**Post #1**

**Introductions & Creating a Blog**

Through the eyes of a child:

You know those days when you have just presented a great lesson and you're thinking to yourself, "Wow that was great lesson! I was well planned, I had all the materials ready, I started with a great opening (sure to capture everyone's attention), I explained how they should demonstrate their understanding, I gave examples, and I walked them through the assessment expectations!" ... when a little girl with puzzled eyes cautiously, reluctantly, raised her hand and said, "I don't know what to do." I am that little girl today. How very humbling it is to step into the shoes of my students and reflect on how it feels to not have the background knowledge, understanding, or experience to confidently complete the task asked of me. The anxiety of everything seeming to be moving along so quickly. The feeling of looking around at everyone else and thinking, "Everyone else seems to get it ... it is just me?"

Along with many new Web 2.0 tools of course, it is this new appreciation and understanding of what some (if not all, at sometime or another) of my students experience and feel during their own learning quests, that I will bring with me as I greet my new bright and eager faces in September.

**Introductions:**

My name is Tammy and this blog will chronicle my journey as I explore Web 2.0 and it's many possibilities and implications for myself as a first time Teacher Librarian and Lead Literacy Teacher for my elementary school K-7. After much debate (sadly with just the voice in my own head) and with a leap of faith I have decided to simply admit my complete lack of technology awareness and ignorance and share my first steps.

**Humble Beginnings:**

A few days ago I scoured an introductory email that the director of TL-DL at the University of Alberta had forwarded to me. Thank goodness she considered sending it to me! I'm not sure I would have even known how or where to take this on-line course! In this email it referred to "e-class". Having never done anything like this I decided to search "e-class" and the name of the university. The search engine Google got me close ... it took to me to a place where the instructors set courses up on "e-class". Long story short, it finally occurred to me to go back and check the TL-DL home page ... and imagine that ... there the link was posted along the top of the page! I hadn't noticed it before. To my relief it was user friendly. After completing what I thought was a decent enough introduction, I pressed the POST button. "Your session has timed out" was the immediate response and my words were gone ... whirling in cyber space somewhere. Could I possibly start over? With heavy shoulders, yet stubborness pervailing, I started again. This time no glitches. I was able to post an introduction about myself and even reply to fellow students also registered in the course. Feeling proud of my accomplishments I ventured forward. I needed to set up a blog. A blog? (Again a complete lack of technology awareness!) Our introduction mentioned three different sites worth visiting ... "Blogger" being one of them. I figured I couldn't go
wrong with one that actually had the word "blog" in it. Again to my relief it was relatively easily to register ... but then what?

**Trailfire to the Rescue:**

Unfortunately both of the books on the required reading list are on back order. Despite my efforts to pay priority shipping, searching ebay and asking fellow librarian colleagues for a copy, I am left waiting for the books to arrive. Thankfully, relevant and pertinent sites posted by our instructor were made available using "Trailfire". I right away started to see the possibilities of using a tool such as Trailfire at any grade level. This is where the clouds started to lift and I realized I had seen "blogs" on line before. I started to make sense of the vocabulary, the possibilities and implications, and reams of questions started consuming my thoughts (how can I use this in the library? Could this be the tool I use when I create our school website? Could the students use it to share their thoughts about a book? Could students write and publish book recommendations? What about my staff? My district?) Again, at the risk of sounding completely "non-techie" I had no idea the volumes upon volumes of information and tools available that I had never exposed to before! (I found myself veering off my intended path and following the various links a number of times.) Just four days ago (yes I know that sounds absurd, but true!) my internet exploring days were primative and very, very narrow ... and sadly I didn't even realize it! I had a few teacher sites full of lesson plans and ideas that I visited often, but I had never commented on or belonged to a blog, known about Google reader, known what a RSS was, or realized what Web 2.0 even referred to!

