# Blogs, Wikis, and Podcasts, Oh My!

## Electronic Media in the Classroom

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# Introduction

In a high-speed, high-tech world, we must assure that our students are prepared for the challenges of the future and the global community we inhabit. This book will help teachers and administrators effectively use the Internet both in their own professional development and in the classroom with their students.

- Chapter 1 is an invitation to digital literacy. The twenty-first century learner needs skills to effectively find and evaluate information.

- Chapter 2 discusses the effective use of blogs in the classroom. This chapter will walk you through the creation of a blog and tips for making it a tool to enhance student learning.

- Chapter 3 introduces wikis. It will help you discover how to make wikis an effective classroom tool.

- Chapter 4 explores podcasting. It will discuss the tools to help you create audio and video files, and ways in which you can effectively use this technology in your classroom. This chapter and the next are based on the work of award-winning author and speaker Alan November.

- Chapter 5 is about other tools that will improve your connectivity in the digital age. It covers RSS feeds, Skype, and social bookmarking. These tools can influence the way we learn and utilize information.

- Chapter 6 is a brief conclusion.

- Appendix A contains a variety of valuable resources to help you and your students explore the world of technology in depth.

- Appendix B provides a complete list of cited references found within this book, as well as additional references used to support understanding of technology in the classroom.

*An Invitation*
*to*
**Digital**
**Literacy**

From the time they drag themselves out of bed until they finally crash to sleep at night, many of your students will navigate their day amid the buzz of a digital world. They'll connect with friends through one medium or another, texting, instant messaging, and emailing. They will reach out further with social networking sites such as Facebook, SecondLife, or MySpace. They will find and share games, movies, photos, music, and other entertainment.

As educators, we appreciate the need for students to unplug and "power down" when they enter the classroom. But perhaps we can take inspiration from the way they experience the world. As they unplug, we need to plug into teaching strategies that take advantage of the digital world and help prepare students to make the most of it.

An increasing number of students see school as disconnected from their fast-paced, highly interactive social environment where they have an active role in content development. But these tools and these types of interactions can actually help bring your class to life. Consider the possibilities of having your students come to class looking forward to plugging in and connecting in ways they never imagined possible in school. Such a bold move will surely make your classroom more engaging and relevant to their lives. The key is to find ways to diversify and utilize the kinds of media that students experience in their digitally-connected world outside school. We need to take what is essential in our curriculum and integrate it with what students find engaging. If we can keep an open mind and learn to become students again, we can add more rigor and relevance to the learning experience. Students are naturally more comfortable in the digital world, so if we allow them to take more ownership in their education by utilizing the tools they know best, we can actually learn from them.

This digital age demands a vision of education in which the learners lead their own learning. Such a vision is a necessity for our children to be competitive in the global digital age of the 21st century. For such a vision to succeed, it will require courageous educators willing to explore the strengths and weaknesses of

these tools—tools that our students already use—to assist in the development of this new vision for education (NCTE 2008).

No matter what your current level of confidence in technology may be, you will profit from this resource. We have written this book for the teacher who has at least a basic knowledge of the Internet and uses email. The tools and ideas you acquire here will help you both in your own professional development and in your classroom with students. They will enhance communication and collaboration in your classroom and with your students' parents.

The guiding principal throughout this book is that nothing replaces jumping in, exploring, and experimenting with these technologies. For each of the tools we introduce, there are several different services available on the Web for you to investigate. The best services are easy to use and provide excellent instructions for the beginner. The Web is the ultimate "learn at your own pace" environment. If the first blog service you try seems to meet your needs, you can stop there. If you're happy with the basic setup, keep it that way. But if you're more experienced and confident, you can experiment with three or four services referenced in this book. You might actually build an elaborate wiki that will be a model for your entire school or district.

Before we jump into the deep end, there are some general ideas you should consider regarding Internet research and your students. For example, we were taught not to judge a book by its cover. The same holds true for websites and digital media. Sites that look important may not be important at all. Sometimes, it is difficult to get students to look beyond the colors, pictures, cool flash animations, and graphics to examine the actual content. However, this critical step can help eliminate spurious websites and invalid information.

Just like print material, it is sometimes difficult to know if you are reading fiction, nonfiction, editorials, or advertisements on the Internet. Therefore, asking questions and thinking critically about the information on the screen is imperative.

# Blogs

The term *blog* is an abbreviation of "web log."  Some blogs are like diaries but without the privacy.  Many are used for reporting breaking news while others are an outlet for commentary and analysis.  Whatever a blog may have in common with a log, journal, or diary, the important difference is that a blog is specifically intended for viewing by, and interacting with, someone other than the author.

The rationale for blogging is the same rationale for writing or communicating in general: to effectively participate as a knowledgeable member of society.  This chapter discusses the creation, use, and effectiveness of blogs as instructional tools.

## BLOGS: GETTING STARTED

Remember our first rule:  The best way to learn is to jump in head first.  So let's do it!  First, pick one of the free blogging services below, or use another with which you are already familiar:

• Edublogs: **http://edublogs.org/**