



## Talking About Digital Media and Learning Toolkit: Sample Editorials

*The following are three examples of ways to incorporate the framing research into short guest editorials between 250 and 600 words each.*

### **Mentoring Students to Be Knowledge Producers in Today's World**

A lot of people are talking nowadays about the need to update our education system. We agree. Making sure that our children have the skills they need to contribute to tomorrow's workforce and communities should be a priority for our country. That means taking advantage of new learning tools to ensure that our children's learning prepares them for the world they will actually live in.

We believe in a common-sense, step-by-step approach to integrating digital media programs in our education system. This involves creating learning experiences for students that teach them how to select and use information in a way that leads to the production of knowledge and, in turn, to the progress of our country.

But what is the best way to do this? We like to think of learning as being on an information journey. Far too often, students are learning to navigate the information journey on their own. It is important for students to get their hands on the wheel and be in the driver's seat, but they need to be guided by more experienced drivers. In a driver's ed course, for example, adults help students get lots of practice driving in different types of settings and terrains. It's not until students have shown that they can handle many different situations safely that we give them a license to drive on the open road on their own.

In this same way, we can think of the role of teachers and parents as guides in helping children learn how to use digital media to achieve learning aims. We mentor them in using these new technologies so that they can get good at navigating the information terrain and find what they need to know to produce knowledge. We know that when students are guided in this way, they develop important skills, such as problem solving and critical thinking, that enable them to handle challenges in the workplace and in life.

But we need to support our teachers and schools to create these learning experiences. We can do this in two ways. The first way is by providing digital training to teachers. There are new programs available now that are effective in training teachers to

integrate digital media platforms into learning. The second way is to support school policies that enable teachers and students to use the web for knowledge production. We need web-filtering policies that support hands-on learning, rather than make it more difficult to accomplish.

If we are going to prepare the next generation to be skilled knowledge producers, then we need to mentor our students in using these platforms in a constructive and productive manner. Training teachers to develop these skills among our youth and creating more effective web-filtering policies are two important steps that will update our education system and move our country forward.

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## **To Improve Children's Learning, Add Key Ingredients: Information Technologies**

Improving our children's learning will only happen when we put forward common-sense, practical solutions that ensure their learning is not outdated. This means identifying and borrowing ideas we see working in communities around our country, and teaching our children useful skills and competencies that will contribute to our country's success in today's digital world.

Educators and entrepreneurs alike already know that improving learning for children requires direct, interactive, hands-on learning experiences and mentorship in order to develop higher-order skills like critical thinking. Children need opportunities to practice working effectively with information: to be able to find information, judge its quality, and learn when and how to mix it together with other information to be able to make sense of the world around them. Similar to cooks who select, mix, and prepare ingredients together to make meals, children also need to learn how to select and work with information to produce knowledge. But children cannot learn how to use information and work with new learning tools by themselves. Instead, they need to have guidance and support from mentors in the same way cooks need support from expert chefs who have more kitchen experience. In effect, providing children access to practice with all sorts of information and tools -- under the guidance of mentors-- is the best gift we can give them and our country for the future.

Effective learning opportunities create empowered learners. It is easy to see that when children have access to informational technologies, under the guidance of experienced teachers and mentors, they develop the confidence and competency to share knowledge with others inside and outside of the classroom. In many ways, it's like learning to drive a car; the only way to really do it is by getting your hands on the wheel and your feet on the pedals. Likewise, children need to learn how to get behind the wheel of new information "vehicles." In doing so, they become engaged and interested in learning because it provides them an interactive context to develop and apply their skills.

There are many innovative curricular approaches that use informational technologies to make learning relevant and engaging. Examples of such promising approaches can be found at the Middleton Alternative Senior High in Wisconsin and the Science Leadership Academy High School in Philadelphia.

These two programs have designed curricula that enable children to use digital media to find and use information, develop research questions, work in groups that are guided by teachers and community leaders, answer questions, and link what they've learned to other issues that affect them, both in and outside the classroom.

What we know about effective learning is that when children have access to learner-centered, experiential, and mentored experiences like these, they learn the information, skills, and knowledge to best prepare them for the future demands of our changing society. If we want to reap the benefits of this knowledge production, we need to bring media into mentored environments where they can be safely explored, shared and mastered.

By committing ourselves to practical approaches to improve children's learning, and by incorporating innovative information technologies into learning, we can make sure that our kids and our country are ready to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.  
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## Remodeling Our Education System with Digital Media

The future of our country depends on how ingenious we can be in retooling our education system to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We need to teach our students skills that contribute to a creative workforce and vibrant communities. We can do this using an approach that is both practical and achievable.

It is time to remodel our education system to reflect the times we live in. Right now, our educational system is an old house that doesn't do a good enough job of educating our children or providing society with the skills that America needs. We have an opportunity and obligation to remodel our educational system to better suit our collective needs.

The best place to start the remodeling project is to emphasize more hands-on, real-world, experiential learning of information, rather than merely drilling the basics. We like to think of students as budding cooks in the kitchen, who need practice working with information ingredients. This is a hands-on experience where students learn from more experienced cooks about how to select ingredients, use cooking tools, and follow recipes. As students become better information cooks, they experiment with ingredients they like to create new kinds of recipes. They share their meals with other students, gather feedback, and refine their recipes along the way. This experience prepares students to eventually become expert information cooks who can skillfully and creatively produce knowledge made from ingredients they find throughout life. If we know we need to get kids into the learning kitchen, we can see lots of places where our education system is already working as well as places we need to remodel it to accommodate the new functions it needs to serve.

Our educational system should incorporate learning experiences with digital media in order to stay in touch with how knowledge is produced and used in our world today. Integrating digital media in the classroom is one important way we can help our students gain mastery in learning and working with new information. Innovative educators and institutions across the country are developing digital media programs to meet the needs of today's students in tomorrow's world. Some of these centers include the Quest to Learn School in New York City, BrightWorks in San Francisco, and the Green Dot Schools in Los Angeles. Students at these schools are not only consumers of knowledge, but also producers of knowledge.

Let's remodel our education system by putting the needs of our students and our country first. Let's be practical and learn from what is working with educators and institutions that are showing the way forward. When we remodel our education system, updating it to include digital learning tools, we increase our ability to meet the future prepared. (Word Count: 456)