

What's New in Literacy Teaching?

A photograph of two young children, a girl and a boy, sitting on a colorful carpeted floor. They are both looking intently at a tablet computer that is resting on the floor. The girl is pointing at the screen. The background is a colorful geometric pattern of green, orange, and blue shapes.

DIGITAL DISCUSSIONS

*Using Web 2.0 Tools to Communicate,
Collaborate, and Create*

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Consider classroom discourse in the pre-Information Age—during the age when students sat in individual desks, in rows five or six deep. What little discussion took place might have occurred between a teacher and a student. A typical classroom discussion about E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web* might have unfolded as follows:

Teacher: Brian, who are the main characters of this story?

Brian: [raised hand] Charlotte and Wilbur.

Teacher: Yes. Good. Karen, why did Charlotte weave the web?

Karen: To save Wilbur’s life.

Teacher: Yes. Good. Katie, where does this story take place?

Katie: At the farm.

Teacher: OK. Yes.

The discussion continued until all questions about literary elements were exhausted. It was a rapid-fire, call-and-response classroom world in which the cadence of the conversation was a quick and staccato back-and-forth. Discussion was one way, one dimensional, and certainly not digital.

Just before the 21st century, in the late 80s and well into the 90s, classroom teachers began to increase the quality, quantity, and configurations of these discussions. Literature circles emerged (Daniels, 2002), and children began to engage in group discussions about texts. Within these groups, rich discussion commenced and children, empowered with various leadership roles, took command.

Meanwhile, teachers began to engage in reading and writing conferences (Anderson, 2001; Graves, 1983; Hindley, 1996). Within these partner conversations, the child’s reading and writing agenda took precedence. During the school day, the classrooms that were once silent flourished with talk. Discussions, not lectures, were becoming a more prominent practice in the classroom.

At present, with the plethora of digital spaces available for children to produce and consume their literacies, a new mode of discussion emerges. It takes place in a world divorced from classroom and home walls and expands across a dimension that



allows students to create, collaborate, share, research, explore, and communicate (Taylor, 2012). In this new world, students use keyboards and touch screens to scribe their lives, thoughts, ideas, and opinions. They do so through blogs, within social networks, and in videos they create to share with peers (Hansen & Kissel, 2010). Students have engaged in discussions across digital dimensions: a process entirely developed, imagined, and revised by the Millennial Generation.

In this article, we examine the multifaceted possibilities of digital discussions in K–12 classrooms. We begin with an overview of digital discussions; we discuss where we’ve been and where we are going as digital teachers and learners. Next, we explore the possibilities of digital discussions within classroom spaces as students use digital spaces to communicate (e.g., Twitter, Facebook), collaborate (e.g., blogs, wikis), and create (e.g., VoiceThread).

We bring you into classrooms that are using this technology creatively and offer ways you can further these technologies within your own classrooms. Along the way, we offer links to videos and websites that allow you to weave across the digital terrains available in the World Wide Web. Finally, we offer our own Twitter handles so that the discussion may continue long after you read the final word.

Research Overview

We have been talking about the value of talk for centuries, and recent research has shown its value in the digital dimension as well (Barnes, 2008; West & West, 2008). Research on reading as a social, collaborative practice is increasing as the demands in our society both in and outside the school require

this ability (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of State School Officers [NGA Center & CCSSO], 2010). In fact, the Common Core State Standards (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010) suggest that students have ample opportunities to engage in discussion with peers in a range of contexts including whole group, small group, and with a partner to contribute, respond, compare, and synthesize ideas both in the classroom and in the virtual world.

New technologies have broadened the role of speaking and listening. Studies have indicated that the act of engaging in online discussions can move students beyond just gathering facts to constructing meaning through deeper processing of text. It can also move students to construct knowledge as they work to solve problems, analyze text critically, explore varied perspectives, and extend their depth of learning (Kiili, Laurinen, Marttunen, & Leu, 2012). Even when readers are skilled at independent online reading, the act of working with others to co-construct knowledge seems to enhance the depth and breadth of their

understanding (Coiro, Castek, & Guzniczak, 2011). Further, collaborative participation in online activities has proven to be a valuable means of engaging even the youngest learners (Stover, Kissel, & Wood, 2013).

Web 2.0 Tools and the K–12 Classroom

In schools across the United States, *21st-century literacies* has become a catchphrase for the integration of more technology within the classroom. We are now deep within the second decade of the 21st century, and the possibilities of digital tools within classrooms are more abundant and ubiquitous than ever. Teachers across the country have found intelligent, interesting ways to bring digital tools into their classrooms, and they have done this without sacrificing the rich conversations that already occur within their face-to-face environments. The following sections show different tools teachers and students can use to communicate, collaborate, and create across home, school, and community contexts.

Common Core State Standards

Comprehension and Collaboration

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.6: Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Digital Communications: Using Social Media to Connect

The digital world has expanded our opportunities to communicate with others. Throughout the past 200 years, communicative tools have faced great expansion. From the invention of the telephone, to the television, to the personal computer, the 20th century faced a technological revolution that changed the way we were able to tell stories, connect to loved ones, and convey information to one another.

