

Learning with Social Media and Web 2.0

Where Do I Begin?

By John K. Kummings

Social media and Web 2.0 technologies have created an environment where unique learning opportunities can occur. Without leaving the classroom, teachers and students can travel around the globe, link to valuable primary source information, and have face-to-face conversations with experts and their subject-area peers.

Innovations in technology have led to new media tools for communicating, resulting in a brand new term: “Death of Distance” (Zhao 2009). Twitter™, Ning™, Google™ Docs and Apps, Jing®, and Skype™ are just a handful of the technologies that can connect you with experts anywhere on the planet in real time. These innovations offer creative ways to engage students, but where do you start?

Knowing where to begin with new technologies is vital to successful use. Before moving forward with a project, review your district’s Authorized User Policy (AUP) and explain your instructional plans using a new technology to your principal to ensure it is permissible under the district policy.

To get started with Web 2.0, go to the source: the Web! Read what your peers write and report on various education blogs

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(see page 5) and try out their suggestions to increase your success. Many of these blogs are great tutorials for the world of Web 2.0.

Self-Driven Professional Development

Having a solid Professional Learning Network (PLN)—a group of experts in your field—allows for a constant source of customized, self-initiated professional development tools and opportunities. A PLN establishes support systems in professional and emotional domains, which can be invaluable to teachers looking to incorporate Web 2.0 (Lieberman and Grolnick 1998). As professionals, we need to seek out information and people who will help us improve our practice in search of “betterment” (Gawande 2007).

Furthermore, research shows that the best learning takes place when students are actively engaged, and social media applications augment the engagement factor. Twitter, for example, can offer an unending stream of resources, information, and ideas throughout the day, as thousands of educators at all levels share their expertise and experiences—in 140 characters or less. This user-friendly Web 2.0 tool is a great way to build your PLN.

Social Media to Grow Your PLN

Having a team of subject- or grade-level partners in your district is important to your PLN; but imagine extending your professional community to people in similar positions across the planet! With Twitter, you can begin collaborating globally—and instantaneously—via posted

tweets with links to lesson ideas, primary sources, blogs, and research articles.

Ask questions. Post answers. Also, check Twitter lists, such as <http://tinyurl.com/twitterteach>, to learn more about the medium and its vast connections. You will be amazed how quickly you can build your network and learn about Web 2.0 technologies used as instructional tools. Soon you will be ready to try them in your classroom; perhaps one of the following.

Elementary School Educators

Through Portaportal.com, a free Web-based bookmarking utility, you can preset sites for students to access for lessons and research, which helps keep them on task. Using your username, students can access your list of prescreened Web sites. The pro version, at \$15 annually, lets you upload documents for student access. With this capability, you could post a quiz, along with 10 sites housing the information to complete it. Depending on your room's technology, this quiz could be completed as a whole group, an individual anchor activity, or in centers.

Middle School Educators

If your students (or you!) are uninspired with building yet another slide presentation, introduce them to Animoto.com. This program creates slide presentations, complete with a soundtrack. With Animoto®, that next book report or history paper will be an exploration in creativity rather than a traditional assignment.



High School Educators

What questions do you wish your students would ask? How do you get quiet students to respond? Todaysmeet.com lets you tap into the “backchannel” and find out. This incredible tool puts you in touch with students (and them with you) in a teen-friendly way—via chat room. The secure platform opens doors of communication among students who might be ap-

prehensive in traditional settings. For example, if your class just read *Heart of Darkness* and will watch *Apocalypse Now* to identify parallels between the two stories, using Todaysmeet.com, you can guide a discussion during the movie—without pauses.

Conclusion

Social media and Web 2.0 technologies have opened the door to great possibilities—from novel ways of engaging students to connecting with experts and resources around the world. Start clicking to open this online world for your students, their families, and yourself. 🍏

References

- Gawande, A. 2007. *Better*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Lieberman, A., and M. Grolnick. 1998. Educational reform networks: Changes in the forms of reform. In *International handbook of educational change*, vol.1., eds. A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan and D. W. Hopkins, 710-14. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Zhao, Y. 2009. *Catching up or leading the way: American education in the age of globalization*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Your Mini-Guide to Social Media Savvy

Definitions

Backchannel: Using networked computers to maintain a real-time online conversation along with spoken remarks.

Web 2.0: Commonly associated with Web applications that facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration on the World Wide Web.

Wiki: A Web site managed by its readers.

Blogs of Note

<http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org>

Find resources for teaching ELL, ESL, and EFL students from a teacher of ELLs and native English speakers in Sacramento, CA.

www.freetech4teachers.com

Free Technology for Teachers reviews various technology resources and how teachers can use them.

www.ncs-tech.org

Get K–8 educational technology resources, commentary, and lesson ideas from a K–4 technology facilitator in Northfield, NJ.