Talking About Digital Media and Learning Toolkit:

Frequently Asked Questions

This document is not intended to provide "the right answers" to questions you might be asked, but rather to offer illustrations of how to more effectively communicate about the role of digital media and learning. In the following question and answer sequence, we demonstrate how an advocate might think about turning unproductive frames embedded in questions into opportunities to advance a more effective message. Communicators will find their own ways of putting these illustrative principles into practice.

Q1. Why do we need digital media in education?

Less Effective Response:

The American education system is currently in a crisis. Young people are disconnected from what is being taught in school. They are, however, highly engaged in digital media outside of school. If we can find ways to use digital media in the classroom, we can engage young people again in learning. We can use digital media to revolutionize our education system by making learning fun and relevant to young people.

Analysis:
- Evokes "crisis" thinking that American education cannot be fixed.
- Doesn't help people understand how digital media are learning tools for finding and sorting information to produce knowledge.
- Triggers "digital media as entertainment" mentality. In this way, digital media is inauthentic learning and a distraction to children's learning.

More Effective Response:

Our nation's progress depends on a common sense approach to improving learning so that young people are ready to lead the workforce of tomorrow. We know that the information terrain is different today than in the past. We mentor students in the use of digital technologies so they become skilled drivers on this new information terrain. We make sure they have both the basic and advanced skills they need to successfully

navigate the journey of knowledge production. If we fail to act with this goal in mind, our country will be stuck with old ways of learning that are unsuited for the needs of tomorrow. Instead, we can move forward by taking practical steps to integrate digital learning tools into our education system.

Analysis:
- Uses values of progress and pragmatism to shift thinking away from individualism and toward national interest.
- Employs the "information terrain" metaphor to help the public understand how the world has changed and why learning needs to change as well.
- Points out that higher-order skills need not come at expense of 'the basics'
- Uses a reasonable tone to help the public understand how digital tools equip students for the workforce.

Q2. Why should teachers focus on Connected Learning? Shouldn't teachers just focus on core skills, like reading and math?

Less Effective Response:

If teachers just focus on the basics, then students will never learn the skills they need to compete in today's workforce. Students will not be able to get good jobs and we will have to hire people from overseas who have the skills for high-paying digital work. Instead, we need to train teachers to create Connected Learning experiences for students. Connected Learning is about giving students the 21st century skills they need to be college and career ready so that America can be strong in the global economy.

Analysis:
- Cues global competition value.
- Cues education as a consumer good: the goal of gaining skills is to be able to make money
- Doesn't specify what is meant by 21st century skills.
- Fails to explain how Connected Learning works.

More Effective Response:

To move our country forward, students need to have practical, hands-on learning experiences that prepare them for the demands of today's workforce. This means that students need to not only learn the basics, but they also need to learn the types of complex skills that the most successful adults use in the workplace every day: problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. One way to think about how students learn these skills is to think of students as cooks who need lots of hands-on practice working with the ingredients of learning – information – to know how to use it. In the beginning, novice cooks are mentored by more experienced cooks to learn the basics - such as how to use kitchen tools, select ingredients, and follow recipes. As students become better cooks, they experiment with ingredients to create new

kinds of recipes. They share their meals with other budding chefs, gather feedback, and refine their recipes along the way. This type of learning experience, which we call Connected Learning, is about preparing students to become expert cooks who can skillfully and creatively create knowledge made from ingredients they find throughout life. When our students are equipped with these types of skills for lifelong learning, our society is better able to make progress on tomorrow's challenges.

Analysis:
- Starts with progress and pragmatism values to tap into a cultural model that is more productive for DML.
- Uses a learning metaphor to explain how Connected Learning experiences promote a collaborative and interactive mode of learning.
- Specifies the types of skills acquired through a Connected Learning approach.

Q3. Doesn't digital media distract students? Isn't it just a form of entertainment?

Less Effective Response:

It's true. Digital media is often a form of entertainment for children. They spend many hours playing video games and watching videos on YouTube. But we can also teach children to use digital media to find out about what interests them. We live in an era when information about anything is available at our fingertips. The old way of learning through "stand and deliver" lectures and textbooks is no longer relevant. We can teach children to use digital tools so they can acquire information they want, whenever and however they need it.

Analysis:
- Reinforces digital media as a form of recreation, or at best, as a supplemental form of learning.
- Individualizes learning, as it focuses on tailoring information to the interest of individual learners.
- Does not specify learning skills.
- Cues digital media as a passive form of learning, or a "faster and fancier" book, that the public views as a "lazy" way of learning new information.

More Effective Response:

In today's society, students need to learn how to acquire and produce knowledge that contributes to the workforce and to their communities. Our country's progress depends on teaching our children how to use the most up-to-date digital tools to become skilled knowledge producers. With our DML programs, we are mentoring children to develop important skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking, in a way that engages them and prepares them to be lifelong learners. We do this by helping them think of information as ingredients that we cook with. We teach students to select and evaluate information ingredients, as well as how to use kitchen tools and follow recipes. The more practice and experimentation that students have working with information in this way, the better they are at becoming knowledge producers in their own right. This is good for our students and it's good for our country.

Analysis:
- Pivots conversation to progress value.
- Mentions specific learning skills.
- Focuses on collective benefits of DML programs.
- Uses a learning metaphor to explain how DML programs promote engagement, rather than distraction, for students.