My investigations took to many, many sites. I have to admit my preference is "beginner" type sites that don't assume I have a lot of background knowledge. One site I stumbled across that I found 'user friendly' as a new blogger was http://theedublogger.edublogs.org/2008/01/14/edublogger/. I found this site easy to read and navigate.

**Looking ahead:**

Well I'm hooked! Let the technology journey begin! Yes, it is true that I have A LOT to learn but I am determined to not give up. It is my intention to not only learn about the tools, but apply and share what I have learned this upcoming school year. Words I found meaningful and thought provoking are these by Anne Davis, an educational consultant from Georgia State University in the Instructional Technology Center, College of Education, "Sometimes when I see all the stuff that is posted on blogs by teenagers I find myself wishing that someone had given them some guidance. Lots of them are just not thinking. We need to build these types of things into our discussions in our classrooms. I like to think that good teaching about responsible weblog use would help. "We will need courageous leaders who are willing to explore the strengths and weaknesses of this medium. Our students will live in a world where they will have access to increasingly more powerful communications tools. Who should teach them how to manage the power of these tools?"

As a teacher and a parent of three children I have come to the realization that it is my job and responsibility to embrace technology and its place in our world ... even if it is exhausting :).
They Grow Up So Fast! Preserve Those Precious Memories On-Line

Like most children, a trip to Disneyland is what my children dreamed of. Yet with the high costs of everything and our busy lifestyles it was simply too easy for my husband and I to say, “Maybe next year.” Well before we knew it, our toddlers were children and heading towards pre-teen. I knew it was time to make it happen. Oh the excitement! Our youngest was five … still young enough to believe in the magic of it all and a princess fan like no other. With camera in hand we began our journey. Photos of our first plane ride; photos of us arriving at the park; photos of us in the pool, and yes even photos of us eating dinner at various establishments … but the most precious photos of all were those with the princesses. We could now go home, pictures in hand and enjoy the memories. Why is backing up our photos online with programs such as Flickr, Photobucket or MyPhotoAlbum such a good idea??? Yes, I did get the photos home. Yes, I did get them loaded onto my computer. Yes, I enjoyed looking at them on the screen and sharing them with grandma and grandpa (who were awed by my ability to show my pictures on the computer) … but no, I didn’t make a hard copy of them (HONEST … I had planned to). That’s when the computer crashed. The camera card had been cleared and every one of those pictures was lost. It is now seven years later and I still occasionally get all worked up and angry at myself. How could I have relied on a computer to be solely responsible for such precious memories!!! With heavy heart, I remind everyone BACK UP YOUR PICTURES in a second location right away. If only I had known about on-line photo sharing.

Choosing a site:

What I find so fantastic about a program like Flickr, is that with very little effort (and in my case - limited technology experience) you are signed up and uploading pictures within minutes. It was very self explanatory and easy to navigate. I appreciated the option of either posting pictures privately (which works well for me) or publicly (which I’m not certain I would want for my family). The peace of mind of knowing that there is another place my pictures can be stored safely and with the convenience of only a few clicks of a mouse, works for me. Before choosing a photo sharing site you might want to check out The Web Photo Sharing Site Faceoff. In this article, Alex Iskold looks at the pros and cons of the most popular photo sharing sites. He ultimately chooses Photobucket as the "overall leader" because of its "good mix between mainstream and social web." I was surprised that although he found it to be the most popular, he considered Flickr to be "difficult to use for non tech savvy." This contradicts my first experience with Flickr … leading to me to question, "Am I more tech savvy than I give myself credit for or have completely underestimated the full capacity of what Flickr can do for me?" Perhaps further explorations will tell.

Online Photo Sharing in Plain English - A Tutorial Definitely Worth Checking Out!
My assignment this week was to explore various on-line photo sharing sites and reflect on how they might be used in our library and school setting. Online Photo Sharing in Plain English was just fantastic! If you have never thought of posting your pictures to the web (I didn't even know that was possible before today and within minutes I had uploaded and protected many family photos) this is would be a great place to start. I was instantly engaged and saw the relevance and possibilities of what can be done. In my experiences, today's students (and truth be told, me too!) like having information presented in a highly visual, novel, engaging way. I think Online Photo Sharing in Plain English does this. This is a site that I would definitely use again when explaining how and why we would be using on-line photo sharing in our school to staff and parents.

