

Technology, Reading & Digital Literacy

Strategies to Engage the Reluctant Reader

L. Robert Furman



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Introduction

The more you read, the more things you will know.
The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.

—DR. SEUSS, *I CAN READ WITH MY EYES SHUT!*

This is a powerful time of change, with creativity and innovation leading the way. Conformity is outdated. We are raising digital-age learners who challenge us to update the way we communicate, the way we learn, and certainly the way we teach. Using technologies that we have yet to conceive, our students will be the next generation of creative thinkers and problem solvers—tomorrow's eBay founders and Facebook creators.

Who are the creators, those innovative and out-of-the-box thinkers? They are the insatiable learners. They are readers. But it is essential that we do more than merely encourage our students to read. We must also introduce them to innovative ways of exploring new things, and it is technology that enables this.

The sheer volume of information available at our fingertips via technology is simply mind-blowing. The platforms through which we are able to explore and learn are ever changing and often complex. This book was written to help you better understand today's technology so that you, in turn, may provide students with the tools they need to be successful.

Technology now demands that our students be both proficient learners and proficient readers. These skills are intricately connected, and they are vital in transforming young learners into innovative adults who can compete in the marketplace of ideas.

But what about reluctant readers? What is unique about them, and what stands in the way of their success? *Reluctant reader* is a term that educators toss around quite a bit, although sometimes not accurately. Google defines the word *reluctant* as: unwilling and hesitant; disinclined.

Based on this definition, we could describe a reluctant reader as someone who has not found an interest in reading—that intrinsic motivation that comes with reading for pleasure or for gaining knowledge. In other words, the reluctant reader simply has no desire or interest to read, and who does not often see the purpose or worth in reading. A typical thought of a reluctant reader may be, “Why read a book when I can watch a movie or find the information I need on a computer?”

A reluctant reader, however, should not be confused with a struggling reader; these two learners are quite different. A struggling reader has difficulty reading and is often a reluctant reader because of it. After all, who wants to do something they have difficulty accomplishing? A reluctant reader can accomplish the task just fine; they just choose not to begin. Therefore, our focus here is on the reader who has found neither the desire nor the interest to read. Our challenge is to help reluctant readers find a spark of interest that gives them that intrinsic fire to pick up a book, start reading, and, more important, *keep* reading.

Digital-Age Jobs Demand Digital-Age Skills

Our technology-driven world has reached a point where a high school diploma no longer guarantees middle class status. Blue collar jobs are rapidly diminishing, while technology-focused professions evolve and multiply. It is more important than ever that individuals read with great proficiency. Being illiterate 50 years ago did not automatically doom young adults because an abundance of blue collar jobs were available to them. Many of today's jobs that provide gainful employment to reluctant readers may very well be gone by the time those students enter the workforce.

Technology, Reading, and the Shrinking World

Through technology our world is actually shrinking. We can turn on our laptops or tablets and communicate with anyone in the world at a moment's notice. I can recall a time when this wasn't possible. I've seen technology change and take this shape over the course of my life. Our students, of course, have been born into a world that provides easy access to this virtual environment. They can and do collaborate and communicate with colleagues from almost anywhere in the world in ways that were unimaginable even a generation ago. Even so, students need help to safely and productively navigate this fast-changing virtual world. This is why it is essential that we equip our students with

the digital-age skills they need. We must help them become independent readers who can serve as excellent communicators of knowledge.

Cross-Disciplinary Thinking

Today's success stories often involve cross-disciplinary thinkers who successfully jump traditional boundaries between disciplines. As we continue the move to a technology-driven society, our digital-age learners will be required to blend a number of technical and nontechnical considerations so that they may navigate their way around a number of disciplines successfully. In other words, it is no longer acceptable to assume that a student's strength in the sciences or in math can make up for his or her lack of skill in language arts. Regardless of an individual's chosen profession, technology demands that each be an excellent communicator of knowledge. And to do so a student needs to be a proficient reader.

The Art of Information Literacy

Surviving and thriving in the current knowledge economy demands excellent communication skills, and these skills ultimately come from an exceptional reading ability.

Social currency in this new world is nearly as important as financial wealth. Today's success stories are often about people who are financially successful because of their social currency in the virtual world. Here again, reading serves

as the foundation of one's knowledge and reputation as a subject matter expert.

Technology Standards

Educators today have to ensure that they teach multiple competencies and touch on multiple standards. This is not an easy job, given the constraints of time and the sheer volume of content to teach. Thankfully, online tools allow teachers to combine the concepts of reading and digital literacy seamlessly so they can teach both at the same time. This provides students the opportunity to meet technology benchmarks, such as those outlined by the International Society for Technology in Education, while they learn to read.

For example, by combining traditional teaching strategies for reading with the tech tools detailed in this book, students should be able to:

- Flex their creative thinking skills
- Enhance their ability to work collaboratively with other students
- Improve their ability to apply digital tools to gather and utilize the information they obtain
- Conduct research, manage projects, and solve problems
- Demonstrate their fluency in technology concepts, systems, and operations

Blending Great Books and Today's Technology

As avid book readers know, finishing a book often leaves them with a sense of accomplishment. To experience this, readers first must find books about something that piques their interest. In the next chapter, we will examine the challenges students have with this first step and explore ways technology can help educators easily find great books that students will love. From there, we will consider great technology tools designed to help students discuss what they've read, share their books, and develop social currency through creative work that is based on the literature they've come to know.

It's worth mentioning that there are countless apps designed to help pre-readers, early readers, and readers with disabilities. There are also a plethora of apps that can help individuals improve their writing, comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling skills. While this book primarily focuses on online tools, Appendix A, "Apps to Inspire Even the Most Reluctant Readers," provides a robust list of apps that can help students build specific language skills.