Q4. How will kids learn if the teacher isn't in control of the subject matter?

Less Effective Response:

For technology to be integrated effectively into the classroom, our school culture needs to change so that teachers and parents are no longer fearful of giving up a certain amount of control to students. The issue of giving up control seems to always raise the fear level, even among many of the best teachers. Schools and classrooms do not, and will not, spiral out of control when we allow teachers the flexibility to take calculated risks to innovate with technology or permit students to learn using social media or their own devices.

Analysis:
- Reinforces fear by cuing the dominant cultural model of "digital media as dangerous."
- Calls up the dominant model of teacher-centered classrooms without providing a more vivid alternative model of student-centered learning.
- Fails to mention mentoring. The mentoring component of DML is the element that assuages public fears, but this critical piece is absent in this response.

More Effective Response:

We know that we need a common-sense approach to improving learning. This means giving teachers and parents the resources they need to mentor students in using digital media, not throwing out these innovations. We like to think of our learners as being on an information journey. They need to learn the rules of the road and how to navigate to get where they need to go. To do this, they have to get their hands on the wheel and be in the driver's seat. But they can't learn this on their own. They need help from more experienced drivers. This is why we offer training to our teachers and parents in how to mentor our students to become expert drivers on the information journey. In this way, we teach our students to acquire and produce knowledge that enables them to be lifelong learners wherever they are.

Analysis:
- Starts with a pragmatism value to shift away from a fear perspective to one that is grounded in a "common-sense" approach.
- Uses a learning model for mentoring that explains how teachers and parents ensure that students are safe when using digital media.

Q5. All of this technology is great if you have the cash for it. Most schools can't afford it, especially schools in poor communities. Shouldn't we just focus on getting these kids to graduate and pass their exit exams?

Less Effective Response:

If educators can reach out to disenfranchised kids by engaging them with tactics like using their mobiles phones and Facebook for learning in class, dropout rates and truancies might actually drop. We might see kids more interested in school, regardless of their economic standing. What makes this a more urgent issue is that the "digital divide" will grow even more if low-income students aren't taught how to use important tech tools they'll need to survive outside school.

Analysis:
- Mentions digital media technologies and apps that the public views primarily as entertainment and distraction.
- No mention of how communities may benefit from having students trained in digital media use. Benefits are individualized.

More Effective Response:

The progress of our country depends on all of our children having access to the most up-to-date education. American workers will need to have digital literacy skills to move our country forward. We know that children's out-of-school time is just as important as in-school time, and that many young people in disadvantaged communities do not have access to quality educational programs after school. These resources are not distributed fairly, but we can change that. To reach these students, we need to make sure that they have access to learning experiences that are interactive, student-centered, and experiential – because these experiences build skills like critical thinking and problem solving. Just like cooks in a kitchen, our students need practice working with information, experimenting with different ingredients, and learning from more experienced cooks. We are working with libraries in underserved areas to implement programs that provide this type of learning experience to these students. All of our communities benefit when children learn the valuable skills they will need to succeed in life and contribute to their community.

Analysis:
- Starts with a progress and pragmatism value.
- Invokes a "fairness across places" value to talk about how communities may benefit from DML programs.
- Points to the ways digital media as learning tools can be used both inside and outside of classroom settings.

Q6. I don't know if I want my child exposed to digital media in school. There are too many risks involved, like sexual predators and cyber bullying. How do I know my child is going to be safe?

Less Effective Response:

How will children learn how to protect themselves if we don't give them the chance to explore on their own? Children are already online at home or with their friends, and we know much of this online time is spent playing games or on social networking sites. If we don't teach children how to use digital media for learning, then they may never know how to take advantage of all the educational possibilities it has to offer. This means that we have to expose children to digital media in a new way. At first, this may seem risky, but they will eventually get the hang of it.

Analysis:

- Relies on the "children as sponges" cultural model to explain how students will naturally learn how to use digital media in school.
- Fails to include mentoring as an important learning component.
- Reinforces digital media as distraction.

More Effective Response:

For our country to make the progress we need in the 21st century, we need to teach and guide our children how to use information technologies in a way that equips them to meet future challenges. We can do this in a way that is both practical and safe. We need to take a common-sense approach to mentoring our students in using digital media, much like the way we mentor our students when they start to learn how to drive. We don't just give novice drivers the keys to the car and let them take off. We mentor them by sitting in the passenger seat while they take the wheel. We show them how to use the pedals, how to check traffic using mirrors, and how to be cautious of oncoming traffic. We are with them while they practice driving in the local neighborhood and eventually on the freeway. We are there to make sure they learn the skills they need, both basic skills and more advanced driving skills, so that they can be expert drivers on their own. In the same way, we want to make sure we equip our students to learn how to use technology so they can traverse the information terrain and become expert knowledge drivers. But we can't do this if we don't let them get in the driver's seat with restrictive web policies at school. That is why we are advocating for a reasonable and updated Acceptable Use Policy. This policy enables responsible educators to provide stimulating and safe learning environments that support the acquisition of the practical skills necessary for full participation in today's digital world.

Analysis:

- Pivots to progress and pragmatism value.
- Uses the information drivers metaphor to explain how mentoring happens with digital media in a step-by-step fashion.
- Reinforces safety of students and responsibility of teachers.