Applications of On-Line Photos in the Classroom

With a whole school sequence using the story One Hen by Kate Milway in mind, I used the search engine in Flickr to seek photos of landscapes of Ghana, schools in Ghana, Houses in Ghana, Children in Ghana. An unbelievable number of photos were at my finger tips! Allowing my students an opportunity to visually "step into" a place halfway around the world will not only engage them, but make the story so much more meaningful and relevant. So my next quest is to now return to these photos and seek out the tools that will allow me to best organize them for the students (and staff).

Another site that I came across that I found intriguing was called Shutterfly. Although Alex Iskold felt this site lacked "sharing and social web features" I was immediately drawn in for its professional looking results. This site has some examples of class sites that have been created and they are beautifully done. It made me want to sign up at once (what's one more registration at this point :) One of the things I have always done for my primary students is to create a portfolio binder showcasing their year. It includes work samples as well as pictures I have taken throughout the year. I tend to go a bit over board each year ... developing about fifteen pictures per child. A site such as Shutterfly would not only reduce my developing costs (phew!) but allow parents to enjoy the pictures on an on-going basis. It also has options for posting your class newsletter, reminders, a calendar of events. It would reduce photocopying costs and parents wouldn't have to keep track of endless paper reminders. So now I need to step into my new shoes ... Teacher-Librarian. How could Shutterfly be useful to chronicle the Library happenings? Well ... perhaps photos of the new book arrivals, pics of students reading books aloud to classmates in the author's chair, photos of guest authors (as well as post library news, reminders and events) and all in a very artistic and professional manner. The security feature I liked about this site is that it was password protected so only our school families could access it. One of the challenges would be ensuring that only pictures in which I had signed permission were used. Our district has in place a permission policy that every parent signs at the beginning of the school year. On it, parents either say yes or no if they agree to have their child's photo used on a school website or printed in the local newspaper.

Is it safe to post photos?

Concerned about compromising your children's safety by posting pictures on line? Christy Matt points out in her About.com article the risks that someone may try and track your child down are real, but
unlikely. She points out the greater risk is that the picture may be used in a way that you never intended ie. an advertisement or a sign for someone's business ... but this too is unlikely. For families that are just not willing to take that chance, Michael Carr in his About.com article provides a solution - watermarking photos. This would allow pictures to be shared but not used for anything but viewing. From what I can see, most on-line sites include the privacy feature that enables you to choose who can see your photos.

**What's next?**

Once again I am surprised at how easily the minutes tick away while searching and exploring the features of the various sites. Photo sharing has certainly caught my attention and I know it something that I will to continue to explore - both personally and professionally. Keep capturing those precious moments ... they grow up so fast!

Thanks Dawn, It was reading your blog that inspired me to try out Picasa. Here is my collage of Halloween '08. I found the program relatively easy to navigate but got a little frustrated when trying to arrange the photos in this collage. The sizing and rotation feature were attached so when I was trying to rotate the pictures would also change size.

Thanks Niki for sharing this terrific site! I appreciated how quickly and easily I could navigate the program and that there was a 'free' option. True, the free option didn't have quite as many choices, but there were certainly enough to make it work for me. My one concern about using the free option was my agreement to have advertising attached - but now that I see the small amount of advertising below the slide show I don't consider it a problem. The number of backgrounds was endless ... a scrapbooker's heaven and posting it to my blog was unbelievably easy. There were tons of school themed options to choose from. Ummm ... let the sharing begin!