In the 21st century, with the expansion of the World Wide Web and the innovative thinkers who learned to harness the power of mass communication, new tools have arrived that connect us to one another.

Twitter helped expand revolutions in the Middle East, Facebook allowed users to piece together personal and professional contacts from various stages of life, and Skype and FaceTime allowed grandparents to see their grandchildren grow. In essence, we have experienced a communicative renaissance—one that can have a great impact in the K–12 classroom. Figure 1, for example, shows a Facebook page for an elementary school.

Instagram

Instagram is quickly becoming a popular social networking tool among students. Instagram is photo-sharing service that allows users to post photographs

Figure 1
Facebook page in an elementary school



to various social networking sites such as Google + and Facebook. Rather than words, users post photographs—providing life updates, telling stories, and conveying information via images. Twitter and Facebook are the better known social networking platforms, but Instagram is gaining in popularity among middle and high school students.

Teachers are beginning to find ways to bring the social networking tools into the classroom, such as using Instagram to record reading history. Students can take photographs of the books they are reading and peers can comment on their choices. They can also take a photo collage of the books using Skitch on an iPhone, iPod Touch, or iPad. Students make a collage of the books they have read over a period of time to show all the types and genres. This collage can serve as a simple evaluation to allow teachers to view their interests as readers. When we consider the discussions that can happen in classrooms, we should consider interactions that go beyond words—an important consideration for this multimodal generation.

Edmodo

When we talk to teachers, they often comment about their hesitation in using Facebook and Twitter in the

classroom. They worry about the privacy of their students and yearn for a platform where they feel more secure in protecting their own identities and those of their students. Edmodo has addressed this issue by providing a secure microblogging platform where teachers and students can interact online. Edmodo provides more security because it is a closed network: Teachers set up an Edmodo site, and only registered users have access to the page. In this way, students and teachers can have digital discussions in a space where only other members of the classroom can participate. Table 1 provides ideas for using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Edmodo to foster classroom discussion.

Digital Expressions: Using Wikis and Blogs to Foster Collaboration

Wikis

The digital world has provided a space to give readers and writers many opportunities to voice their thoughts about a multitude of subjects. You might go to a restaurant, love a meal and the service, and then post a rave about it on www.yelp.com. Likewise, you might attend a movie, think it's a stinker, and contribute your thoughts about it on www.rottentomatoes.com by writing a movie review

Table 1
Incorporating social networking sites into classroom discussion

Using Facebook in the Classroom

Communicate with families: Teachers can use Facebook to communicate information quickly and easily to parents, keeping parents up-to-date on important announcements and weekly homework assignments. In lieu of a classroom webpage, the teacher creates a classroom page on Facebook and then parents “like” it. The teacher posts curriculum updates and homework assignments on a weekly basis and the parents receive notification of the updates. Parents can quickly and easily ask questions and obtain a fast response from the teacher.

Create news timelines: Teachers and students write news updates about current events, events happening in the classroom, and events happening at school (sports, campus news, etc.) and they post news about the classroom to family.

Create literary characters: Teachers create a Facebook page for a famous historical or literary figure. Students can post status updates from that person’s perspective and post responses from the perspectives of other characters from the story or other historical contemporaries.

Facilitate class polls: Teachers can use Facebook’s interactive poll app to post various polls to students. These polls can be used to initiate conversations about classroom topics.

Spur social action: Students can use Facebook to advocate for important causes. They may pose an important social issue, post a persuasive video explaining why social action is needed, and then allow the Facebook page to serve as a platform to initiate conversation and facilitate social action.

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)
Incorporating social networking sites into classroom discussion

Using Twitter in the Classroom

Track a hashtag: On Twitter, the # sign represents a hashtag. Hashtags allow Twitter users to consolidate information about a topic. If you want to know more about a particular current event, like an election, users can type in #election to find out what others are saying about that event. In the classroom, teachers and students can track hashtags to read more about current happenings. More important, it allows students to contribute to the conversation.

Write a story or poem: Students in the classroom can use Twitter to write a collective story or poem—each writer can contribute a 140-character addition to the piece of writing and watch as it unfolds in Twitter.

Ask questions: Students and teachers can use Twitter to ask questions to one another, allowing a quick, convenient way for teachers to get anecdotal assessments about student thinking.

Record reflections: At the conclusion of each class, Brian asks his university students to write a 140-character reflection that answers the question, “As a learner, what is the one thing you’ll take away from today’s class?” Teachers can do the same in their K–12 classrooms and either record the responses for the schools (as might happen in early childhood classrooms) or allow students to record responses themselves.

Connect to the Common Core: In the English Language Arts section of the Common Core Standards, students are asked to offer succinct answers to complex concepts. Readers are asked to tell the main idea of a literary text, summarize an informational text, or chart the development of a character over the course of the text. Students can post their thoughts to these standards using Twitter as a platform for expression. They can see the posts of peers, and teachers can use this as another informal assessment tool to monitor understanding and progress.

