**Statement on Technology**

The need to update pedagogy for ELA classrooms is undeniable. Using Web 2.0 technologies to accomplish this is not only necessary, it is inevitable when we consider the impact, particularly on the social and intellectual level, that technological changes are fostering around us every day. This can be a prickly issue among many educators, however, and must be approached judiciously. As is the case with anything new and the same holds true here, there is a set of educators that generally sees technology as more of a problem than useful; nothing more than a distraction. I think I have a unique take on including Web 2.0 in the ELA class room to offer to individuals such as this.

Before beginning my praise for Web 2.0 however, it is important to address the fact that the task of convincing tech-reluctant educators that using things like blogs, wikis, podcasts, twitter and the many other tools that exist out there to assist reading and writing pedagogy is made all the more difficult when over-zealous individuals cheerlead for using technology in the class room without having a true handle on the purpose or the potential of the tools that they are so enthusiastic about. Though well-meaning in their endorsement, seeing the tools of technology fail so thoroughly, educators who were cynical to begin with only have their apprehensions reinforced. In the following document, I think that I have laid out some clear goals for using technology that will appeal to those who are afraid that the seeming rush to integrate Web 2.0 tools into the classroom will be done at the expense of basic literacy goals, as well as helping those who are interested in using these tools but may be at a loss regarding how to be successful.

Technology for technology’s sake is not the way to go, I acknowledge that I want students to be able to master the research skills necessary to sort through all of the information (*and disinformation*) that they are bombarded with on a daily basis. While oversaturation of media can often be a deterrent to such a skill set, I think shielding students from internet technologies, or separating their educational process from the “evils” of the web, is setting ourselves up for failure right from the nascent phases of any pedagogy whose aim is to create strong readers. In terms of what I am interested in doing as concerns reading, is creating students who are critical thinkers. There is no better, or easier, way to illustrate to students the process of making thematic connections between disparate texts, than by using the wealth of texts available online. I discuss this further below under the heading: [**READING**.](#READING)

In terms of my interest in the teaching of writing, I would like to see students who are capable of synthesizing complex ideas into cogent and articulate prose. This is not a new goal, but in an environment of seemingly constant distraction, where the opportunity to devote adequate one on one instruction in the face of ever increasing class sizes, the issues of audience, or presence, and also of feedback are certainly important for students, or indeed would be for anyone who was expected to understand discursive knowledge by writing about it. Using social media technologies to get students writing with an immediate audience in mind (their peers) as well as keeping them writing throughout the term or unit, is an easy and extremely fruitful way to answer the question of time constraints in the classroom. Again, I provide more specifics regarding this under the heading: [**WRITING**](#WRITING).

Perhaps the most important place to start when considering the question of how to use Web 2.0 in the classroom is to understand the concept of *neuroplasticity*. Briefly, this principle, in theory, refers to the way that the human brain processes information. Specifically, the word *plasticity* indicates, as you may have already guessed, that many scientists believe that as the human brain is constantly in the process of generating new cells and synapses, particularly during the formative years of 0-21, the learning pathways that affect how information will be processed and understood are in constant flux. When one steps back and realizes that the generation of children that we are responsible for today are receiving more information via more sources, and at a nearly inexhaustible frequency, than any generation that came before them, it becomes apparent that the reason so many frustrated teachers are seeing a lack of engagement from the students in their classes is due to an asynchrony between classroom discourse and the way that contemporary students’ brains have been wired.

Here, I suspect, is where the rub for many educators resistant to Web 2.0 comes into play. It can come across as platitudinous to suggest that the reason for poor academic performance is simply “kids just learn differently today”, but think of all of the IEP’s and 504 plans that are out there. How many students are now labeled as suffering from ADHD or something similar? Think of how overmedicated our kids are. Is it just that we never noticed these things before? It would appear that these disorders are on the increase. Why? The big question, though:

Is it really preferable to obscure our problems through chemistry rather than meeting those problems head on, facing the fact that the interconnectedness of technology has forever altered how our species learns, communicates, and interacts, and thus alter the way in which we educate our children accordingly?

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There are two simple and very common goals that we would be striving to reach in the teaching of reading. They are listed right in the New York State Core Standards. The first is that we want students to be able to go past the face value of the words and identify thematically where the producer of a given text is going and what literary devices they are employing to get there. The second major goal would be to see students take the all-important step of connecting the ideas from one text and making connections or specific disassociations with their analogues.