### Post # 3

#### A Lesson Plan Using an Online Video to Introduce Character Education

The following is a lesson plan I have created to introduce Character Education to my students. It is based on the YouTube video titled: Got Character? Before using this lesson, it is important to view the video, first for content and then secondly, for noting the times you want to press 'pause' to allow for student reflection.

1. Establish the learning intention. "By the end of the video you should be able to identify what it means to have character and give examples of how you can demonstrate character here at school"

2. Anticipate. "What do you think the word character means? Turn, talk & report out." Define the term character traits. "The video you are about to watch was created by students in an elementary school. They are going to give examples of what it means to show character at school. Which character traits do you think are important and why?"
3. Process. (Record student responses after each question)

- Stop at 29 sec. "What should he do?" Stop at 45 "Turn & talk, what does being trustworthy mean? Think of a time when you have been trustworthy."
- Stop at 1 min. "What should she do? Stop at 1:12 "Turn & talk, what does being respectful mean? Think of a time when you have been respectful."
- Stop at 1:31 min. "What should she do?" Stop at 1:48 "Turn & talk, what does being responsible mean? Think of a time when you have been responsible."
- Stop at 2:00 min. "What should she do? Stop at 2:09 "Turn & talk, what does being fair mean? Think of a time when you have been fair."
- Stop at 2:25 . "What should they do? Stop at 2:39 "Turn & talk, what does being caring mean? Think of a time when you have been caring."
- Stop at 2:44 "What should he do?" Stop at 3:14 "Turn & talk, what does citizenship mean? Think of a time when you have shown citizenship."

4. Transform. In small groups have them discuss, plan and create a situation that showcases a student showing character. Provide practice and rehearsal time and then role play or possibly video tape.

5. Reflection. What is the character trait that you value most and are committed to contributing to our school community? What actions will you take to demonstrate this trait?

I hope to share and demonstrate the possibilities of video sharing with my staff by 'hooking' them in with a ready to go lesson. (As part of our school goal, every teacher in our school has committed to teaching Character Education lessons during the first week in September.) Our school is equipped with three COW’s (computers on wheels with projectors) which allows the students to view what is on the computer up on a big screen. As fortunate as we are to have these, they are only used by a small number of staff members having been using them. Perhaps this could be the catalyst to staff discussions about the use of Web 2.0 tools and technology in our school.

Reflections

Pros: The use of this video (and others like it) will grab the student's attention, keep them engaged and deepen their understanding of the content (in this case - character education). I know that many of my students would be interested in creating a similar video themselves (but I haven't yet decided if I would post it online; but I would certainly show it at one of our monthly assemblies). It did take some time to find just the right video using the site TeacherTube, but I feel it was well worth the effort. By watching the video a second time it was easy to select the sites to stop and reflect.

Cons: It was frustrating that I couldn't get the voices to match with story just right. (Sometimes if you let the video load and then press play it helps ... but it didn't work in this case.) To the right of the video there is a "download" option. I tried this, but I received a message that claimed a driver was needed to
open a ‘flv’ file. Hesitant, but willing, to download another program onto my computer, I followed a link claiming it would provide the necessary driver to allow a ‘flv’ file. Once the program started scanning my computer I got that, "oh no what have I done now?" feeling. In the end, it led to me to a program that was available for purchase which I denied. I think that I would be limited to using the video, as is, in my school setting. I am not confident that the school computers would have this driver either. Even with the voices off I would definitely go ahead and use the video.

Post # 4

On Line Video Sharing

Have Times REALLY changed?

Imagine ... it's 1978 and you're in a grade six class at Pleasant Valley Elementary. While rethreading the film onto the smaller of two reels, the teacher calls out "Hold on everyone, I think I've got it this time!" The latest film of traditional and current life in France flashes onto the pull down screen ... upside down! The crowd of impatient eleven year olds breaks out into laughter as the teacher tries frantically to make sense of the film projector. "Run and get Mr. Jones from down the hall ... hurry!" she calls out to no one in particular. By the time the film is up and running it is recess.

