

READING WORKSHOP 2.0

Children's Literature in the Digital Age

Frank Serafini ■ Suzette Youngs

The way readers read, share, discuss, and analyze children's literature has been affected by the emergence of multimodal and digitally based texts. Unlike traditional, print-based texts, multimodal and digitally based texts require readers to attend to visual images, design elements, and hypertextual elements in addition to written language (Serafini, 2010). Because of these changes, new instructional approaches and resources will be required to support the development of young readers in a Reading Workshop 2.0 environment.

Making a shift to a Reading Workshop 2.0 environment requires educators to consider the following three questions: (1) How will the role of children's literature be affected by a shift to a Reading Workshop 2.0 environment? (2) What new abilities and skills will readers need to navigate and comprehend multimodal and digitally based texts and resources? (3) How do teachers incorporate multimodal and digitally based resources into an already crowded reading curriculum?

In a Reading Workshop 2.0 environment, readers might read children's picture books and novels on e-readers, share their ideas on Web-based discussion boards, and analyze texts using digital tools and resources. Digitally based response notebooks and websites designed for sharing book reviews and commentaries (e.g., Goodreads.com) might take the place of traditional, paper-and-pencil book reports. In this column, we consider how multimodal, digitally based texts and resources influence reading, sharing,

discussing, and analyzing children's literature. Although these processes blend together in actual practice, we discuss them separately here to provide readers of this column with some instructional possibilities for supporting these individual processes.

Reading

How we read and encounter children's literature has evolved since the advent of the personal computer. In the past decade, audio books, e-readers, and interactive digital storybooks have been challenging the domination of print-based texts in many classrooms. Young readers are reading children's literature delivered on computer screens, Kindles, Nooks, iPads, cell phones, and other electronic devices. These devices allow readers to control the size of the font, hide the contents of what they are reading from other students, instantly share reviews and commentaries with other readers on websites, get targeted recommendations from booksellers, and purchase additional texts immediately after finishing the ones they are reading.

When reading multimodal and digitally based texts, readers are still required to decode written

Suzette Youngs is an assistant professor at University of Northern Colorado, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Greeley, USA; e-mail suzette.youngs@unco.edu.

The department editor welcomes reader comments. Frank Serafini is an associate professor of Literacy Education at Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University, Phoenix, USA; e-mail fserafini@mac.com.

“Decoding written language is only one aspect of learning to navigate the structures and designs of multimodal and digitally based texts.”

language; however, they must also learn to navigate new text structures, for example, nonlinear narratives, hypertext, and multiple storylines, and understand how visual images and design features add to the meaning potential of these complex texts (Serafini, 2012). Decoding written language is only one aspect of learning to navigate the structures and designs of multimodal and digitally based texts, albeit still an important component of reading.

E-readers such as the Kindle, Nook, and iPad allow readers to easily access digitally based dictionaries as they read, providing support for their comprehension of text and expanding their vocabularies. In addition, many readers now subscribe to magazines and newspapers in electronic versions, foregoing the delivery of printed texts. These versions of the news are more interactive, are updated throughout the day, and contain links to additional information and resources. The picture book *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* (Joyce, 2012) began as an Academy Award-winning animated short film and is now available as an app for digital tablets. Realizing this story across digital and print-based formats changes how readers transact with the narrative, encounter the accompanying visual images, and navigate its textual structures.

Sharing

Readers are able to share and archive their reading lives in new and

exciting ways in digital environments. Websites such as Goodreads.com, Shelfari.com, and LibraryThing.com allow readers to create online reading histories and place books on digital bookshelves for future reading. These Web-based resources allow readers to share what they are reading and what they have read with readers around the world the instant they finish a book.

In addition to sharing books and commentaries, readers can highlight sections of texts and make these available for other readers to consider. Readers can see what other readers have found important in a text, forcing them to reconsider what has been read and what meanings are possible as they continue with the text. Whereas in the past reading was predominantly an individual experience, it has become a more social event by using the digital resources that are readily available to readers. The access to others' reading lives has created a space for sharing responses to texts on a global platform. Readers in the United States can now find out what readers in New Zealand, China, and India think about the same book. Finding out what other readers read, think, and highlight is an

important evolution in the reading lives of our students.

Discussing

A Reading Workshop 2.0 environment presents new opportunities for readers to discuss literature outside the boundaries of the physical classroom as video conferencing technologies such as Skype, FaceTime, and iChat create spaces for readers to discuss what they have read. Teachers can locate other classrooms around the country or worldwide and establish a relationship in which readers can read, share ideas, and discuss texts across time and space. Many students have the technology in school or at home to have virtual “face to face” interactions via these video technologies. This access to other people affords readers the opportunity to instantly connect with classmates and friends to discuss the latest bestseller.

