

New literacies, New York & Web 2.0: a little insider knowledge is a helpful thing!

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WEB 2.0 - BY NEWYORKJON

WWW.TOONDOO.COM



Figure 1 Web 2.0 on Toondoo <www.toondoo.com> where comics are easily made and displayed

New York: a 24 hour mix of crowds, yellow cabs, bright lights and entertainment where you can walk down Madison Avenue, past television starlets, millionaires, homeless people and pretzel vendors. Where do you start in the city that never sleeps? One solution is a local guide. First time visitors can arrange to have a local resident take them on a tour of the city. What is new for the first time visitor is more familiar to your local guide. With insider knowledge, they make helpful suggestions: the best place for coffee and bagels, how to get cheap Broadway tickets, which is the fastest subway line and how much to tip the waiter. They might introduce you to the guy who runs the coffee shop on the corner, and explain how New Yorkers see the world. Now you begin to develop not only new knowledge about the city, but also a new mindset by engaging with a local, an insider.

Compare a first visit to New York with engaging the new concepts around Web 2.0. Any cursory reading about

Web 2.0 seems to suggest that innovations appear almost daily, and that each one is better and more must have and must use than the last. Where to start and what to do? It can be just like visiting a foreign city for the first time. If we take the concept of new literacies and its related Web 2.0 technology, and try to gain a local's view or mindset, then we can begin to feel more confident in the types of resources or activities we might choose to explore and engage with in our classrooms.

Showing and sharing

Simply put, Web 1.0 (the web pre-2004) might be understood as *showing*, while Web 2.0 is all about *sharing* (Figure 1). The early years of the web involved showing mostly text and image, as well as audio and video. Some individuals created simple websites with words and pictures. Those with a little more technological nous could create their own audio and video, although it was more likely that corporate and media websites could show high end graphics, music and

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video. As the technology evolved, there has been a move to sharing (Alexander, 2006). Technologies such as IM (Instant Messaging), *Facebook*, *Flickr* and *Skype* allow users, particularly young people, to be in constant contact with each other, across rooms, streets and continents. Sites like *MySpace* and *Bebo* allow users to not only post photos, audio and video, but to instantly tell their networks when they have posted new information, whether they text, chat, blog or *poke* each other. Virtual worlds like *Second life* or games like *World of Warcraft* are predicated on interaction with others, whatever avatar or character form they choose to take (Educause, 2008).

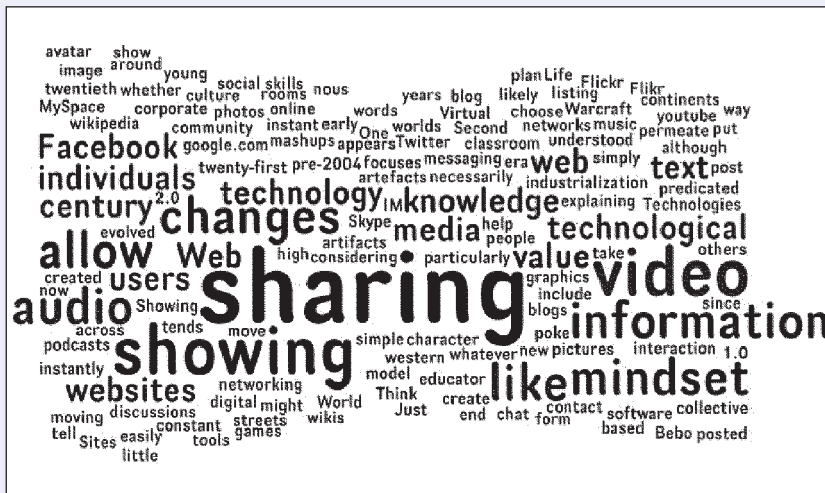


Figure 2 Wordle, a Web 2.0 tool, generated this word cloud from the text in this article <wordle.net>

Just listing technological changes and software will not necessarily help an educator plan for their classroom. One way of explaining the changes is by considering the mindset that appears to permeate not only changes in technology but in western culture (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Think about the mindset moving from a twentieth century industrialisation model, which focuses on *showing* the individuals skills, knowledge and artefacts. A 21st century mindset tends to value the *sharing* of information, where value is in the collective building of knowledge, with blogs, online discussions and community based wikis such as *Wikipedia*. The artefacts of this era now include tools (Figure 2) that allow sharing of information easily (*google.com*), production of digital media (*youtube*, *Flickr*, podcasts, mashups) or social networking (*Twitter*, *Facebook*).

What technologies are relevant and current for our students?

The question for educators involves reflecting on their own mindset as well as those of their students, in terms of what technologies are relevant and current for all learners (Oblinger, 2008). At the same time, those of us with more life experience understand that any showing or

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sharing of information needs to be approached with a critical and reflective eye. What is shared now in youthful exuberance may be regretted next week, month or in years to come. Wandering through a virtual world may stimulate many learners, but overwhelm others. There have already been reports of virtual truancy when students have been on field trips in virtual environments.

The local guide

So, as teachers, we need to gather some local knowledge, from peers and students alike, as well as bring our own expertise and travel experiences when investigating new literacies and technologies. For an introductory guided tour to some of the basics of Web 2.0, the California School Library Association (CSLA) has a website tutorial entitled, *23 things*. It guides

you through 23 web activities that slowly introduce you to some key skills and tools on the web. A good example of a local guide experience is found at *School library learning 2.0* <www.schoollibrarylearning2.blogspot.com>.