Flash forward to a couple of years ago ... I am now the teacher. With a mouse in hand, the computer screen in front of me, I call out "Hold on everyone, I think I've got this time!" A "You are not authorized to visit this site" message pops up on the screen ... for the third time. "Run and get Mr. Jones from down the hall!" I call out to no one in particular.

Isn't interesting that thirty years later I can draw such similarities? I have grown up in a world where I have watched first hand, technology virtually explode into every aspect of my daily life, "one of immense and rapid growth" (Richardson, 2006); and yet when embarking on new technical frontiers, those feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and/or frustrations are parallel to those of my grade six teacher so many years ago. As I delve into the world of video sharing, I take comfort in the words of Johanna Riddel, "As teachers, we have always taken our role as the source of information seriously, but we have to remember that we are learners, too. Today's shifting educational landscape, fueled by creative, collaborative technology applications, requires a spirit of adventure - a willingness to let go and often, to learn along side our students." (Engaging The Eye Generation, Visual Literacy Strategies for the K-5 Classroom, 2009)

My First Journey into Video Sharing

If you asked me three months ago if I would ever be posting something on a video sharing site like YouTube, I would have laughed and answered "no." Well surprisingly, and rather proud of myself, I have successfully created and posted my first YouTube video. Granted it is rather raw and lacking public appeal (I certainly don't expect a million viewers to stop by and watch); but nevertheless, it is my own little piece to share with the world. By the way, if you are interested in creating a YouTube video that will receive millions of hits, you might be interested in visiting David Scott's site: 8 Tips to Make Your
YouTube Video go Viral. In this article he provides the following advice, "Most importantly: Your video needs to be funny or amazing or remarkable or have some fascinating information or be controversial. Basically the video needs a reason for people to pass it on."

My journey started with what to post? Feeling hesitant and awkward about creating a clip using the web cam installed in our laptop (which by the way my own kids jumped in and used effortlessly within minutes); I decided I wanted to begin with something 'safe'. No clear shots of my children or self, that could possibly be manipulated or used in an inappropriate way. I must admit after reading, Some Tips On Being Safe On YouTube by Andrew Milburn, some of my concerns were alleviated. He points out that by following "a few simple rules" such as not using your home address or including your personal information, " you will be kept away from harm (but sadly this cannot be 100% as in anything in life)."

Having said this, is the risk small enough that I am willing to take this chance with my children or the children in my class? At this time, I am still left undecided.

Although it consumed a great deal of battery power, taking video with my camera was simple. In hindsight, by sitting closer and not having to use the "zoom" feature at its maximum power, the image would have been clearer and less grainy. Once it was downloaded into my computer, I was promptly offered to "make a movie" using Movie Maker. Having not done this before, I took it as another opportunity to try something new. I was not disappointed, it was easy to navigate, provided options like fading in and out, and multiple places to save it. Not quite ready to attach it directly to my blog, I chose the safer option - my computer's hard drive. I then opened a YouTube account (also quick and easy to set up), selected the file and hit upload. Voila, I was now a part of the world of on line video sharing. According to Social Media, Web 2.0 And Internet Stats, 200,000 videos were posted in the month of March 2008 alone and at that time there were 70,000,000 video were already uploaded on YouTube. Imagine the number today is much higher today.

So here is my first YouTube video for you to watch!

Lacrosse 2009

So is There a Place For On-Line Sharing in the Classroom?