The popularity of *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2010) enticed readers to devour these books and share with their friends their thoughts about what had happened. Our own daughters and nieces were found sitting on their beds texting one friend and video conferencing with another as they read through the trilogy. Readers live in a world where access to their friends can be instantaneous, supporting how they share their responses to their favorite books. A Reading Workshop 2.0 environment creates a space for readers to establish meaningful connections with other readers as they read books that are similar to their own interests.

“Whereas in the past reading was predominantly an individual experience, it has become a more social event by using the digital resources that are readily available to readers.”

On websites such as Goodreads.com, Librarything.com, and Shelfari.com, readers can join discussion groups focusing on their favorite books and entrench themselves in a particular literary genre that might not be as popular in their own classrooms. Readers can remain anonymous as they post their commentaries and feel safer to share their ideas with these groups because of this anonymity. These websites also allow readers to discuss literature with people of different age groups, nationalities, experiences, and genders, exposing them to a wider variety of perspectives. Teachers can also use these websites to create classroom discussion boards for their classroom or schools.

A Reading Workshop 2.0 environment affords readers the opportunity to expand their understanding of particular authors, genres, and topics they are reading by using cell phones, digital tablets, or computers to explore publishers' and authors' websites and critical review sites such as Hornbookguide.com, Childrenslit.com, and Thechildrensbookreview.com. Information is readily available to help readers interpret and understand what they are reading. Literature discussion groups can also use technology to pose questions to various authors, video conference with another group reading the same book, and pull up digital resources to support their discussions.

Analyzing

Digital environments can expand the opportunities for readers to reconfigure ideas from predominately written formats, for example, literature response notebooks, to representing ideas in multimodal presentations using PowerPoint, Wordle, YouTube, Glogster,

“As the digital worlds students inhabit outside of school expand, so too should the digital resources and environments within schools expand.”

Prezi, and other digital resources. The use of video allows students to represent their interpretations in a variety of formats that others can access and consider. These digital projects require readers to develop an understanding of the affordances and limitations of various multimedia for highlighting and representing their interpretations (Kress, 2010).

Creating multimodal presentations that include video clips, photographs, sound effects, and music allows readers to expand their ideas as they make intertextual connections to pop culture and other experiences outside of school. These presentations can be posted to sites such as Glogster.com and Youtube.com for other readers to consider. Glogster can also be used as a way for readers to express their interpretations across multiple genres. Glogster is a digitally based poster site that allows readers to combine and upload text, images, and moving images, providing avenues for deeper understanding.

Another interesting way to expand avenues for analysis is through the use of Wordle (Wordle.net). Wordle software allows readers to create *word clouds* by uploading any type of written document, displaying words with the highest frequency of occurrence in larger and bolder typeface. The larger a word is displayed, the more frequently it occurs in a text. Readers can access an interview with a particular children's author, copy sections from a particular book, access a transcript of a class

discussion, or copy online reviews and upload these texts into Wordle for readers to compare and analyze. This visual display of textual information provides readers with another way to consider what is being said about their favorite books.

Through the use of digital software programs such as Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop Elements, readers can combine images and text from one book with images from another to create new visual representations. Readers might take a book such as *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 2001), scan particular pages, and digitally bring a character, for example, Chester, from another book into this alternative literary world.

Chester (Watt, 2009) is a postmodern picture book in which the main character, Chester, uses a red marker to intrude on the original story. Readers can use this technique to show how Chester might react to the characters from *Voices in the Park*. Readers could also create a sequel to *Knuffle Bunny* (Willems, 2004) using the blend of cartoon drawings and black and white photographs to render their own version of the story. These digital resources expand the possibilities for analyzing children's literature and share readers' interpretations with wider audiences across time and space.

Concluding Remarks

A Reading Workshop 2.0 environment provides readers with many new

resources for reading, sharing, and discussing and analyzing children's literature. These digital resources support teachers and students as they break away from the traditional book report and allow readers new avenues for analyzing and discussing what they are reading. As the digital worlds students inhabit outside of school expand, so too should the digital resources

and environments within schools expand.

REFERENCES

- Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. London: Routledge.
- Serafini, F. (2010). Reading multimodal texts: Perceptual, structural and ideological perspectives. *Children's Literature in Education, 41*(2), 85–104. doi:10.1007/s10583-010-9100-5
- Serafini, F. (2012). Expanding the four resources model: Reading visual and multimodal texts.

Pedagogies: An International Journal, 7(2), 150–164.

LITERATURE CITED

- Browne, A. (2001). *Voices in the park*. New York: DK.
- Collins, S. (2010). *The hunger games*. New York: Scholastic.
- Joyce, W. (2012). *The fantastic flying books of Mr. Morris Lessmore*. New York: Atheneum.
- Watt, M. (2009). *Chester*. Toronto, ON, Canada: Kids Can.
- Willems, M. (2004). *Knuffle bunny*. New York: Hyperion.