

From  
**Pencils**  
to  
**Podcasts**



Digital Tools for Transforming K-6 Literacy Practices

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*Reproducible pages are in italics.*

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# Literacy in the 21st Century

**Humans have long used tools to** create, construct, and evaluate. An artist uses spray paint to create a mural on the side of a building. A construction worker uses steel to build a skyscraper. A homeowner uses a level to ensure a painting is square. As teachers, we have the responsibility to equip our students with the tools that they need to fully participate in our interconnected, global society.

## Why We Wrote This Book

To prepare students for the ever-expanding technological world, it is essential that we give them opportunities to use technology to augment traditional learning practices. The ability to communicate with wide audiences, create new products and innovations, and collaborate with people near and far is easier than ever. Smartphones, tablets, computers, and even interactive TV connect us now more than ever. Information is accessible at our fingertips from a range of sources.

In many of the classrooms we visit, we observe students using technology to conduct research work on projects and discuss their newfound knowledge. We see teachers using technology for assessment purposes. Allowing students to work in digital spaces enables them to communicate and collaborate with peers and a larger audience beyond the four walls of the classroom. Using technology as a tool is a part of our everyday lives. In fact, as coauthors living in different cities, we used Google Docs as a tool to draft, comment, revise, and complete this book.

Just before the 21st century, the International Reading Association (now the International Literacy Association) and the National Council of Teachers of English published new standards for English language arts (IRA & NCTE, 1996). These standards established that students should “use a variety of technological and information resources to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge” (IRA & NCTE, 1996, p. 3). Yet, many teachers today lament a lack of familiarity and limited time to incorporate technology in the classroom (Stover, Kissel, Wood, & Putman, 2015). We believe that technology does not need to be an isolated activity that is tacked onto the instructional day; rather, it is an effective and efficient tool that can be integrated with preexisting lessons and instructional activities. We hope to provide teachers with a

resource that offers practical suggestions to enhance teaching and learning by digitalizing familiar literacy practices such as reader response, reader's theater, research, and writing, to name a few. It is our aim to help teachers overcome perceived barriers and see the benefits of integrating technology meaningfully in classrooms with easy-to-implement digital tools.

Definitions of what it means to be literate shift constantly (Leu, 2000). Traditional notions of literacy that focused mainly on print-based reading and writing now include new literacies. The Internet and other information communication technologies (ICTs) result in evolving literacy practices for today's students (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). For instance, using web 2.0 applications such as blogs and wikis fosters more active and transactional processes compared to web 1.0 tools including word-processing documents that involve mostly passive one-way delivery of information. According to the International Literacy Association's (2009) position statement on new technologies and reading instruction:

To become fully literate in today's world, students must become proficient in the new literacies of 21st-century technologies. As a result, literacy educators have a responsibility to effectively integrate these new technologies into the curriculum, preparing students for the literacy future they deserve. (p. 1)

Students need to develop process-oriented skills rather than general content knowledge to be successful in the future workplace (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). In these future roles, employees will need to process and critically analyze information, collaborate with others, and disseminate information using a range of modalities. ILA (2009) reminds us that students need to be Internet proficient to effectively participate in an era of global information sharing.

Students have greater access to technology both at home and in school. Yet there is a need for ongoing support for technology use beyond simple access. According to literacy experts Jay S. Blanchard and Alan E. Farstrup (2011), "Technology alone does not make the difference, but rather how it is used" (p. 303). Researchers Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share (2007) note that providing access to technology does not guarantee that it will be used "for meaningful instructional tasks" (p. 306). In fact, the teacher is one of the most significant factors associated with effective technology integration (Mandell, Sorge, & Russell, 2002). ILA (2009) reminds us that educators have a responsibility to integrate technologies into the curriculum to better prepare students. Blanchard and Farstrup (2011) assert, "Teachers must be at the heart of the decision-making and instructional-planning process as technologies are introduced and implemented" (p. 305). Thus, enhancing teachers' knowledge of tools, pedagogy for instructional use, and providing necessary support to address educational goals and standards should be considered (Larkin & Finger, 2011; Perkins & Saltsman, 2010). With these aims and responsibilities in mind, it is our goal to provide educators with authentic strategies to seamlessly embed technology into the existing curriculum.