Using Instagram in the Classroom

Reading portfolios: Students can create a visual reading portfolio by taking photographs of all the books they read throughout the year. Students can get reading recommendations by viewing books uploaded by peers. Teachers can view a record of the books their students have read throughout the year.

Visual field trips: Take your students to places around the world through images. Search for a destination on Instagram and allow students to view the images by taking a virtual field trip. Use the images as a springboard for discussion in the classroom.

Classroom Instagram account: Create an account for the classroom. Allow parents access to the account. Throughout the year, post pictures about happenings within the classroom.

Visual pen pals: Connect your students to other students across the country or across the world. Learn about their lives through images. Through an image exchange, students learn about the lives of others visually, rather than through words.

Photo essays: Students can provide unique views about lives, their communities, and the worlds in which they live by creating photo essays. Then can then upload the images onto Instagram and use it to spark discussion.

Social action: Encourage students to become passionate about a cause. They can find ways to advocate for the cause using images. After posting images, they can engage in discussions about how to solve these important issues.

Using Edmodo in the Classroom

Write and respond to book reviews: Students read books, write short book reviews, post the reviews, and discuss books with peers.

Brainstorm: Teachers might consider posting an assignment on Edmodo and encouraging students to use Edmodo as an interactive brainstorming space.

Establish learning groups: Students from our university classrooms have created an Edmodo page to communicate with peers. In K–12 classrooms, students can do the same by establishing reading groups, writing groups, or both, and using Edmodo as a space to communicate within these groups.

Provide multimedia support to parents and students: Teachers can use Edmodo to post instructional videos for parents and students to support lessons taught in class. After viewing videos, parents and students can make comments and ask questions that the teacher and other peers can use to respond.

to persuade other moviegoers. Love a book? Post about it on www.goodreads.com and follow your friend's favorite books as well. Likewise, writers might wish to convey their thoughts about the world through a personal website that others can follow. The Internet is a vast space where writers have opportunities to express and readers have opportunities to respond, making these spaces a rich expanse for discussion.

Blogs

A blog, which is a shortened name for a web log, is a kind of online journal or diary that is updated by the author as often as desired. It usually includes personal opinions and information related to some topic or issue. The blog's author can determine which features (e.g., calendars, artwork, writing, links, photos) might be included on the blog.

Blogs in the classroom can take on many forms. Zawilinski (2011) described an approach to blogging that combined higher order thinking with online responding (Table 2). Teachers direct students' responses beyond the literal level by posing questions and prompts that get them thinking, analyzing, and reflecting. Teachers can encourage students to use their background knowledge by locating additional sites and readings to extend their knowledge and experiences. Students can synthesize the comments and posts of others to continue the conversations and, in essence, demonstrate that they are truly listening to what classmates have to say.

Lastly, students can be prompted to explain, clarify, and support varied perspectives on a topic and seek out evidence to substantiate their claims. One teacher took this idea and developed generic prompts for his fifth-grade students to keep in mind while blogging to avoid their tendency to make only literal level, colloquial comments.

Blogging With Book Clubs in Fifth Grade

Instead of a traditional book club, Kim Heintschel allowed her fifth-grade students to collaborate and discuss Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* using a blog (Figure 2). After a short introduction on how to use blogs to communicate, the students used their independent reading time during readers' workshop to read and respond to one another.

Table 2
Generic prompts to promote higher order thinking while blogging

1. Share your background knowledge on the topic and seek out other sites, sources, and information for others to read.
2. Include one or more of the following elements in your blog: Tell about misconceptions or perceptions, summarize what has been said, or make analogies to other situations, texts, events, or global situations.
3. Synthesize—don't just summarize—the comments of others as well as what you have read.
4. Craft your response with evidence, support from other sources, and differing points of view.

The students decided how much they would read and how much time they had to respond. The students gave themselves one week to read, a few days to write an initial post, and another few days to respond to one another. The students read one another's posts and added to, agreed with, or disagreed with their classmates. Occasionally, Kim would post on the blog to continue the discussion or ask questions to probe for more thinking (Figure 3). To show their comprehension of the book, students posted on the big ideas and created an avatar of their favorite character in the story.

Blogging With Book Clubs in Second Grade

In Cathy's second-grade class, students were accustomed to participating in book club discussions with their peers. Students used prompts to respond to their peers, but the responses were always perfunctory. They would mutter "I agree" or "I disagree." The discussion didn't feel authentic, and the content of what was spoken was kept on the surface.

After students were given many opportunities to engage in traditional book clubs, Cathy introduced online book clubs using a blog. Upon beginning a new book, Cathy explained to her students that they were going to discuss the book in a different way. They would use a blog to discuss the story, and they would need to say more than "I agree" or "I disagree."

Cathy introduced the book to students as a group and then had them gather around a computer, where

Figure 2
Book club blog for a fifth-grade class

Bridge to Terabithia Book Club

Bridge to Terabithia Book Club
https://www.gaggle.net/blog/bridgetoterabithiabookclub

Welcome, Miss Heintschel
Log Out

My Blogs:
Bridge to Terabithia Book Club
 Show deleted

About this blog:
Bridge to Terabithia Book Club at PSRES.

