

## **Multimedia and Internet @ Schools**

Pipeline Column:

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### **Some Tricks to Build Information Fluency**

Educators have long been harvesting ideas from popular culture to imbue excitement into lessons and engage learners. We've used contests, treasure hunts, quizzes, creative works, and more to make the lessons interesting and fun. We know that play is one of the most fundamental ways in which we learn. The Internet has provided us with many new ways to provide learners with an environment that allows them to learn through discovery, play, and collaboration and just plain having fun.

The ideas I am listing in this column are just that. They could work anywhere – the classroom, the lab, homeschooling, school libraries, public libraries' after school programs, summer camp, The "Y", and boys and girls clubs – just about anywhere kids want to have fun.

Just remember one point – this has to be subversive. If they know we're tricking them into learning so many of the skills they'll need they'll turn off. But you already know that. It is just part of the game we play.

The Nov. 2005 Pew Internet and American Life report titled *Teen Content Creators and Consumers* shows that "American teenagers today are utilizing the interactive capabilities of the internet as they create and share their own media creations. Fully half of all teens and 57% of teens who use the internet could be considered Content Creators. They have created a blog or webpage, posted original artwork, photography, stories or videos online or remixed online content into their own new creations. Teens are often much more enthusiastic authors and readers of blogs than their adult counterparts. Teen bloggers, led by older girls, are a major part of this tech-savvy cohort. Teen bloggers are more fervent internet users than non-bloggers and have more experience with almost every online activity in the survey. Teen Content Creators and Consumers: More than half of online teens have created content for the internet; and most teen downloaders think that getting free music files is easy to do."

I suspect that this trend has already grown exponentially in less than a year due to the enormous influence of MySpace, Facebook, Bebo and their cousins. Most of the seeds of ideas below are things I have heard of going on in schools and libraries around the world. Many of these ideas are based on simple (and usually free) websites and tools that take little time to learn, are readily accessible and allow you to build content and learning units that are fun and engaging.

## **YouTube**

I have to admit that I'm a YouTube addict. My favourite YouTube student created video is called "Library Dominoes". [Check it out here; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwihz7iZlx0&search=dominoes%20library>]

There is an enormous youthful creativity happening in the development of very short videos and the sharing of them through YouTube (often linked from MySpace or Facebook pages). So here's a crazy idea – run a contest for your school to give a prize to the best video on YouTube that markets 'our' school library. All they have to do is send you the link and their name. Be prepared for irony. Don't forget that many camera phones also shoot short videos. If you want to be truly frightened, search library terms on YouTube and surf away. (Don't neglect to find the Japanese game show set in a library!) Imagine a video log (vlog) of the science fair, spelling bee, or band/choir concert. The technology is no longer as daunting as it once was. Your classes YouTube video could become a hit viral video! If you're a music teacher you can use sites like Apple's GarageBand and iTunes to publish the students' performances or encourage them to publish their own best indie work.

## **Flickr, Picasa, Riya, etc.**

A story told in pictures in a great fun activity. We use this technique often in creative writing classes. It's called 'storyboarding' in the TV, music video, documentary, and film production world. This is a valuable skill in the entertainment industry. Have your kids take digital pictures that tell a story and load them in order into one of the major photo sharing services like Flickr, Picasa or Riya. Then, here's the information literacy skill, have them tag each picture with its content description. For extra marks they can load them into a photo blog (Blogger, Technorati or Blogspot, will do) and add their script, directorial instructions or stage commands to each picture. Eventually this can serve as a scaffold for a full production – in print, video or stage. They get to be the star!

Another creative use of photos is for a history project. Learners can create galleries of famous settings for their local area's history – buildings, battlefields, statues, historic plaques, and more. Each photo can be tagged with its descriptions and blogged as a way to enliven the local history and make it real. This could make a great field trip and a gift to your school and town. It can grow over time into an asset that can even support local tourism.

## **MSN Family Album**

Family trees have been part of the curriculum since time immemorial. Newish websites supporting the popular hobby of genealogy include Ancestry.com, Genealogy.com, FamilyTreeMaker.com, and more. These can be quite useful in helping students discover the greater world. As they move from their nuclear family in the early grades through their wider family and their broader community

and beyond into an understanding of immigration and emigration patterns and variety of cultures globally, it can be engaging to create levels of family and community albums that create visual learning of the diversity of the school community. Kids learn the skills and create a product that is easily shared with their parents beyond parents' night events. None of those pesky film development costs either.

## **Blogger**

This is a now classic event. Start a class news blog. Assign reporter teams on a weekly or monthly basis. Have them discuss and implement their sections – jokes, sports news (gym), creative writing, poetry, class project reports. Share it with their families. There are plenty of ways to do but it's the kids' creativity that should emerge here. They don't need to make it look like a newspaper or other blogs and can include sounds, pictures and films as options. Let them express themselves and see what happens with your guidance. Blogging is writing too. We all know that expression skills go far beyond essays and speeches.