Although we live in a world surrounded by technology, it is essential that teachers incorporate technology in purposeful ways to enhance students' learning experiences. Elizabeth Dobler (2011/2012) states that “the tool must let us do something better—more efficiently, more effectively—than we can without the technology” (p. 18). Rather than being isolated tools that replace the teacher, technologies should be fully integrated to foster student-centered learning with the goals of promoting lifelong reading habits and reading achievement (Blanchard & Farstrup, 2011). Technology enhances curricular integration and supports specific learning goals (Northrop & Killeen, 2013). In order to be effective, technology integration should be routine and support curriculum goals (Edutopia, 2008). According to Blanchard and Farstrup (2011), “Technology provides indispensable resources used as part of an extensive range of new and traditional instructional tools geared to the needs of children” (p. 294). In this book, we suggest ways to facilitate students' abilities to create, communicate, collaborate, share, and assess learning using a range of technology tools.

Digital tools can enhance instruction and learning for students. *From Pencils to Podcasts: Digital Tools for Transforming K–6 Literacy Practices* discusses and demonstrates how technology use can foster skill development and deeper thinking through authentic reading, writing, and communication practices in the classroom and beyond. The digital tools we present throughout this book can be used to mediate a variety of literacy practices to enhance students' oral language, fluency, comprehension, and writing abilities. Students simultaneously develop essential skills to foster communication, collaboration, and sharing with authentic audiences via technology. Digital tools allow students to create, communicate, collaborate, and share within and beyond the four walls of the classroom in new and innovative ways.

## How This Book Is Organized

We envision this book as a toolbox filled with strategies and suggestions to help improve classroom instruction while integrating technology. You can read it as a resource by locating a particular tool to meet your students' instructional needs or by exploring digital tools you are interested in trying. In this way, you can see examples of how other teachers used the tools and read the step-by-step instructions for implementing the technology in your own classroom. Each chapter provides sample tools and strategies that we have found to be successful in fostering digital literacy practices with grades K–6 learners. We do not believe in one-size-fits-all approaches and therefore offer these as possibilities.

The chapters are grouped into the following four parts.

- I. Tools to Facilitate Comprehension and Analysis
- II. Tools to Facilitate Evaluation and Revision
- III. Tools to Facilitate Performance and Publication
- IV. Tools to Facilitate Assessment and Reflection



Each chapter presents a unique digital tool to mediate literacy practices, beginning with a vignette, followed by a section grounded in research and a description of the suggested digital tool. We then describe how to implement the digital tool in the classroom and offer a classroom example to give the reader a comprehensive understanding of the tool and its role in facilitating literacy teaching and learning. Each chapter concludes with suggestions for integration in the content areas as well as adaptations to provide the reader with multiple ways to consider integrating technology tools in the classroom. These suggestions are not exclusive but rather are meant to offer possibilities.

Web 2.0 technology allows users to create content on the Internet, making it easier to share with a wider audience. As Jason Ohler (2005/2006) notes, “Media-based [content] are now everyone’s to create [and] everyone’s to watch and enjoy” (p. 44). Digital creation of information allows students to become active creators rather than passive consumers of multimedia (Ohler, 2005/2006). Part I houses the tools that facilitate comprehension and analysis. In chapter 1 we describe the use of digital word walls and tools such as wikis, digital images, and online dictionaries to enhance students’ vocabularies—specifically their knowledge of Greek and Latin roots. Chapter 2 details how a fifth-grade teacher used the Edmodo online platform to foster communication between elementary and college students about shared literature.

Although writing is a communicative process, traditional literacies using paper and pencils limit students’ opportunities to communicate to wider audiences beyond the classroom (Merchant, 2005). However, new technologies have broadened the role of communication and mediate social practices. According to the International Society for Technology in Education, students need opportunities to “communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats” (ISTE, 2007). In chapter 3 we share how students used Kidblog to participate in online book clubs. Part II moves to tools that facilitate evaluation and revision. Chapter 4 presents ways to engage students in research using multimedia sources. Chapter 5 details how to foster a wide community of readers through the creation and sharing of book reviews via audioBoom, QR codes, and Twitter.

Web 2.0 tools promote collaboration among Internet users (Laru, Naykki, & Jarvela, 2012) and can have a profound effect on learning and thinking (Solomon & Schrum, 2007). Working together to co-construct knowledge can enhance the depth and breadth of students’ understanding (Coiro, Castek, & Guzniczak, 2011), foster discussion, enhance literacy learning and communication skills, and support a sense of community (Larson, 2009).

The need to evaluate online content is increasingly important in our digital world. Chapter 6 describes how to use Google Drive to facilitate online revision circles as students collaboratively write and revise a reader’s theatre script. Chapter 7 provides an approach to reader’s theater that incorporates digital tools such as iMovie and YouTube to improve students’ fluency and enhance students’ self-evaluation and sharing with a wider audience.