully document their experiences as learners. We encouraged instructors to document their experience through lesson planning and journal writing. David and Renee also made numerous classroom observations. To prepare the new instructors, we used a mix of whole group learning, small group activities and individualized consultation. The Powerful Voices for Kids instructor training program (which is described more fully in Appendix B) reflects these core ideas about media literacy pedagogy in teacher education:

- *Deep understanding and competent skills.* Having a solid understanding of both the practice of critical analysis and the skills of creative media production enables teachers to guide learners to develop competencies.

- *Motivations matter.* Teachers should bring their own values and motives, their passions and intellectual curiosity, fully into the classroom as they shape their curriculum choices.

- *Emergent curriculum.* Curriculum "emerges" improvisationally from meaningful interactions between children and teacher but requires a solid base of careful planning and preparation by teachers.

- *The spiral: ask questions, find and use, analyze, reflect, create, and take action.* Children ask questions, gather information, analyze it, and then compose using a

variety of types of media forms and genres, guided by a teacher who coordinates children's collaborative participation.

- *Being present to the here-and-now.* Recognizing and using teachable-moment opportunities takes practice in learning to manage unexpected or unpredictable moments in teaching and learning.

- *Time for sharing and reflection.* Systematic written and small-group reflection helps build teacher confidence and promote metacognitive thinking about student needs, learning goals and curriculum choices.

Since the Powerful Voices for Kids program was designed as a learning experience for both instructors as well as participating children, we hired instructors who were already familiar with media literacy. Most had backgrounds in communications and media and were comfortable in their identities as artists or makers. We did not prepare lesson plans for teachers, a practice that is typically used in media/technology summer camp program. We wanted to respect the expertise and knowledge that teachers bring into the classroom and didn't want to let our instructors off the hook as creative professionals. Instructors were invited to get to know their students and design learning experiences to meet their needs. By emphasizing creativity, curriculum innovation and reflective thinking among the instructors, we aimed to create a rich learning experience for them and their students. As shown in Chapter 3, this approach enabled us to examine how specific curriculum choices made by new teachers reflect and embody both their emerging understanding of their students and their own passions, attitudes, motivations and values.

Instructors are learners, too. We intentionally built a learning experience specifically for instructors into the structure of the summer learning program for children. At the end of each day of the program, after children had been picked up, we spent about 45 minutes in large or small group reflection, sharing the "highlights" and "lowlights" of the day. Although instructors were tired after a long day of work, this component of the program was one of the most important elements to support their own professional development. Of course, the intensity of the debriefing sessions yielded a certain authenticity and emotional rawness, coming at the end of the day when teachers were perhaps at their lowest moment of the day. However, these meetings became an increasingly safe space for sharing moments of celebration and honest self-reflection, increasing our sense of camaraderie with colleagues and empathy with our students and their families.

Harnessing Teacher Creativity to Address Classroom Challenges

Students created a wide range of communication artifacts while participating in the Powerful Voices for Kids program. They videotaped each other giving speeches, reenacting historical events, reading aloud, and reciting poetry. They interviewed other students and adults. They created music videos, public service announcements, digital

stories, and mini-documentaries. They wrote scripts, built simple web pages, drew pictures, created comics and programmed videogame interactives.

But just looking at this work, you can't tell much about the process that was used to create it. This is one of the reasons why both students and teachers may develop unrealistic attitudes about what kind of media productions are possible. At our website, you can see examples of behind-the-scenes footage that shows the creative process from start to finish—that's where the learning takes place.

Much of the visibility and positive energy that's now devoted to celebrating Web 2.0 teaching and learning comes from the fact that teachers are highly creative people who enjoy explaining ideas and sharing information in engaging ways. Teachers have always been creative authors, of course. But for many teachers, new digital tools provide wonderful new opportunities for teachers to exercise that creative impulse. By creating PowerPoint slides, worksheets, and videos, teachers activate their own talents and imagination. For example, the website, Cool Tools for Schools lists over 300 digital resources that teachers can use for presentations, media production and collaboration.[133] Thousands of teacher-created websites and blogs offer a revealing portrait of this kind of creative energy at work.

Once upon a time, the creation of educational multimedia was the province of a small group of media professionals, working under the influential historical orbit of the Public Broadcasting System. The making of educational videos was expensive and time-consuming. Today, nearly anyone can be a producer of educational multimedia. Creative people from the field of medicine and health were among those in the lead. Clinical psychologist Naif Al-Mutawa created *The 99*, a set of comic characters based on the Islamic archetypes. And then there's *BrainPop* (and *Brain PopJr* for K-3 students), a collection of animated short educational videos created by Dr. Avraham Kadar, a physician who wanted to teach his young patients about asthma. Or consider the work of Herb Mahelona and Amy Burvall, two high school history teachers in Hawaii who have created the History for Music Lovers YouTube channel, composing music video parodies including "The French Revolution," (sung to the tune of the song Lada Gaga's "Bad Romance") and "Renaissance Man," (sung to the tune of "Blister in the Sun" by the Violent Femmes.) They were motivated to make history music videos as a way to capture the attention of their students by rekindling their own passions for history and tapping into to their mutual interest in pop music of the 1980s. Many educators have benefitted from the work of these remarkable teachers, and the many others who have been able to share their creativity using the Internet and social media.

