

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

Teacher Survival Strategies

Web 2.0: Do Teachers Dare Indulge?

Subtitle: Prepare for Web 3.0!

There is a lot of hype about Web 2.0. And, teachers encounter the gamut. Beliefs range from... Web 2.0 is the missing key that will allow technology to revitalize education

Web 2.0 is what students are already doing, and teachers will be left in the dust if they fail to capitalize on the resource

Web 2.0 is the key technology that will finally allow computers and software to replace teachers

Web 2.0 can "bring up test scores" when those lazy, shiftless, check-swiping teachers can't be trusted to deliver accountable learning outcomes for all students

Or, Web 2.0 is hype and a waste of time, just like the failed "Technology Integration" movement

In fact, Web 2.0 hype is just another attempt by folks who don't understand education to bring back the blighted technology integration world under new clothes

...On and on...

Whatever your take on Web 2.0, is it here to stay? Flip Answer: Web 2.0 will soon be Replaced with Web 3.0 First question: What does "Web 2.0" mean?

Answer: Who know?

But, what the term Web 2.0 refers to is the ability of software that is run on some "Social Network" sites to attract visitors. Even more, these sites motivate visitors to connect, reveal personal and private details about themselves, upload pictures, leave comments, rate and evaluate materials, share links, and a bunch of other stuff that hasn't been invented or perfected yet.

Of course, the downside is that today's social site oasis dries up, and the hoards of thirsty caravans converge on the next fad focus-of-the-day.

The questions that teachers need to ask are: What measurable curricular outcomes have been tested and have been shown to increase with the use of these technologies?

What instructional targets and student learning are produced by these strategies that cannot be done better, faster, easier, more economically with other strategies?

How does this technology save time and effort for students and teachers?

If this technology is adopted, what technology and non-technology has to be given up?

What infrastructure is needed, and what infrastructure support is required to fully utilize this technology?

What could go wrong if these technology tools are adopted, and what plans are in place to ensure that adaptive and replacement strategies can be deployed before adverse outcomes are realized?

In short: What are the benefits and costs of hopping on the Web 2.0 "bandwagon"?

In fact, these are the exact, same questions that teachers need to ask about any instructional resource, even "dark-age tools" such as chalk, paper, notebooks and crayons.

Unfortunately, these are the questions that Web 2.0 advocates seldom answer. Instead, they talk a technology, rather than an instructional agenda. Prepare for the Hype Advocates of Web 2.0 technologies will tell you that these new generation tools... Are so easy to use that they require no training

Are more engaging to students'

Make a greater impact upon collaboration

Enhance classroom communication

Are already in use in classrooms across the country, and

You should make haste to adopt before you are left behind

Sound important. But, these reasons failed to target and document solutions to the important questions about instruction (above) that you should ask.

This is called, putting the advocate's "feet to the fire." What are these Tools? Web 2.0 Tools include:

Blogs

Wikis

Social Network Software

Streaming Video

Any online service with a "Widget"

These tools seem common place. But, are they work the investment in time and money?

The Downside of the Tools and Technology

All is not bliss and delight in the "Web 2.0 Paradise."

Dangers lurk, and high profile issues emerge in relation to student safety, learning focus (instead of wasting students time) and teacher job security. (When things go wrong with anything educational, the teacher is the first to be blamed.

Possible dangers include:

Students are identified, lured into dangerous relationships on social network sites

Social network sites fail to control the "xxx" rated content and provide access to materials that students should avoid

Collaboration (with software such as Wikis) allows everyone to edit text. This is great for editing fiction, but not great when the accuracy and quality of ideas must be evaluated by everyone, then read, studied and reevaluated when multiple users make changes. These changes in the integrity and relevance of the information have to undergo constant scrutiny

Threats, bullying, intimidation can be conducted in an anonymous manner

Heightened expectations that this hyped technology will directly lead to enhanced, measurable and accountable student achievement and increased test scores when there is no direct relationship between the Web 2.0 technology and measurable student achievement

Increased expenditure on the technology infrastructure that is required to operate this technology, and a corresponding decrease in funding for other curriculum support expenditures

Increased pressure on teacher to undertake Web 2.0 activities because district decision-makers believed the hype about increased ease of use and student motivation, prompting them to invest money in the required infrastructure

Why Web 3.0 is Inevitable
Web 2.0 is hype and fantasy, but technology is real.

Just as E-mail systems replaced letters, phone calls, and take-home notes; so will usable technologies replace current systems.

But, time is not saved by E-mail, and the ease and speed promote stress and hurry.

But, no one wants to quit using E-mail and go back to stamped notes and postal worker intermediaries.

What Web 3.0 needs to go to is towards the gathering of "institutional knowledge" and the sharing of "best practices."

The problems with current models of classroom management and instructional delivery are that teaching remains an occupation of isolation from peers.

What Web 3.0 will do is open collaboration between competent and effective (master) teachers, and enable those with less developed skills and less elegant work habits to learn from and model effective best practices.

The problem now is that only students see what subtle changes in tactic and technique that master teachers implement. And, there is no avenue for the novice teacher to learn the nuances, except "trial and flop."

Web 3.0 will place expert knowledge and model-best-practice skills in front of those who "need to know, practice and do."

The potential for Web 2.0 is unmet and advocates are focused upon ideas and issues that are not related to education.

Web 3.0 will be different. The technology will be mature enough to be both easy to use and useful. And, teachers who want to take the fast train to master teacher proficiency will hop aboard.

The Web 3.0 Train is on the horizon. Miss the Web 2.0 Train, and you will be well positioned for real benefit in a year or two.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Teacher Survival Strategies at 03:00