Institute for Reading and Writing Instruction
Session 3: How Can Schools Use Social Media to Help Reluctant Readers?

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A Rationale for Using Social Media

The *social* aspect of social media provides new opportunities for interaction—opportunities which have the potential to go beyond merely transferring old print assignments into digital formats. Social media can create new audiences for receiving work, new structures for organizing information, new formats for presenting ideas, new methods for collaboratively creating knowledge, and new opportunities for engaging students through literacies that are relevant to their lives outside and beyond school.

Anticipating Resistance

Fear #1: "Why take a more time-intensive route to meet the same old standards?"

Standards are becoming increasingly sensitive to the need to produce students who can navigate Web 2.0: "Standards today must ready students for competition and collaboration in a global, media-saturated environment. … Media-related technology helps shape what goes on in both college and the workplace; indeed, it has in some important ways reshaped the very nature of communication. Students who meet the Core Standards will have the reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to flourish in the diverse, rapidly changing environments of college and careers." (Draft, national core standards project, Sept. 2009, http://www.corestandards.org/).

Fear #2: "The Internet is dangerous!"

Perry Aftab, in *The Ecomomist,* writes,

Young people can pose as others on social networks. They communicate with people they don't know in real life. They break the rules. They challenge authority. They share information about themselves. They take and post videos online.

Thank goodness!

They pose as members of General Washington's army, as secret agents in ancient Rome and as members of the underground railroad to bring history lessons to life. They engage in peace initiatives by communicating with students from around the world. They break the rules by collaborating with strangers in creating new works of art, music, design, poetry and literature. They find sources of reliable information that challenge traditional learning tools and conventional textbook resources. They recruit others to worthwhile causes and inspire them with personal stories and information about how they can make a difference. They take and post videos to educate others about cybersafety, bigotry, bullying and political activism. (http://www. economist.com/debate/overview/123)

Fear #3: "I'm no expert in social media technology!"

Jesse Gainer and Diane Lapp discuss teachers as immigrants to the new world of social media while their students are the natives. Teacher lack of expertise in this world can result in a sharing of the responsibility and power in the learning relationship. (*Literacy Remix: Bridging Adolescents' In and Out of School Literacies*)

Fear #4: "I don't want to commit to a large-scale revision of my curriculum."
Social media can be made scalable; you can gradually ramp up to bigger and bigger implementations of social media in your classroom. Wikis that build classroom glossaries, study notes, or encyclopedias can provide a low-risk opportunity for both you and students to begin getting familiar with academic social media uses.

Part II. How to Develop a Social-Media-Based Unit: Some Considerations

What do students have to GAIN from social media?
1. Collaborative learning
2. Project-based, "authentic" learning
3. Experience with ill-structured problems (rather than black-white thinking)
4. Practice with writing process
5. Increased critical literacy and evaluation of online information
6. Choice of texts and media, thereby increasing interest and relevance
7. Validation of adolescent social language while building upon it with academic language
8. Re-enfranchisement of students who see traditional school curriculum and practices as irrelevant

In general: new pathways to engagement

General planning considerations
1. Ask yourself: Why social media?
2. Determine standards and objectives that can be met with the project
3. Plan the instruction
4. Select format, materials and resources
5. Develop tools for assessment
6. Revise at the project's end

Part III. More specific considerations

Format 1. Blogs
Benefits: continuous learning community, authentic audience for writing, potential for feedback/guided feedback

Considerations for blog-based units:
1. Choose a service (such as blogmeister, blogspot, edublogs) which allows you to moderate content and to control access to the posts.
2. Work with IT to make sure the blog site is not blocked by district filtering software.
3. Draw up a blog contract with guidelines for parental permission, password-controlled access, student privacy, acceptable use policies, consequences for misuse.

An example. Over the course of the semester, you'll be responsible for jointly creating a class newsblog. Each of you will be responsible for selecting a topic related to 20th Century American History [or North American mammals, or AP Pscyhology, or ...] and then preparing a short "article" which explains and illustrates the topic you've selected. Four students will

post each week, and we'll take the first twelve minutes of class each Friday for those students to present their article to the class. In addition to the article you post, you'll also be required to comment on at least two other posts, adding information about the topic based on your own research/experience.

Format 2. Podcasts
Benefits: Allow for sharing of information at any time. Can be used to update students who miss a lesson. Provide a way to update parents about school/class events. Build listening skills. Can be automatically delivered via RSS feed. Create opportunities for students to think about structure/logic of information

Considerations for podcasting projects:
1. Consider editing software such as Audacity (free), GarageBand (free with Macs), or VoiceThread (a multimedia option)f
2. Encourage students to use music. Royalty-free music can be had from soundzabound.com, royaltyfreemusic.com, musicbakery.com, and The FreeSound Project.
3. Consider the audience for the project.
4. Name the podcasts—and the podcast series. Especially if you'll allow access by others, select a creative, engaging title.
5. Storyboard the podcast.
6. Save the final file as an mp3, which is standard for podcasts.
7. Upload the podcast in order to share it. You may be able to host the files on your school's website, or you can use a free blog site to post them.

An example:
Recording "Meet the Author" reports as podcasts allows the classroom community of learners to construct a library of peer-produced author biographies that could be used in a variety of extension activities after the fact. A student, in the same class or in a different school, could use the "Meet the Author" library as a resource for comparing and contrasting different author. Understanding an author's educational, cultural, and historical context can be essential in understanding that author's work. (see http://fcit.usf.edu/podcasts/ for other ideas)

Format 3. Wikis
Benefits: Allow for collaborative editing, which can help make revision processes visible. Provice flexibility in allowing both individual and collaborative space. Can allow for group notes about course material. Can also be used to create or record class glossaries, taxonomies, experiment design descriptions, field observations, or other reference works.