As we have seen in this book, instructors and teachers bring enormous reserves of creativity to their practice. Both Osei and Mona, with their rich backgrounds as musicians and performers, taught children how to understand the elements of a popular song, write lyrics and perform them in front of a camera. Mr. Landis taught students the basic concepts of interactive media by introducing them to programming. David's experience as a filmmaker made it easy for him to guide students through the process of making a number of short videos. And after Ms. Jared, the art teacher, had finished reading a

scholarly article on digital and media literacy, she taught herself to use ComicLife, a simple software tool for creating comics by composing a multi-panel spread, combining photographs and language to summarize and respond to what she had learned.

But there can be a bit of a downside to teachers' creativity, too. Some teachers may get wrapped up in themselves as creative producers to the detriment of their students. Their own projects take center stage and kids become performers, assistants or merely audience members. Renee once observed a young instructor who had used his students to make his own special film: a playful parody of the film, *Planet of the Apes*. The instructor was intensely involved in all aspects of the production, writing the script, designing costumes and filming. But the children in his program were clearly less engaged and interested in the project. Few seemed to understand the concept of parody or registered even a basic understanding of the purpose of the teacher's film.

Teachers often use their creative energy to make educational support materials to help student learning. When experimenting with media production, they may become inspired to create media that helps them better "deliver" the content of their curriculum. When teachers take it upon themselves to make PowerPoint slides about famous American presidents, videos about math formulas or podcasts about animal habitats, the content reflects teachers' choices about what children need to know. These creative educational materials may lead to robust learning. But it may also lead teachers to simply use digital media as another way to transmit content, contributing to a traditional pedagogy that positions students primarily as audience members receiving a dose of edutainment. The assumption here is that learners are so disengaged and alienated from learning that teachers must create elaborate entertainments simply in order to capture and hold attention.

Because many forms of professional development in educational technology offer teachers "how to" tutorials (to create a podcast, a blog or a video), it's often a natural impulse for teachers to want to create educational content. But students end up on the losing end if digital learning consists of merely activating teachers' creativity, without a focus on creating learning environments where children themselves can be creative and use digital tools for self-expression and communication.

Classroom Management in Media Production

In most cases, teachers can bring their interests into the curriculum in ways that enable children to be active users of media. When teachers engage their students in the creative process of media production, they're headed in the right direction. Creative classrooms are often noisy places. We observed a consistent tension between order and chaos in the classrooms. Progressive educators have long noted this phenomenon. In creative classrooms, it is often "hard to distinguish between apparent chaos and creative disorder," says open classroom education veteran Herb Kohl.[134] Walking the hallways of the Powerful Voices for Kids program, an observer would generally see small groups of children in a classroom, talking, writing on the blackboard, dancing, or acting out a scene. In one room, children might be musically improvising, with a small digital piano,

drums and plenty of handclapping and singing. In another room, an observer would hear a spirited conversation going on, led by a teacher who might be frequently interrupted by students calling out ideas. In another room, children might be working at tables, drawing out a storyboard or writing in a journal. At the computer lab, children might be surfing the Internet, uploading and manipulating photos, or using a drag-and-drop computer programming tool to create simple interactives.[135]

But educators and learners may both underestimate how much time is required for a media production. Nearly every instructor we observed wrestled with the effort involved in getting a group of children to complete a media production project. For example, Mr. Fitzgerald thought his Grade 5 students would be able to create public service announcements in one week--- but it actually took three weeks to complete. Even very simple projects, it seemed, took eons of time.

Because instructors were motivated and enthusiastic, of course, most projects that were attempted were completed. As PVK instructor Emily Bailin described it, "Coming to Powerful Voices for Kids every single morning was such an exciting thing. I am very familiar with a lot of theory and a lot of studies that have been done but I've never seen in actually in action so, that's been incredible. I mean it started at 6 A.M. when I was up and it you know ended maybe at 10 p.m. when I would go back to sleep at night. It was just the adrenaline kicking in." But despite the heroic efforts of Emily and the rest of the staff, some projects did not get finished. Some lessons bombed within the first 10 minutes. Others bore the unmistakable mark of the teacher who did some late-night heavy lifting to edit video or polish up websites.

