SCAFFOLDING
DIGITAL CREATION

Three steps to move students up the ladder from consumers to curators to creators of digital content

By **W. Ian O'Byrne**

a 21st-century educational system must educate all students in the effective and authentic use of the technologies that permeate society. This means that students should have opportunities to not only read the Web but also write the Web.

In this article, I will identify three stages that I believe exist as we help students become the digital natives that they need to be. These stages move students from consumers to curators to finally creators of content. The stages do not have to operate in a sequence nor should they be mutually exclusive. Students could and should move across each stage depending on purpose in their work.

Consumption

The first stage involves students reading online content and materials primarily. This may take the form of students reading blogs, wikis, and social networks for personal and academic pursuits. Students should read across multiple modes of information such as text, images, video, audio, and other graphical representations. Graphical representations may include charts, graphs, infographics, and maps. The important thing to remember is that students need to be able to synthesize across these varied modes and formats.

The good news is that our students are already reading online. Research and anecdotal information suggest that as a society, we (and students specifically) are online reading and interacting vociferously. We need to provide more room for online reading comprehension in classrooms from pre-K through higher education. We also need to require more from our students in terms of applying a critical perspective as they read in these spaces.

One powerful way to build critical literacies is to have students annotate websites as they read by printing webpages and highlighting the hard copies. Annotation is also possible through the use of online tools like the open source tool Hypothes.is.

Curation

The second stage involves students curating online content as they search and sift through texts. Curation is defined as pulling together, sifting through, and selecting specific content for presentation. This may take the form of students reading and archiving websites before sharing or commenting on the content. In this process, students are deciding whether these materials are credible or relevant to the purpose of their inquiry. This process occurs on two levels: As students are gradually learning more about a topic by reading more content, they are also modifying their evaluations of new content. Over time, students become more of an expert on the topic and the process involved as they build their own credibility.

Many educators and students already act as curators as they sift and share links on Pinterest and other social networks. Using these platforms, individuals can review the vast amount of information and links that are shared online. They then indicate what is the best of the best. The links and collections shared are evidence of knowledge, expertise, and credibility.

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One possibility for embedding curation of online content in the classroom is through the use of Pinterest or similar platforms built specifically for educators. Educators may also use tools like Storify to allow students to collect and comment on resources while searching online.

Creation

The third stage involves having students construct or create digital content. There are many parallels between online content construction and the writing process, as students plan, generate, organize, compose, and revise digital work. This may take the form of students editing a wiki, building a website, or producing a stop-motion video.

In this process, students are encoding and decoding meaning by constructing, redesigning, and reinventing texts. Students write, compose, and create through play and expression with digital texts and tools. The tools used in this stage are varied, as students may choose to write a blog post, capture video for a public service announcement, or edit code for an app. Students also need to be considerate of the purpose and audience for the work they create.

One possibility for embedding content creation is to have students film think-alouds for their projects. Video think-alouds can be created using Web cameras on computers, tablets, or mobile devices. These think-alouds can be of students as they discuss their ideas and work, or the video can focus on the specific project or text they are describing. The think-aloud provides an opportunity to build metacognitive skills that would normally be recorded in a journal or written essay. A powerful tool to use in the collection and sharing of these videos is VoiceThread on a classroom blog.

Becoming digitally native

For students in particular, their ability to best use these literacies is central to our collective future. Educators should continue to show that they can work with students to understand and

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prepare them for these digital spaces and beyond.

As technologies connect our global marketplace, students need to identify opportunities to empower themselves as true natives of these digital spaces. This can happen only if educators identify and develop opportunities to build and use these digital literacies in instruction.

There is a need not only to use these texts and tools in instruction but also to have educators display them. This is an opportunity to review our own instructional practices and literacy strategies highlighted in our classrooms. ■