Considerations for wikis:
1. Select a host (such as wikispaces.com, wetpaint.com, pbwiki.com, or Google sites) which doesn't have ads, allows multimedia, has a clear privacy policy (to keep out spammers), includes access to a user community (for teaching ideas, help, etc.), and includes a feature to notify teachers when updates have been posted.
2. Decide who will be allowed to edit and view the wiki.
3. Decide whether students will post using pseudonyms.

4. Create a wiki contract for students and parents to sign (purpose, safety precautions, terms, consequence, etc.

An example:
Welcome to the Glengarrypedia Wiki (2006)! This space is designed to provide additional information to the historical and cultural references and allusions that take place in the novel, *A Tourist's Guide to Glengarry.* (See the wiki at http://glengarrypedia.wikispaces.com/).

Format 4. Digital Story-telling
Benefits: Allow multi-media (re)presentations for a variety of audiences, to provide evidence of student understanding and analysis of genre, figurative language, or other content-area knowledge. Can be collaboratively developed. Support research objectives. Promote evaluation and synthesis of information. Provide visual practice with structuring ideas.

Considerations for digital story-telling:
1. Choose from a variety of multimedia software such as Adobe Premiere, Adobe Photostory Elements, Macromedia Flash, Apple iMovie, Movie Maker, Comic Life, etc.
2. Ensure that the focus is on telling a story. Storyboard planning as a prerequisite.
3. Establish guidelines for and discuss the importance of citing work.

A few examples: A simple beginning to digital storytelling might involve the use of a digital camera with text attached to pictures via a program such as Comic Life, effectively creating graphic novels. Students could create autobiographies as an initial project in the fall. They could create adaptations of previously studied or familiar short stories, communicating a current social message or theme with their adaptation. A subsequent and more complex project might involve identifying a current social issue of concern at the school, telling its story through the use of clips relating it to larger historical events and excerpts from poetry and songs, interwoven with original text. Or, for a health class, students could collaboratively develop a public service announcement about factors of addiction.

Format 5. Social Bookmarks/Tags
Benefits: Make order from chaos of internet. Develop students' skill in categorizing information. Create class resource lists for research projects.

Considerations for social bookmarks:
1. Select a social bookmarking site such as del.icio.us or diigo.
2. Provide clear instructions about HOW to tag.
3. Provide students with at least SOME of the tags you expect them to use. Consider tags about content (what is the file about?), context (what is the file related to, in terms of the class—essay 1, modernism, group-project1?), media (what type of information is it--blog, news, primaryresearch, secondaryresearch?).
4. Provide exercises to help the students see how tags can help them analyze the bookmarked material.

An example: A tag cloud or word cloud is a visual representation of tags that users generate or the word content of a site--what the site is all about. Tags help users find similar web sites that are interesting to them. Tags are usually single words and are typically listed

alphabetically, and the importance of a tag is shown with font size or color of the word. **Students can create a Wordle out of spelling words, an outline of a story, descriptions of characters in a story they are reading and much more. The color and bolding of a word illustrates the idea of hierarchy to younger students in a visual way.** (from /sites.google.com/site/bevseducationalwebsite)

Format 6. Google suite
Benefits: Broad accessibility. Collaborative capabilities. Increased efficiency for teaching tasks. See google.com/educators/tools.html for more information and ideas.

- *Google Docs*: can serve as spreadsheet-based quiz platform, in addition to allowing collaborative editing of text documents. Folders allow teachers to keep information organized by class/group/student. Collaborators can insert comments in addition to edits. Work can be selectively published for parents/other teachers to view.
- *Google Notebook*: individual or collaborative notebooks
- *Google Sites*: can be used as a wiki or as a traditional top-down site for pushing content. Students can subscribe to RSS feeds to get updates to site.
- *Google Earth*: mapping program which allows for creation of placemarks. See http://www.googlelittrips.com/GoogleLit/Getting_Started.html for some interesting examples of books translated into a visual format.

Part IV. Resources

"Classroom Resources: Lesson Plans." www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans IRA/NCTE. 2010.

"The Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling." http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/ The University of Houston. 2010.

"Google for Educators: Tools for Your Classroom." http://www.google.com/educators/tools.html Google. 2010.

"Ideas for Podcasting in the Classroom." http://fcit.usf.edu/podcasts/ Florida Center for Instructional Technology. 2010.

Literacy Remix: Bridging Adolescents' In and Out of School Literacies. Jesse Gainer and Diane Lapp. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 2010.

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"Ten Ways to Use Your Edublog to Teach." http://edublogs.org/10-ways-to-use-your-edublog-to-teach/ Edublogs. 2010.

"Toward a theory of new literacies emerging from the Internet and other information and communication technologies." Leu, D.J., Jr., Kinzer, C.K., Coiro, J., & Cammack, D.W. In R.B. Ruddell, & N.J. Unrau (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (5th ed., 2004, pp. 1570–1613). Newark, DE: International Reading Association. Available at: http://www.reading.org/Publish.aspx?page=/publications/bbv/books/bk502/abstracts/bk502-54-leu.html&mode=redirect

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"Welcome to Google Lit Trips!" http://www.googlelittrips.com/GoogleLit/home.html Jerome Burg. 2010.