The use of a Literature Circle (LC) where students discuss significant events in the text and are introduced to different critical lenses with which to measure their responses can be an invaluable tool in fostering a collaborative atmosphere of dialogue as well as a class culture of critical analysis. This of course assumes that we are looking at the learning process from an objectivist perspective where students will learn from, and in conjunction with, one another when developing the methodology to construct meaning in both fulcrum texts as well as those that are ancillary but feature in semi-weekly class LC discussions.

The use of individual student blogs or, what I would prefer, the inclusion of a classroom NING, would be excellent Web 2.0 tools to employ for this purpose. A NING is structured similar to Facebook in the way that users are able to communicate with one another. Each user has a profile, which does not necessarily have to contain a great deal of personal information, and then is able to create posts that can contain audio or video media as well as links to other relevant information that the student may wish to share with the class. It is important to note that a NING is a closed social network and the teacher, as administrator of the site, has the ability to screen all student responses to ensure that only information relevant to the course and following course protocols is posted.

This form of LC activity, when used in conjunction with in-class mini lessons and discussions, is a perfect way to keep students engaged in discussion, and therefore the texts, well beyond the classroom walls. When it comes to creating a collaborative classroom community, using social media as a way of extending the classroom culture that you have fostered is a wonderful way to, not only familiarize students with consistent dialogue, (as they have to participate in the NING activity by posting at least 2-3 original posts/ week as well as respond to the posts of their peers), but to give a very literal example of how connections between disparate sources is a natural outflow of the learning (reading) process.

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Our next major focus is on the writing level of our students. If our goal has been to use social networking tools to create a community of sharing ideas and meaning making, kind of like a classroom sized marketplace of ideas, then it follows that the written ability of students will naturally play an important role. In this paper I am narrowing my focus to technical, research-based writing, but this is true of any genre that one’s class may be exploring. Since we are already using the NING in our LCs, we realize that the sharing of each post with classmates as well as the critiquing of the posts of peers is a de facto revision process if we are serious about keeping up the level of participation and our students are convinced of the value and authenticity of the tool.

As my interest lies in research, I think that using social bookmarking tools such as Diigo can prove to be valuable when crafting a unit for the writing of a research or persuasive argument paper. One of the things that would be great is if students are writing about their research and where they are planning on going with their material throughout the course of the semester or year. Using social bookmarking tools is a great way to create this reality. Students can share the sources that they are researching and comment on and evaluate said sources. This way, by the time it comes to actually produce the project/paper, they will have a very good handle on what they will be writing and why. (If we are really lucky, they even have several segments of their project/paper already written).

The most important argument that can be made for the advocacy of using Web 2.0 in the ELA classroom, whether it be to focus on writing, reading, research, or any of a myriad of other foci, is the level of constancy that the tools create. This is a game changing moment in how we teach our kids. If we use Web 2.0 effectively, we take the learning environment into the real world and give a relevancy and engagement to the teaching of traditional ELA skills that we would not be able to instill otherwise.

**CONCLUSION**

There shouldn’t be anything threatening about this. Web 2.0 is merely a way segment how we conduct our classrooms. We do not want to incorporate technologies simply for the sake of being trendy, but because their incorporation provides us the opportunity to do more of the kind of teaching that we want.

If you look at the ideas that I have proposed, there is nothing revolutionary about them; writing about one’s research, for example. This is rather standard procedure. Similarly, annotating texts and exchanging ideas and feedback with peers is a normal part of what we do every day when we encounter new texts, regardless of if they are films or works of art or even a piece of music. Web 2.0 is simply a way to get students participating in these processes en masse. It lightens the work load for the teacher, as well. Instead of having to slog through mountains of papers at the end of the term, feedback has been provided at a regular pace throughout the writing process, and through the constant pace of revision that blogging and feedback-ing that Web 2.0 has provided, the quality of the writing sample that is turned in will be higher and easier to grade.

Many research studies have been conducted in recent years that measure the benefits of using Web 2.0 in the classroom to enhance pedagogies centering on critical thinking and the writing process. Below, I have included my own literature review article for those who are interested in learning more about the topic or looking for more resources concerning Web 2.0.

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