## **Podcasting**

Recent research has shown that recording some lessons and events has a positive impact on performance and learning. This can be especially true for music, learning new languages, ESL, speaking fluently, etc. Some learners express themselves better orally so reactions to poetry, novels, short stories and films can be captured and reviewed or assessed. Podcasting is a neat way to create and capture such events. You can learn how at the SirsiDynix Institute with two free sessions that were captured online to teach you how to listen and how to publish a podcast. Again, these podcasts can be shown to students' families and proudly shared. Learners may even treat them more seriously if there is a lasting record and performance beyond just their class. The best performance could be shared with your reading buddy, at whole school events or traded with peer classes. You could even podcast the science fair!

## **Del.icio.us – Playing Tag**

Send your various project teams out to discover the five best web resources on their topic. This skill is called tagging the research stream. Use a shared bookmarking utility like del.icio.us to have them tag their best bookmarks and share it with the class and their group. For example, imagine five groups of 5. Have each group cover a different biome – desert, arctic, forest, etc. Each has to find 5 sites on the climate, animals, flora, etc. of each biome. They need to define their group name and their tags first and then search and evaluate websites based on their learnings from class on site evaluation skills. In the end they can present the results based on what drove their decisions about the best sites. Ideally, this could be an online presentation and presenter link to the sites while describing their thinking and the group's results and decisions. In the end

they have a new skill – shared, collaborative bookmarking and content organization using next generation web skills. Not bad.

### **Pimp Your MySpace**

Millions of high schoolers (and junior high schoolers too) have MySpace personal sites. As I've noted in previous columns this is a huge social movement. Most MySpacers blog quite often and visit their site twice a day for about 25 minutes. Many people in senior positions and some parents are concerned about this trend and the potential for serious dangers (confidentiality, privacy, security, stalkers, Cyber-safety, etc.) let alone the risk that your kid's MySpace profile from 2006 will show up in his congressional campaign of 2047! Of course, blocking MySpace has the complete opposite effect by forcing it underground at school and making it just that much cooler.

So here's what you do but it's a trick (shhhh). Thousands of sites now offer tricks to make your MySpace site look cooler ('sick' actually) or how to add neat new features. Learn a few - just search <pimp your myspace> on Google and you'll see! [Try not to look too cool when you use this jargon- grin.] When you know a few little tricks (practiced on your own site, of course) offer to teach some seminars on the topic of pimping your MySpace account. Then, sneakily and with extreme subterfuge, comment, as an aside, how to manage your privacy, control your profile, think about your photos, etc. A few asides can offer a lot of cyber-knowledge. Offering a course in MySpace safety will attract too few and empower only that few who show up. Offer something they desire and give them more of what they need. Cool, eh? Or maybe that's sick.

### **Second Life, Teen Second Life, Active Worlds**

This is my favourite way to think about teaching characterization in novels. Understanding characters is a vital part of learning to read along with setting, plot, conflict, etc. Creating an avatar (an interactive representation of a human in a virtual reality environment) with a great back story is a cool activity that many kids are already engaged in. Many libraries are finding that their collections of Greek, Roman, and Norse myths are circulating a lot more than they have in the past. This is largely because kids are researching the back story of the avatars that are their role in videogames. This is a very creative act and also shows kids actually will do research for fun! It is especially engaging for boys. So, have your students create an avatar. Your active and visual learners will get truly engaged by creating a real avatar online and then describing their powers (super or otherwise), history and lives. You may find some are way ahead of everyone and can co-teach! More advanced grades can create whole environments like native villages or forts, historical places or battles, and more. You can assess on creativity, research and historical accuracy, and more. Since the Alliance Library System outside Chicago is creating an entire library in Second Life and Teen Second Life and Eastern University in Pennsylvania has created an academic

library virtual world, these environments are now hitting the mainstream and can no longer be considered just toys or games.

### **OPAC or Web Treasure Hunts and Easter Eggs**

Trying to get your learners to search databases and use the OPAC as a search tool to your great resources? I know it's not easy. Set up a treasure hunt event. This is actually in the current lingo of kids. Many (maybe most) PC Games include what are called 'Easter eggs' or hidden features inside of video games. The first Easter egg was a hidden room inside the Atari 2600 game *Adventure* (1980). These can also take the form of built-in cheat codes. They also appear in many DVDs. Can you build a treasure hunt that matches your lesson or teaches library skills? There are a few on the web and one in the sidebar. These can be fun and for extra points add a special catalog card into your OPAC which contains a special clue, perhaps where the book is shelved with the winning card. (You can even edit the MARC record or multiple winners.) Give a prize to the first kid to complete the hunt and find the special egg. Then you'll have a surprised but delighted kid with a bunch of new search skills.