Chapters 5 and 6
Posted on 3/1/12, 1:58 PM EST by Miss Heintschel
Use this post below to comment on Chapters 5 and 6. Don't forget to reply to each other!
Add comment
9 comments

I wonder if Jess's family will find out about Brige to Terabithia and if they do what will they do? Will they like the idea about it or will they make him stop going there? I wonder what other kids would think or do if they found out about Terabithia

Posted by Meredith Paige Hancock (mhancock8064@cabarrus.gaggle.net) (student) at 3/7/12, 9:32 AM EST
Reply
0 replies

the wierd thing is, that jess has an early crush on leslie and is to afraid to tell her. but at the same time, leslie souds as if she already knows and doesn't know if she likes

Posted by Madison Renae Kapp (mkapp8230@cabarrus.gaggle.net) (student) at 3/7/12, 9:32 AM EST
Reply
1 reply

How do you know Jess has a crush on Leslie? Do you think she feels the same?

Posted by Miss Heintschel (kimberly.heintschel@cabarrus.gaggle.net) (educator) at 3/7/12, 1:43 PM EST
Reply
0 replies

Blog Controls
New Post
Edit Blog Settings
Create New Blog
Blog Lookup
Print

My Favorites:
Math CAMMP Lesson on Patterns

Blog Visitors: 142
Map

Blog History:
2012
April (1)
March (4)
February (4)

Recent Blogs:
Jasmine's how to
Vanessa's Blog
Noel's News

Figure 3
Book club blog: Big ideas or themes

Bridge to Terabithia Book Club
Welcome, Miss Heintschel
Log Out

My Blogs:
Miss's Blog
[New Blog]
[New Blog]
Bridge to Terabithia Book Club
[New Blog]
Example

About this blog:
Bridge to Terabithia Book Club at PSRES.

Big Ideas or Themes
Posted on 3/7/12, 1:42 PM EST by Miss Heintschel
Bridge to Terabithia has several big ideas or themes running through the story. Comment on the big ideas or themes and respond to one another as well.
Add comment
5 comments

I think the big idea is stick up for your friends, that if you really, really like them that you should set them free. since that's what's happening with them, jess is going to hold on to leslie and tell her his true feelings, which is going to end up bad frustrated.

Posted by Madison Renae Kapp (mkapp8230@cabarrus.gaggle.net) (student) at 3/29/12, 4:30 PM EDT
Reply
1 reply

the big theme is similar, too!

Posted by Madison Renae Kapp (mkapp8230@cabarrus.gaggle.net) (student) at 3/29/12, 4:31 PM EDT
Reply
0 replies

I think so far that the theme is friends are there for so don't give up on them and using your immaganation is a good thing not something you should be embarassed about any time in your life child or adult.

Posted by Nicholas James Company (nccompany8195@cabarrus.gaggle.net) (student) at 3/16/12, 12:02 PM EDT
Reply
0 replies

I think the BIG idea is how Leslie and Jess's friendship leads them to building and playing around in Terabithia and Jess getting PT or Prince Terrian for Leslie.

Posted by Nicholas James Company (nccompany8195@cabarrus.gaggle.net) (student) at 3/16/12, 11:51 AM EDT
Reply
0 replies

One of the big themes i think is friends. Because Jess and Leslie and them's have a good relationship and they help there friends when their friends feel gloomy and down

Posted by Kevin Jason Wang (kwang8280@cabarrus.gaggle.net) (student) at 3/16/12, 11:50 AM EDT
Reply
2 replies

I agree.
Posted by Meredith Paige Hancock (mhancock8064@cabarrus.gaggle.net) (student) at 3/16/12, 12:05 PM EDT

Blog Controls
New Post
Edit Blog Settings
Create New Blog
Blog Lookup
Print

My Favorites:
Math CAMMP Lesson on Patterns

Blog Visitors: 135
Map

Blog History:
2012
April (1)
March (4)
February (4)

Recent Blogs:
Madison's Blog
Elena's Blog
Ashanti's Blog

she modeled the steps to log on and explained her expectations for their blog posts. She then shared the directions listed in Table 3 to guide students through the procedures.

Next, Cathy had each student sit down, and while the other students watched, let that student practice posting a comment by having him or her make a prediction about the book. After that, each student was expected to post something on his or her own about the book at least twice more (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). She encouraged them to use the same discussion starters as they did in their traditional book clubs. Using the blog as a space for book club discussion gave Cathy's students the flexibility to make their posts during their independent work time or even from home.

Table 3
Directions for posting to your blog

1. Click on the pages to the right to go to the book you are reading.
2. Read through your classmates' posts about the book you are all reading.
3. Decide whether you want to respond to someone else's post or post something you are thinking about on your own about the book.
4. If you are responding to someone else's post, click "respond" and write your response.
5. If you are asking a new question or posting something new, click "comment" and write your question or comment.
6. When you are finished, log out of the blog.

