Chapter 19

Weebly, Wikis, and Digital Storytelling:
The Potential of Web 2.0 Tools in Writing Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author explores three questions: 1. How is the practice of writing in K-12 classrooms influenced by this era of new technologies? 2. How can online technologies be brought into the classroom so students can understand that they read and write everyday in digital forms? 3. In what ways can teachers create technology-rich experiences to support 21st century writers? To answer these questions the author briefly examines the theoretical foundation of the process model for writing and how online technologies have impacted this model in classrooms. Next, the author describes three Web 2.0 tools that are available to teachers to use in their classrooms during writing: digital portfolios, wikis, and digital storytelling. The author explains how he uses these tools within his own college classroom. Finally, the author provides a rationale for why teachers should consider using these within their own K-12 classrooms so that digital technologies become a natural part of students' writing experiences.

INTRODUCTION

In my undergraduate Language Arts course, I begin the semester with a simple exercise. I ask students to think back to the past week and make a list of the various types of writing they composed, their

purposes for composing them, and their intended audiences. Drawing from personal, school, and work lives, students consider the types of writing they crafted. They have ten minutes to complete this exercise, but they usually finish in two. Typical responses are included in Table 1.

This past semester, when I asked students about their responses, one student explained, "I don't

Table 1. Types of writing

Type of Writing	Purpose	Audience
Notes in class	To remember	Self
Term papers	To get a good grade	Professor
Grocery List	To remember	Self
Order slips for work	To communicate with the cook	Cooking staff
Notes in planner	To organize, remember	Self

write because I don't really have time to write anything other than stuff for school. At work I write orders. At home I write lists of things I have to do. And at school I write papers for classes, but besides those things, I don't write much else." When students don't view themselves as writers, they don't see the types of writing they do every day in different forms.

I then asked the class to consider what they do online as readers and writers. Encouraged to expand on their charts, students began to identify the various ways they wrote within their online worlds. They considered what it meant to be 21st century writers, composing in an era where technology is ever-present, and using mediums such as smart phones and computers as platforms for their messages. With this lens, students broadened their lists to include the following in Table 2.

Initially, students didn't see themselves as writers; they never considered their texts, tweets, and status updates as actual pieces of writing. When students considered the digital ways they composed, they began to see the different types of writing they created, the varied purposes for creating it, and diverse audiences who consume it. They realized that, indeed, they did write and they did so daily and hourly. In fact, they identified themselves as voracious consumers and producers of literacy.

Even though students started to accept the uses of these technologies in their own lives, they still viewed these literacies as somehow divorced from what they considered *real* forms of writing; the forms most accepted in school settings. And they certainly didn't consider the possibility of incorporating these types of writings into their own classrooms as future elementary school teachers.

This chapter is presented as a how-to and a what-if for teachers and teacher-educators interested in incorporating digital portfolios, wikis, and digital stories into their classrooms. It is meant to show how the digital forms of writing might be expanded into both college and K-12 classrooms. The purpose of this chapter is to start asking, and answering, the following three questions: 1.) How is the practice of writing in K-12 classrooms

Table 2. Types of writing, including digital writings

Type of Writing	Purpose	Audience
Facebook (Status updates)	To connect with friends/to communicate	Friends
Blogs	To respond to others' comments	Self, blogosphere
Texts	To communicate/inform	Friends, family
Email	To communicate, inform, connect, respond	Friends, family, co-workers, professors, classmates
Instant Messaging	To communicate	Friends
Twitter	To communicate, inform, entertain	Friends, Twitterverse

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