Other classroom management issues arose because new learning activities (like viewing and discussing) were unfamiliar to some children. Many children in the program had not previously experienced classrooms where movies, videos and YouTube were used as educational resources. Teachers had to develop precise routines for managing discussion, showing children how to share responses, one at a time, and how to look at people while they are talking, showing your level of understanding through nonverbal indicators.

It took time for children to approach viewing activities with a certain level of seriousness, since even young children have already learned to see video viewing as simple entertainment. When Val led children through a viewing and discussion of *Cheaper by the Dozen* with Steve Martin, a children's film, we noticed that children struggled with detaching themselves from the narrative in order to have a discussion. They clamored, "Don't stop the movie!" and "Let's keep watching!" which created tension in the classroom as Val tried in vain to activate children's interpretations of the the film by asking questions.

Sometimes the creative ideas that children shared could inadvertently lead to classroom management challenges when teachers became uncomfortable with the unique perspectives children offered. When Dee was leading a conversation about heroes, victims and villains in storytelling by asking children to create characters, one of her

Grade 2 students read from her story, saying, "My character is bad because, when she was a young little girl, people always used to pick on her and she got tired of it. Her childhood was really bad, and then when she was a grownup, since people did all that mean stuff to her, she's gonna do it to other people, even though she don't even know them." Indeed, this child had created a character who was both a villain and a victim, but Dee wasn't sure how to respond to the child's story. As she hesitated in deciding how to respond, the hubbub of response from the other children led to some confusion and the loss of classroom momentum.

Other issues arose from children's lack of comfort with a creative space, where creative activities, like brainstorming, involve certain kinds of verbal and sometimes physical playfulness. For example, when David's students wrote and produced their own pop song, they wanted to create the beat, the chorus and the dance simultaneously. Coming into the classroom, an observer might see a cluster of students standing at the white board, fighting for the dry erase marker, as they collaborated on writing and revising song lyrics. Other students were working on the computer, using GarageBand to create their beats. Still other students had pushed aside the classroom chairs as they worked out the choreography to the dance. For parents, educators and school leaders who expect learning to happen in quiet classroom where children are seated at desks, this kind of learning environment can be startling, to say the least.

Creating a Climate of Mutual Respect

Sometimes learning activities were simply so stimulating that children acted out in inappropriate ways —not wanting to share the FlipCams, for example, or getting loud when sharing ideas in ways that may have become disruptive to other children.
We were able to assess student learning by looking at samples of their work along with reviewing the written reflections that teachers shared with us. We've tried to capture this evidence in the vignettes presented in this book. Because we valued authenticity over self-promotion, we looked to the limitations and challenges of this work to fuel our own intellectual curiosity. We rejected those simple-minded "just do it" messages, blithely offered by scholars and advocates, who advocate for simply putting teachers, kids and technology together and seeing what happens.

Instead, we paid careful attention both to "what worked" and "what didn't work" in the context of the many choices of each day's practice. As we see it, the drive to address unexpected negative outcomes, liabilities and challenges, and other problematic aspects of digital and media literacy education is a sign that the field is maturing.[136]

Media production and analysis activities are intensely social. As a result, some learning situations included interpersonal aggression and meanness that interfered with the quality of learning and the quality of student-teacher relationships. Some days, it seemed that the classrooms were bubbling with one-upmanship and one-downsmanship among children and between students and teachers. Again, some part of this was clearly linked to the lack of experience on the part of the teacher in creating a respectful learning environment. Nuala worried that children's aggressive and mean-spirited behavior might

contribute to teachers who do not demand high expectations from them. "One of my biggest fears that teachers, some teachers, might give up on them. Sometimes I just want to say, 'You can't act like this!' You can't act like this because if you do continue to act like this, I'm afraid that teachers might give up on you, you know." To address teachers' concerns, we offered support and structure to help address classroom management issues by using Doug Lemov's fine book, *Teach Like a Champion*.[137] Still, some days, we wondered:

- How might media messages contribute to children's emerging understanding of "what's right" and "what's wrong" when it comes to social relationships? Does this behavior reflect the impact of the kind of hurtfulness and power games that are so much of contemporary culture, including entertainment culture--- the normalizing of insulting creative efforts we see on *American Idol*, the backstabbing and two-faced lying on the reality shows?

- How do we nurture and cultivate, as a team, the values that really matter--- creating trust, respect, warmth and caring in a community where people have shared goals?

Thank goodness that there were so many instances where kids and teachers came together for productive work and learning, so that even when disruption occurred, these moments were offset by other very human moments that occurred spontaneously when we encountered each other as human beings, in all our frailty and with all our limitations.

CONCLUSION
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ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER 10

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