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THEME: Meaning

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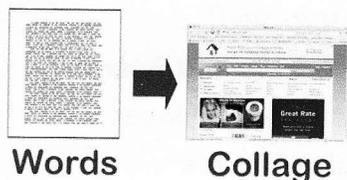
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From Text Art

in Everyday Communication



Jason Ohler

If you understand the image above, then you understand the crux of this article: more and more, images are being used to communicate ideas once reserved exclusively for text. For more information, a text-based explanation follows.

Literacy Shift

Literacy: being able to read and write the media forms of the day, whatever they may be.

Literacy requires being able to consume and produce the media forms of the day, whatever they may be. For centuries this has involved primarily words, particularly words recorded and read on paper. But during the past ten years, the default media form has been slowly shifting from the text-centric report to the new media collage. From PowerPoint presentations to digital stories to the ubiquitous web pages that follow us around all day, the multimedia collage is the media form that now bridges the worlds of work, school, and personal pursuits.

Shrinking Lag Time Between Read-only to Write-possible

The shift has come about due to the presence of inexpensive, pervasive tools that have reduced the time taken for media to go from mass media (written by a few and read by many) to personal media that the general public can both read and write.

Media form	Read-write lag time	Explanation
Text, books	centuries	Words were first spoken to the illiterate masses, who, after centuries of listening, learned to read. But it was still centuries before the average citizen was expected to be able to write.
TV, movies	50 years	For the first half century of TV's existence, it took engineers and substantial financial backing to produce and distribute TV material. However, today anyone can create a "TV station" using an inexpensive video camera and a broadband connection.
Web material	10-15 years	During web 1.0, the web was read by many and written by few. But in Web 2.0, nontechnical people can create or add to blogs, Wiki or other social media forms with little or no training.

Consider the lag time that has passed between reading and writing the following:

The Attitude Is the Aptitude

Clearly the trend is an ever-decreasing amount of time for new media forms to go from the read-only to write-possible. We can anticipate a day when new media forms enter mainstream communication channels that are read-write from the outset. Thus, we need to be facile enough to grasp their value and mechanics. Once again the digital age is telling us the attitude is the aptitude. Our intelligence in part will be determined by our ability to quickly learn new communication forms while adjusting to the role that old ones play. As new media forms emerge, it seems reasonable to assume that they will add new communication dimensions to the media collage, expanding the foundation of Web 2.1.

Web 2.1 in Education

Media collage: integrating a number of media into a unified narrative. We have been relatively comfortable with Web 2.0 because it has been primarily text-based. But as we shift from text-centrism to media collage, we lose our footing. Very few of us feel comfortable integrating text, images, video, music, and other media into a unified narrative because it is a relatively new media form. And yet, that is exactly what the world now depends on, and what education does not stress. Some possible ways to address this include:

- **Finally and officially recognize art as "the 4th R."** Art is no longer a content area, it is the cross-curriculum literacy needed for basic forms of communication. It should be supported in school systems as such.

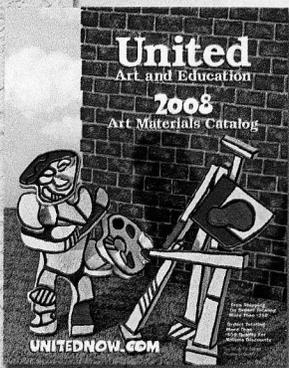
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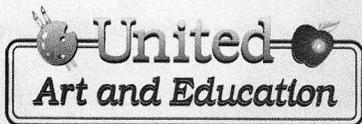
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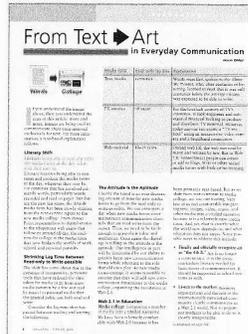
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Continued from page 16.



- **Listen to the market.** Business, organizations and the rest of the internationally networked community clearly communicate in a Web 2.1 world. Not to prepare our students to be able to do so is clearly irresponsible.
- **Add Web 2.1 literacy to teacher education programs.** We can't expect teachers to be comfortable assessing work created in a Web 2.1 world if they have not been trained to do so. They do not need to be particularly artistically inclined or technically facile. But they do need to be able to implement rubrics that respect effectiveness and quality.
- **Use media grammar.** What are the run-ons and fragments of the media collage? They do exist and can be taught to a certain extent. More information at jasonohler.com/mediagrammar.

Web 3.0 is, of course, already being implemented. It will add substantially to Web 2.1 in ways that will change the very nature of how we use the Web and depend upon it as a resource. But that is a topic for another article. 

Dr. Jason Ohler is president's professor of educational technology and eLearning at the University of Alaska. More information is available at www.jasonohler.com.



For more information about Web 2.1 visit jasonohler.com/beyondwords