Educational sites

For those with a little more experience, there are a variety of educational sites that list Web 2.0 associated links and resources. There are two sites that are particularly helpful. *WebTools4u2use* <webtools4u2use.wikispaces.com> is a wiki, which means you can not only access information but also add comments and information that is relevant. It was created for school library media specialists and is based in the University of Central Florida. Each subsection, including podcasting, social bookmarking and blogging, offers an introduction to the resource that is supported by short videos and then a *Five to test drive* starting list for each resource. The other website is *Shambles* <www.shambles.net/web2>. This site was created as part of The Education Project Asia (TEPA) which supports international schools in 17 countries in South East Asia. The Web 2.0 section offers extensive links with quite detailed commentary about each site that it lists, and its educational uses.

Of course, you may be the type of traveller who wants to jump in and have a go with some ideas that take your fancy. Below are some broad groupings for different Web 2.0 resources, along with samples sites and comments on how we might think about them in terms of new mindsets and new literacies (Figure 3).

There are some significant opportunities for engaging learners in deeper understanding about multiple perspectives and recognising that knowledge is socially constructed (problematic knowledge).

Web 2.0 resource categories	New mindsets, new literacies	Examples to get you started
Audio and podcasting	Sharing audio and music (legally) is a key feature of Web 2.0 capabilities. Software to record, blend and mash voice, sound and music creates new texts. Students engage in new literacies to understand, use and enjoy the results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Voicethread</i> <voicethread.com> has an educational area. Children can add audio to photos, documents, videos. As part of the collaborative aspect, different users can add comments. Provides authentic audiences for students and ESL learning. • <i>Audacity</i> <audacity.sourceforge.net> is free software for recording a podcast (Windows or Mac). • <i>PodOmatic: create, find, share podcasts!</i> <www.podomatic.com> allows you to create podcasts online and host them on your own site for others to access.
Blogs and wikis	While blogs and wikis have been around for a while on the web, the ability to tag (assign your own classification terms) to your site for others to search is more recent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Edublogs</i> <edublogs.org> hosts blogs designed for teachers and students. These blogs offer features such as embedded podcasts, videos and talking animated characters called vokis. • <i>AllStars</i> <allstars.edublogs.org/category/projects> This shows the variety of ways information can be shared on a blog by primary school students. • <i>WebTools4u2use: RSS</i> <webtools4u2use.wikispaces.com/RSS> This link explains RSS (really simple syndication) showing how you can create your own newsfeed of information from your choice of blogs, creating a regularly updated source of information on topics of interest.
Drawing and art	Sharing traditional texts online such as artwork and comics, encourages visual literacy as well providing larger viewing communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Toondoo</i> <www.toondoo.com>. Make and share comics in a site built for students. • <i>Artsonia</i> <www.artsonia.com/museum> is an international art gallery where students from around the world share their artworks.
Photo and video	Multimedia and multimodal information is the common currency on the web. Sharing this type of information, with appropriate safeguards, allows users to share and collect a variety of learning resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Animoto</i> <www.animoto.com> creates videos with your photos and music, editing them automatically. • <i>Flickr</i> <www.flickr.com> is the most well known photo sharing site. However, if you want more limited sharing, try • <i>Dropshots</i> <www.dropshots.com> for photo and video sharing by invitation. • <i>TeacherTube</i> <www.teachertube.com> has educational videos for teachers and students to search and share.
Presenting information	Presenting information across various modes and sharing it across networks means utilising new literacies as both viewer and designer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Wordle</i> <wordle.net>. This site generates word clouds, a visual representation of the most common words or tags in a website or text. (See example in main body of article). • <i>ClustrMaps</i> <clustrmaps.com/index.htm>. Added to your blog or website, a world map showing the location of visitors to your site. Helps students see the global connections when they publish on the internet.
Search engines	Sharing information also means being able to search for relevant, clear and appropriate content on the web.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Kigose: safe search engine</i> <www.kigose.com> is a search engine for schools that filters information for age appropriate content (Figure 3). • <i>Searchme</i> <www.searchme.com> is a search engine that previews each website visually.

Web 2.0 resource categories	New mindsets, new literacies	Examples to get you started
Social networks	While social networking is a key feature of Web 2.0, many sites are not for younger students. Some however, have been set up to allow the same community experience for younger users. Valuing this experience as part of students' cultural lives helps connect home and school technology experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Imbee for teachers and schools</i> <www.imbee.com/teacher>. This social networking site is for 8–14 year olds and has the option of including classroom and teacher interactions. • <i>Club Penguin</i> <www.clubpenguin.com> This Disney owned site is currently one of the most popular with primary aged students (Figure 4). The focus is on games and social interaction via penguin avatars.

Figure 3 Examples of Web 2.0 tools for new mindsets and new literacies



Figure 4 Kigose: safe search engine <www.kigose.com>



Figure 5 Penguin Club <www.clubpenguin.com>

Off you go

Often it is not until you have explored a new city that you then discover the places that are most interesting or useful. Having visited some new sites and considered that a different mindset might be helpful, educators

can then re-imagine their current curriculum practices and requirements, as well as begin to share in ways of communicating and interacting that these new resources offer. There will of course be practical considerations about time, resources, relevance and appropriateness. The

key factor will be a willingness to explore, learn and question those with local knowledge (students and teachers), reflect on your own mindset and then continue to share your own learning experiences with others you meet on your travels. ■

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