Figure 4
Blog posts

The screenshot displays a vertical list of ten blog posts. Each post includes a small yellow apple icon, the student's name, a timestamp, and the text of the post. The posts are as follows:

- Emma said** at 9:15 am on Apr 7, 2011: i predict that this is going to be about a kide that lives alone with his family but then his grandfather moves into his room and makes him crazy!!!!
- Ridley said** at 9:20 am on Apr 7, 2011: i predict that a boy will live with his grandpa and have a war about a room that they both want to stay in.
- Jude said** at 8:53 am on Apr 8, 2011: I prided that the book is going to be about a kids grampa is moving in, and the grandpa wants his room but the boy says no way grandpa!!!!
- Nadia said** at 9:28 am on Apr 8, 2011: I predict this story will be about a litte boy and his grandpa haveing wars.
- Jonathan said** at 9:35 am on Apr 8, 2011: i agree with ridly because the boy is sad that grampa is moving in
- Emma said** at 9:41 am on Apr 25, 2011: i think nadia is corect because it is about a boy how has alot of wars with his grandpa.
- Emma said** at 10:26 am on Apr 26, 2011: I am on chapter 25 the book has a lot of short chapters it is relly easy to read that book.the book is funny to me i dont know about any body els but i think the book is relly funny.
- Emma said** at 10:30 am on Apr 26, 2011: and a relly good book.
- Nadia said** at 10:29 am on Apr 26, 2011: Emma i agree the book is really funny,whan do thank is going to happen next?

Figure 5
Blog post



Digital Creations: Using VoiceThread to Create, Share, and Respond

VoiceThread is a Web 2.0 application that provides opportunities for users to create, communicate, and collaborate with an authentic audience in an online space. VoiceThread is a multimedia presentation tool that allows users to present information using a range of modalities such as uploaded images, videos, and documents. In addition, a key feature of VoiceThread is the ability to record audio and video through the comment feature. Both the creator and the viewers can use this feature as a platform for discussion.

For instance, the creator can use the comment feature to read, describe, and offer insight about the

uploaded content. The comment feature can also be used to pose questions for the viewers. Once the content and recorded comments have been uploaded to the VoiceThread, the creator can publish and share his or her work for a public or private audience by adjusting the privacy settings. Table 4 walks you through the basic steps for creating a VoiceThread.

When a VoiceThread is created and published, it is given a unique web address where viewers from anywhere in the world can access it. After viewing the uploaded content and comments, the viewers can also use the interactive comment feature to type, record audio, or record video feedback for the creator and other viewers. A range of responses can be shared, including a summary of learning, an emotional

Table 4
Steps to create a VoiceThread

Reaching a Wide Audience: Steps to Create a VoiceThread

1. Register for a free account.
2. Sign in.
3. Click CREATE tab at the top of the page.
4. Click UPLOAD button.
5. Choose the source of your media (e.g., a file from your computer, a website, or even photos from a media source such as Facebook or Flickr).
6. Select file.
7. View and edit final product at MyVoice page.

Providing Feedback: Steps to Comment on a VoiceThread

1. Register for a free account.
2. Sign in.
3. Click on the COMMENT button.
4. Determine what mode of feedback to provide:
 - Click on the RECORD button to leave an audio recorded comment. Click STOP when finished recording. VoiceThread will play back your comment.
 - Click on the TYPE button to leave a written comment.
 - Click on the video camera icon to leave a video-recorded comment. Click STOP RECORDING when finished recording. VoiceThread will play back your comment.
 - Click on the telephone icon to leave a phone-recorded comment. Enter your phone number. VoiceThread will call and prompt for the recorded message.
5. Click SAVE to keep, cancel, or delete your comment.

response, answers to questions posed by others, or asking new questions to extend the dialogue.

In addition to the comment aspect, VoiceThread offers an interactive doodle feature. Viewers can use the doodler to draw on the slide while commenting. Like the comment feature, this tool is easy to use and allows the creator and viewer to mark the part of the text or slide that aligns with their comments. Table 5 presents a number of ideas for using VoiceThread in your classroom discussions.

VoiceThread has become a popular tool to use in K–12 classrooms. Caroline, a fourth-grade teacher, brings VoiceThread into her classroom to digitize literacy. At the start of the new school year, Caroline introduced her fourth graders to VoiceThread by showing them examples of published VoiceThreads

from the website. She explained to her students that this was a website they would use throughout the school year for a range of projects. Caroline and her students viewed sample book recommendations, published stories with peer feedback, and online book club discussions, to name a few. By exploring a range of VoiceThreads, Caroline’s students were able to see the open-ended nature of this web application.

Next, Caroline explained that they would be using VoiceThread to publish their “I Am What I Am” poems (short, autobiographical poems that describe the writer) as way to get to know one another better and build classroom community. Caroline uploaded her poem onto VoiceThread (watch [Caroline’s “I Am What I Am” video](#)) and shared it with her students using the smartboard.