In the article, The Power of Sharing, posted by The Guardian Weekly Global Network, Jamie Keddie discusses how three young art students created and posted a bogus video depicting a nuclear bomb explosion. "The aim," said the art group, "was to question the truthfulness and credibility of the media." Although their purpose was successfully fulfilled when they generated a great deal of interest and discussion, judges didn't agree and charged the three $10,000 each. Jamie Keddie suggests that using videos such as these in our classrooms, can certainly capture the attention of our students and spark important media related discussions, "For teachers who have online access in class, video sharing provides a powerful reference tool to enhance class discussions. Unlike standard television programmes, YouTube clips are restricted to no more than 10 minutes. The majority are much shorter, which is an additional advantage for time-starved teachers." I am fortunate. I have in my classroom, a computer with Internet access and a digital projector attached at all times. I agree with what Keddie says - I find it quick and easy to incorporate relevant YouTube videos into the beginning, middle or end of my lessons.
In contrast to the educational videos I order from our District Resource Center, I can find and use online video sharing at my convenience. I simply have the sites I want to use, minimized on my computer before school starts, and I am ready to go with the click of a mouse. Because the length of a YouTube video cannot be longer than 10 mins. they are much quicker to preview than a full length documentary. For teachers that do not have the luxury of Internet in the classroom, Keddie points out that "clips can be downloaded to CD-Rom disks or memory sticks and played on computers in class or they can be viewed on MP3 players and mobile phones."

One of my personal YouTube favourites (I used with my class a couple of years ago) was a montage of Owen and Mzee photos set to Louis Armstrong's song, What a Wonderful World. Frustrating and surprising, is that I couldn't relocate this particular video to post on this blog. Certain I would have only have only used the tag words Owen and Mzee before, it is no where to be found today. This leads me to wonder ... do people regularly remove YouTube videos? Perhaps we as educators need to save those video we know are ones we'll use again and not rely on search engines?

**An Absolute Gem - One Example of How Two Brothers use On-Line Video to Demonstrate Their Creativity and Comprehension**

While pondering the question, how can video sharing be incorporated in my classroom? I stumbled across a YouTube site that has left me awed and inspired. Two brothers, Ben and Noah (probably 8 and 10 years old) created a series of videos that chronicle the Story of Owen and Mzee - a tale of unexpected friends, called Hipposode. In addition to this series, they created a video titled "Behind the Scenes" that shows viewers how they went about making this series from developing a story board to creating the characters and the backdrop out of art paper.

As mentioned earlier in this blog, I am still 'on the fence' when determining whether or not I would be willing to post videos of my students on-line. Is ensuring that parents are well informed and comfortable with a video of their child being uploaded to the World Wide Web enough? Seeing what these two boys created is allowing me to consider new options and be rejuvenated by Keddie's question, "Isn't it about time your school got itself a new camcorder?"

In Teachers Tap Video-Sharing In the Classroom an article posted in the Wall Street Journal (March 2008) Joesph de Avila, not only reflects back to the days of film projectors (imagine that!) but introduces us to the value of using sites like TeacherTube (whose goal is "to provide an online community for sharing instructional teacher videos") and SchoolTube ("dedicated to student video and media sharing for entertainment and classroom use.") In this article, he also points out the down side of using such sites, "Much of the material on these sites isn't tied to curriculum or designed with educational standards in mind, and the videos vary widely in quality. In addition, teachers need to weed through clips to make sure they are relevant for class -- a potentially time-consuming process." These words resonate, as I recall spending a whole evening last week simply scouring the reams and reams of videos. After previewing twenty five "library" YouTube videos, I found only three that I thought had some place in my curriculum and learning journey. Now I know there are many other quality videos to be
discovered, but if we are not careful, we could spend our time searching to find just the right video, while our other curricular planning takes a hit.

What this search did uncover was a brilliant video that I believe speaks on behalf of all us in this course ... what are the qualities of a really good video you ask? As quoted earlier, David Scott claims it must be "amazing" and have "a reason to pass it on." This is that video needs to be passed on!

A Librarian's 2.0 Manifesto

**Is YouTube Our Only Choice for Online Video Sharing?**

With so much emphasis on YouTube, I wondered "are there any other options?" Ryan Bilsborrow-Koo of DV Guru evaluates Ten Top Sharing Sites in an easy to read, well organized format. For each site, he "test drives" and critiques the pros and cons in following categories: visual appeal, the interface, editing features, sharing options and an overall verdict (he also includes the sample videos created while evaluating each program.)

