
Preface

This may look like a book about technology, but it's really a book about the connections, collaborations, and conversations that the new "cool tools" of the Web are allowing us to create. It is less about blogs and wikis and podcasts than it is about the educators behind them who are using them so creatively to motivate students to learn more deeply and contribute what they know to the amazing body of knowledge that is the World Wide Web. And the best part of it is that very few of these educators have any great technology skills. More, they have ideas and vision of what easy publication tools might do in their classrooms.

In the 4½ years that I have kept my blog at Weblogg-ed.com, I have learned more about the world, more about education, more about people, and more about myself than in my 40-odd non-blogging years, 20 of them spent as a classroom teacher. It has been a most excellent adventure that has made me understand clearly the powerful potentials of technology in schools, and why it is crucial that our teachers and students learn to use these tools and others well if we want our kids to continue to compete for the best jobs and the best lives. We are entering a new interconnected, networked world where more and more people are gaining access to the Web and its continually growing body of knowledge. And access doesn't just mean being able to read what's there; it means being able to create and contribute content as well. At first blush, that may not seem like such a big deal, but it is a shift that requires us to think seriously and expansively about the way we currently teach students and deliver our curricula.

This book has three main goals. First, I hope to give educators some context in terms of what these technologies mean for our society as well as for education. More than anything else, the fact that the new interactive Web is weaving so many drastic changes in journalism, business, and politics convinces me that its effects on education will be equally transformational. Second, this book aspires to challenge and motivate teachers to think differently about their classrooms and

the potentials of the technologies discussed in terms of pedagogy and curriculum. And finally, I hope to share enough of the “how-to” needed to get teachers started using these tools right away. Luckily, the barriers to entry to publishing to the Web have come way down.

Not every educator will use every tool discussed in this book. But every educator needs to understand the potential impact of these tools, nonetheless, because our students will be using them (or newer iterations) more and more, and because the underlying concepts they are built on are tremendously important. The social connections that students are now making on the Web, the ability to share and contribute ideas and work, the new expectation of collaboration, the ability to truly extend the walls of our classrooms . . . these ideas are at the core of this new Web. As educators, it’s imperative we understand the implications of these capabilities for our classrooms.

And it’s also imperative that we all work to make sure that every child gets access to this new Web as well. I have been extremely fortunate to work in a district and community where the Internet is a staple. But I fully realize that few of these ideas will have any relevance to teachers and students who do not have access. Although almost 100% of schools have an Internet connection, far fewer than 100% of our kids have meaningful access. We still have a long way to go, and I would urge every educator to do whatever he or she can to insure every student gets connected to these ideas as quickly as they can.

Finally, I know that many educators have legitimate concerns about publishing student work to the Web. I’ve made every effort to convince you that first, sharing what students do to a wider audience is good pedagogy, and that second, we can keep our kids safe in the process. But this is not a perfect world, and certainly there will be times when our students’ identities are compromised or they will act inappropriately in front of an online audience. Every teacher and every district should be prepared for that. In my years of working with these technologies, however, I can tell you from personal experience and from collecting anecdotal data from many other teachers, students don’t usually abuse the tools, and that “teachable moments” rarely become something more than just that. But even if your or your school’s comfort level precludes using them with your students, use them for yourself. These tools are great for professional development and collaboration with other teachers and mentors, and I urge you to embrace them for your own use even if you don’t bring them to your students.

This book would not have been possible without the generous sharing of ideas of dozens of educator bloggers who have taught me

more than I could ever capture in just a couple of hundred pages. And although I can't name them all, I can thank a few who have helped me in profound ways. When I first started looking for teachers using blogs, Pat Delaney was an inspiration and an early mentor. The generosity of Ken Tompkins to offer space on his server to let me experiment told me much about the goodness of bloggers. And, early on when Tim Lauer asked me up from the audience to share in his blogging presentation at a national conference, it was a moment of validation. Joe Luft, Pam Pritchard, Sebastian Fiedler, Sarah Lohnes, Terry Elliot, and Peter Ford are all early adopters whose feedback and support of my own work were and are most appreciated. Other educator bloggers like Anne Davis, Tom Hoffman, Barbara Ganley, Ken Smith, Alan Levine, Stephen Downes, George Siemens, David Warlick, and James Farmer, to name a few, are those whose work I read with anticipation each day. Finally, I want to thank Alan November, who has become a good friend and a valued mentor, and my colleague and friend Rob Mancabelli, who along with many creative and dedicated educators at my school, Hunterdon Central, have been so supportive of my efforts. All of these people and many more have inspired me and taught me about how these tools can teach and build connections and community. I'm very, very thankful to all of them and to all of the others who have contributed to this work.

The best news is that each day I find more teachers beginning to publish their thoughts, their voices, and their knowledge to this new, evolving Web. That's the power of these tools and of this new Internet that we are creating together, and it is much of the motivation for this book. My learning never stops. I sincerely wish the same for you.