Table 5
Using VoiceThread to create, share, and respond

Book reviews: After reading several book reviews to study the format, structure, and craft of this genre, students write and post a book review for a recently read book. After uploading a selected image such as a photo of the book, students provide a brief summary, then rate the book based on a maximum rating of five stars. Peers can respond by leaving their own feedback about the book, asking questions about the book, and offering similar recommendations, thereby extending students' repertoire of books for independent reading.

Reader response: Students reading a common text can use VoiceThread as an online space to share their thinking and engage in discussion about what they read. Students can post an initial reader response by uploading an image to the VoiceThread (a scene, character, symbolic representation, digital photo of a text excerpt). Next, peers can offer a response using the comment and doodle feature. This fosters a dialogic approach to reader response that extends student thinking and fosters deeper understanding of text.

Inquiry-based learning projects: After engaging in research and wide reading on a particular topic, students can create a VoiceThread to share their findings and new knowledge. For instance, students may report on the contributing factors of climate change. Peers can view the project and offer comments, ask questions, and suggest additional resources related to the content shared. These projects can be published for a wider audience by changing the setting to public.

Writing process: Students can use VoiceThread as an online space to share their writing in various stages within their writing process. By posting a draft of their writing, students can elicit feedback from their teacher, their peers, and a wider audience, such as their family members.

Poetry: Poetry is meant to be read aloud. Students can post their original poetry to VoiceThread and record themselves reading it aloud. Having the ability to play back their recording allows students to pay attention to the tone of their language. They can then determine whether they wish to record it again. This can also improve students' fluency. Peers can comment on the poetry by adding their thoughts, insight, and connections.

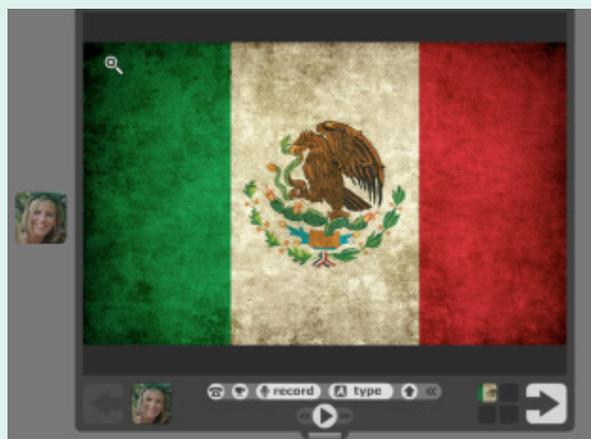
Op-ed writing: As a web-based tool, VoiceThread can be an online space for students to share persuasive writing to build awareness of important issues and foster social change. Viewers can post responses to express agreement or disagreement with the stance of the author and provide evidence to support their claims.

She prepared her students to do the same (see Figure 6 for a sample student poem).

When her students were ready to publish their poetry, Caroline took them to the computer lab where she modeled the steps for uploading documents and images to VoiceThread (refer again to Table 4) and how to use the comment feature to narrate the presentations and leave feedback for peers. The students then used the comment feature to record themselves reading their "I Am What I Am" poems aloud to accompany the personalized images.

Once Caroline's students published their poetry on VoiceThread, they viewed, listened to, read, and commented on their peers' work. Through using VoiceThread as a platform to publish their "I Am What I Am" poetry, Caroline's students engaged in digital discussion with their peers to note similarities they shared, ask questions, expand on their interests and experiences, and ultimately develop friendships. For instance, comments such as "I like soccer too and I play for the Hurricanes. What team do you play for?" and "I think it is cool that you are from Mexico.

Figure 6
Sample student "I Am What I Am" VoiceThread poem



I am what I am. I am an immigrant from Mexico living in South Carolina. I am a United States citizen but proud of my Mexican heritage. I am caramel colored skin and dark hair. I am a daughter to an amazing mother and a sister to two brothers. I am what I am.

I am what I am. I am a soccer player, a reader, and a dreamer. I enjoy being swept off to faraway places in the books I read. I am a creator. I love to draw, build, and imagine. I am what I am.

Can you teach me how to speak Spanish?” were springboard for further discussion.

Conclusions

Whether you tweet, blog, record your voice, or post a photo essay, technology in the 21st century has changed and broadened how we engage in discussions with one another. In this article, we have shown how social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter can be used for multiple purposes such as communicating multimedia to parents and students, advocating for social causes for a class project, or writing a collective poem for Language Arts.