Taken directly from his site:

AND THE WINNERS ARE...For posting: If you just want to get a video clip online and share it with friends via email or on your own blog, Vimeo wins for its speed, ease-of-use, and simple playback functions. It also lets users download the original file, and features some light community features (note that a new version is launching very soon). One of the few sites I used that I never had a problem with. Alternate choice: Videoegg.

For viewership: If you want to step up to more community features and get widespread viewership of your viral clip, YouTube gets the job done with a lot less hassle than vSocial or Grouper.

For editing: If you want to alter your video online in any way--through editing, remixing, or combining your clips with those from other users--then head on over to Jumpcut and don't look back. Jumpcut really offers the first leap forward in online video sharing, and is worth a look even if you have no use for editing features (its full-fledged community is launching "very soon").

At this point in my video sharing adventure ... trying to explore and evaluate nine other online video sharing sites becomes "information overload". It is comforting to know that he has done much of the work for us and his advice is available when one is ready to explore other options. I'll take heart in the advice a friend, "learn to do one thing well before taking on the next." So for the time being ... I will bask in my early successes with YouTube.

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**Post #5**

**Social Bookmarking**
"Social bookmarking? It sounds like scrapbooking. Is it anything like our scrapbooking girl's night out?" a friend asks. Funny enough ... it kind of is! After all during our "scrapbooking girls night out" we gather the pictures that are most important to us (perhaps like collecting useful sites?); we organize them onto theme pages (perhaps like tagging?); we need the right tools (perhaps like diigo or de.licio.us?); and we get together and share ideas and materials with one another to make the job easier and more enjoyable (perhaps like networking?) So here is my "scrapbook" of my social bookmarking journey...

I can certainly relate to the words of Will Richardson in Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts & Other Powerful Web Tools for the Classroom, "It's starting to feel like you need your own army to help you keep track of all the information you might need or want." Although, exploring the informational world of Web 2.0 ignites untapped interests and endless possibilities; it also brings with it a need to organize and retrieve all this 'information' (and just in the nick of time!). So here I am “jumping in once again with two feet” exploring and evaluating social bookmarking tools.

What is social bookmarking anyway?" Wikipedia defines it as "a method for Internet users to store, organize, search, and manage bookmarks of web pages on the Internet with the help of metadata, typically in the form of tags that collectively and/or collaboratively become a "folksonomy". Folksonomy is also called social tagging, "the process by which many users add metadata in the form of keywords to shared content." Richardson refers to it as "the army" we have been awaiting.

Richardson selects Furl [which was acquired by Diigo "Digest of Internet Information, Groups and Other stuff." in March 2009] as a "favourite" tool that allows him to come back "regularly to retrieve ideas or quotes." As a fellow gatherer of seemingly endless, interesting and relevant sites, I often find myself, tapping my head and thinking aloud, "Now where did I just see that information or idea again?" Frustrated and precious time wasting, I often begin my searches again (sometimes with success, sometimes not). Ironically, I have experienced this very frustration during this past week while I gathered information and quotes for this class. Unaware of social bookmarking tools until this week, I was left with two options, "add to my favourites or “create a shortcut on your desktop?" Well as you can well imagine, my favourites list is now so full that it really makes no sense (especially when I didn’t take the time to name them but rather just left them as a seeming never ending list of url's) and my personal desktop is now cluttered with an equal number of "must keep" sites. It is clearly time for "Social Bookmarking Tools - the Wonder Organizers to Step in!"

A Change in Thinking – “Tag Your It!”

No longer are we left to have to choose just one topic, one location, when organizing our favourite bookmarks into folders. No longer are we restricted to only accessing these favourite bookmarks on the computer in which we saved them. (Oh, how very last week of me!) With the use of tags, single key words, we are able to store, access and share, not only our favourite sites, but those of others, from any computer (or hand held device) with internet access. Staggering for a newbie like myself!