### **Creative Projects**

It is a common trick to get learners engaged by taking great entertaining and educational things from popular culture. Think of how many great units or projects included versions of *Jeopardy*, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, *The Weakest Link*, *Trivial Pursuit* or *Brain Quest*. These are even greater learning events when they are developed by the learners in their teams. And most game shows have websites even the classic ones - just make sure the old ones are known to your kids. Regrettably, our classics may be ancient history to them. It doesn't always have to be question and answer games. Vocabulary games like *Password* and *Family Feud* are easily learned and played. Don't laugh. They're both excellent and quick ways to teach synonyms for use in Boolean database searching!

### **The Pay Off**

So what have we done in these games that have helped kids unleash their information fluency skills? Simple really, as long as we put our minds to it:

1. We have shown them cyber safety skills in using the web.
2. We have shown them how to promote their creative efforts.
3. We have respected their work and, not inconsequentially, built self-esteem and presentation skills.
4. We have promoted team work as well as collaborative searching.
5. We have helped them develop research skills including basic information literacy skills in tagging, description, vocabulary, editing, and more.
6. We have built advanced vocabulary skills for the technological framework.

7. We have increased their technical skills with websites, digital objects, computers, cameras, and more.
8. If we're doing it well, the parents have been engaged in the learning production and display.
9. And we let them have fun too. Learning and enjoyment should go together.

I am aware that some schools sadly restrict access to some sites. Often these are based on fear and a misunderstanding what is actually happening in the world and the skills that people will need in the future for which a foundation needs to be developed now. I believe that over the coming years we will come to learn that kids do not develop the special skills that they need to succeed by never actually experiencing the learning that comes through working on the web. The various learning scaffolds are showing up in many of the websites shown as examples in this column. Fulsome conversations need to be had with IT, parents, educators and policymakers to ensure that learning triumphs over fear.

In any event, we can make learning an event! We're only limited by our imaginations.

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### **Websites Mentioned in this Column**

#### **YouTube**

<http://www.youtube.com/>

#### **iTunes**

<http://www.apple.com/itunes/>

#### **iTunes GarageBand**

<http://www.apple.com/ilife/garageband/>

#### **Flickr**

<http://www.flickr.com/>

#### **Picasa**

<http://picasa.google.com/>

**Riya Photo Search**

<http://www.riya.com/>

**PhotoBucket**

<http://www.photobucket.com/>

**MSN Family Album**

<http://communities.msn.com/content/features/photoalbum.asp>

**Ancestry.com,**

<http://www.ancestry.com>

**Genealogy.com**

[http://www.genealogy.com/index\\_r.html](http://www.genealogy.com/index_r.html)

**Family Tree Maker**

<http://www.familytreemaker.com/>

**Blogger**

<http://www.blogger.com>

**Del.icio.us**

<http://del.icio.us/>

**MySpace**

<http://www.myspace.com>

**Facebook**

<http://www.facebook.com/>

**Bebo**

<http://www.bebo.com/>

**SirsiDynix Institute**

<http://www.sirsidynixinstitute.com>

*A Beginner's Guide to Podcasting: Part 1 - A Consumer's Guide*

[http://www.sirsidynixinstitute.com/seminar\\_page.php?sid=62](http://www.sirsidynixinstitute.com/seminar_page.php?sid=62)

*A Beginner's Guide to Podcasting: Part 2 - A Creator's Guide*

[http://www.sirsidynixinstitute.com/seminar\\_page.php?sid=63](http://www.sirsidynixinstitute.com/seminar_page.php?sid=63)

**Second Life**

<http://secondlife.com/>

**Teen Second Life**

<http://teen.secondlife.com/>

**Active Worlds**

<http://www.activeworlds.com/>

For an example of an **OPAC Treasure Hunt**:

*A Library Adventure: Comparing a Treasure Hunt with a Traditional Freshman Orientation Tour* by Sandra Marcus and Sheila Beck

<http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/crljournal/backissues2003b/january031/marcus.pdf>

**Jeopardy**

<http://www.sonypictures.com/tv/shows/jeopardy/indexflash.php>

**Who Wants to be a Millionaire?**

<http://www.millionairetv.com/>

**Wheel of Fortune**

<http://www.sonypictures.com/games/wof/index.php?hs308=>

**Brain Quest**

<http://www.brainquest.com/>

**Trivial Pursuit**

<http://www.trivialpursuit.com/>

**Pew Internet and American Life**

Teen Content Creators and Consumers

[http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/166/report\\_display.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/166/report_display.asp)