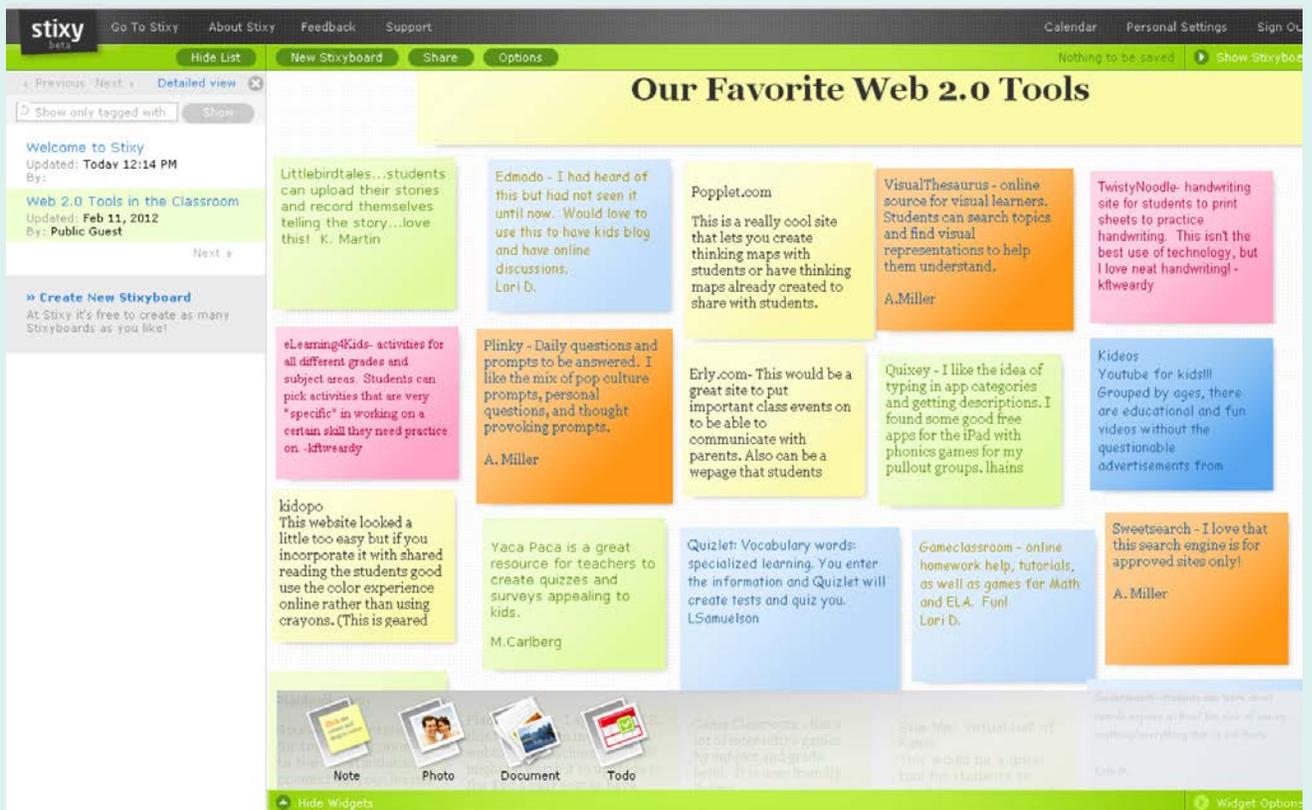
We have also shown the value of Internet platforms, specifically the inclusion of blogs and wikis, for promoting collaboration with others as a

means of not only expressing ideas and thinking but also as a vehicle for what the Alliance for Excellent Education (2011) called “deeper learning,” where students support and substantiate their opinions with evidence from multiple sources. Finally, we have illustrated VoiceThread, a Web 2.0 application that provides students with yet another digital resource to express their creativity and to connect and communicate with others.

Table 6 lists a few of our favorite websites for furthering digital discussions—we hope you’ll try some of these ideas, tweet us to say what you think, and tell us how you use digital discussions in your classroom. Let’s keep the digital discussion going! Our Twitter handles are @btk7m [Brian], @kdwood93 [Karen], @kstover24 [Katie], and @Kimberlyh018 [Kim].

Table 6
Websites and online tools to spur further discussions in classrooms

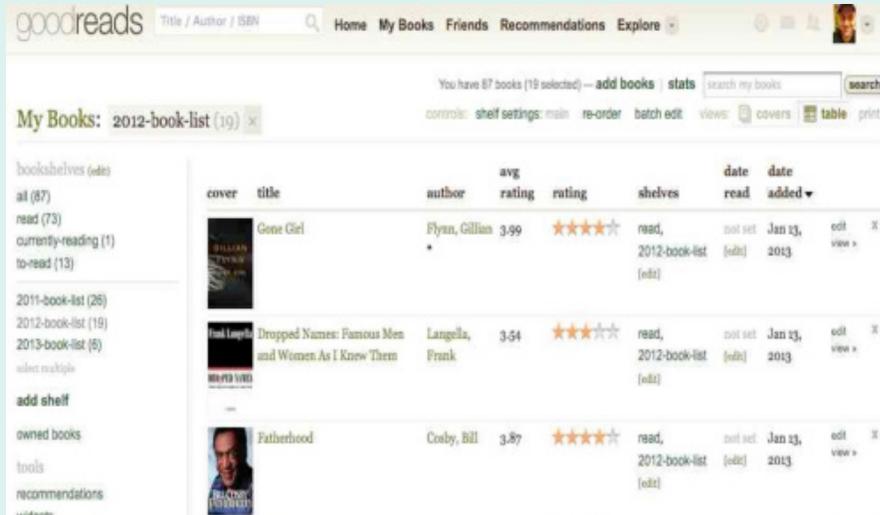
Stixy: This is a sticky-note app that allows the creator to create notes on a cork-style board. Students can use these in a Think-Pair-Share way by jotting thoughts on a note, sharing it with others, and discussing it via writing.



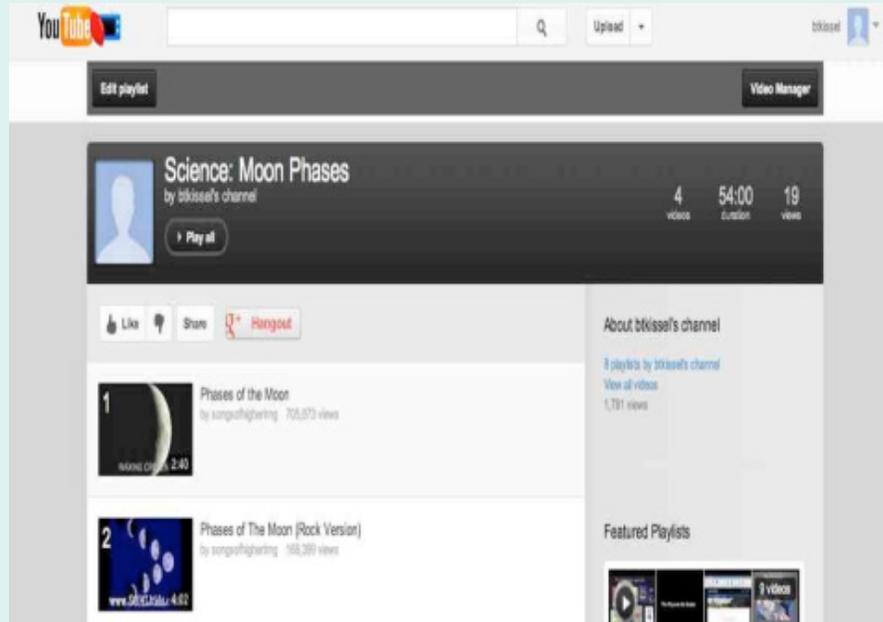
(continued)

Table 6 (continued)
Websites and online tools to spur further discussions in classrooms

GoodReads: GoodReads is a social networking site for book lovers. Students can set up accounts, read books, review them, share reviews with their peers, and discuss them through the interactive site. This is a wonderful way for students to keep track of the books they read, discover new books recommended by peers, and engage in conversations about the books.



YouTube: YouTube is not just for viewing random videos and wasting time. Sign up for a YouTube account and create your own channel. Teachers can create a channel about a particular topic (e.g., Moon Phases) and post appropriate videos gathered from the site. Students can view the videos and post comments about them in the comment box underneath. This is a multimodal way to watch, comment, and discuss content.



QR Codes: Ever wonder how you could use those QR codes in your classroom? In her presentation at NCTE in 2012, Sara Kajder explained how she used them in her middle school classroom. After students read a chapter book, she asks them to video record a book review. They upload the videos to YouTube. Then, using a QR Reader she downloaded onto her iPod Touch, she creates QR codes from the YouTube website. She creates labels for the QR codes and sticks them to the backs of the books. When students are looking for a new book to read, they use an iPod Touch, iPad, or smartphone, scan the code, and view the reviews posted by their peers. Scan the code on the right to be taken to a list of helpful digital resources that can get you started in your classroom.



Resources: Websites, Videos, and Helpful Links

Digital Communication in the Classroom: Facebook, Twitter, and Skype

- Facebook: www.facebook.com
 - [What Is Facebook?](#)
 - [100 Ways to Use Facebook in the Classroom](#)
- Twitter: www.twitter.com
 - [What Is Twitter?](#)
 - [50 Ways to Use Twitter in the Classroom](#)
 - [More Twitter Ideas](#)
 - [Even More Twitter Ideas](#)
- Skype: www.skype.com
 - [What Is Skype?](#)
 - [50 Ways to Use Skype in the Classroom](#)
 - [Mystery Skype Projects](#)
 - [Skype With an Author](#)

Digital Collaborations in the Classroom: Blogs and Wikis

- Blogging in the Classroom:
 - [Ideas for Blogging](#)
- Other Blogging Sites to Use to Create Blogs:
 - www.kidblogs.org
 - www.weebly.com
 - www.edublogs.com
 - www.edmodo.com
 - www.wix.com

Digital Creations in the Classroom

- VoiceThread: (Create interactive voice projects)
 - VoiceThread.com
- LiveBinders (Create a binder of resources to use in your classroom or to use professionally to consolidate your favorite websites):
 - LiveBinders.com
 - [VoiceThread LiveBinder Resource](#)
- Podcasting:
 - AudioBoo (Make your own 3-minute podcast)

Other Helpful Links

- Troy Hicks (digital literacy researcher and professor):
 - hickstro.org
 - www.choiceliteracy.com/articles-detail-view.php?id=1021
- 21st Century Teacher's Tech Toolbox:
 - [Teacher Toolbox for 21st-Century Tools](#)

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