So Which Social Bookmarking Service Is Best For A New Teacher-Librarian?
Well what social bookmarking options are there? As with anything on Web, there are a plethora of options, (check out Loren Baker’s Top 125 Social Bookmarking Sites) but two by far, are frontrunners ... Diigo and del.icio.us.

**Diigo**

Upon activating my account, I am immediately made aware of a highlighting feature of Diigo. I am thinking that this would be a very useful tool for me personally, as I don’t ever pick up a professional book without a highlighter in hand. I also see the value of it for my students. Learning to identify "what’s most important" is a skill we as educators are constantly striving to help our students acquire. The British Columbia Performance Standards mandates that students are taught to "accurately identify main ideas", "provide specific, relevant details" & "use subtle clues in the text to build inferences and interpretations." The Web Highlighting feature of Diigo would be useful when helping students to practice these skills. Steve Hargadon agrees, “highlighting passages and leaving comments on Web pages for other diigo users to see is a great way for teachers to effectively assess student assignments.” (School Library Journal, 2007)

On the home page an "Educator’s Upgrade" is offered. Trusting that is going to be applicable and offer features that will make this tool indispensible, I have signed up. Signing up does require a school district email and address so I am interested to see if my district "accepts" or "allows" such an application. Diigo claims I’ll know within 48 hours.

In the top right hand corner of the home page (also referred to as "my dashboard") there is a search option. Knowing that character education is important to my school start up, I started my search with these words. I was immediately shown relevant and useful sites (some that I had previously found using Google, but many new ones!) One of the sites I was interested in ‘holding’ on to was Character Education Partnership. So my next question was how do I use this Social Bookmarking Tool to "hold" it for me?

Upon returning to the original search page, a save option was available directly below the site. Since I was a first time user, I was prompted to create a name for "MY LISTS" which I simply titled Character Education. I then added a number of other sites shown on the search page that I was interested in, to that same list. If I came across a site that didn't fit under the heading of Character Education, an option to create a new LIST is always available. I appreciated the "preview" option that allowed me to quickly peruse the sites without having to open a new window.

As a search engine I am not disappointed! I am surprised at how the ‘tagging’ system of this search engine was able to directly hit what I was looking for. But discussing Diigo simply as a search engine, doesn't begin to define its potential. With a social bookmarking site like Diigo you are “building comprehensive resource lists much more effectively than any one of us could working alone. Exemplifying the wisdom of crowds, these applications are fast becoming an important resource for relevant information.” (Richardson, School Library Journal, 2007). As a personal organizing tool I am already hooked and jumping in ... but what about for my staff and students? Staff – absolutely, I think they will be easily “sold” on such an easy, effective tool. "By getting in the habit of saving interesting or
useful links can be a huge asset in and of itself.” (Blog, Wikis Podcasts, and other Powerful Web Tools for the Classroom). But what about my students? I am left questioning - will our district allow students access to the ‘sign up’ component to this site? and secondly, even though it is free, is it realistic to ask parents and families to sign up? Especially when there is another option, that when attached to my library blog, they can use without having to sign up ... del.icio.us. 

Here is my first “List” I have created using diigo ...

**Character Education**

**On to del.icio.us ...**

The creators of del.icio.us define their site as “a social bookmarking service that allows you to tag, save, manage and share Web pages all in one place. With emphasis on the power of the community, Delicious greatly improves how people discover, remember and share on the Internet.” Will Richardson suggests “that although [del.icio.us] may not have all of the flexibility and power that Furl [Diigo] has in terms of search and archiving, its simplicity makes it an equally powerful tool for teachers and students.” (Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for the Classroom, 2006)

When opening the del.icio.us home page for the first time, I was taken by surprise the number of “bookmarks saved in the last MINUTE” – 320! Following the “Join Now” option I was prompted to include my email address [all fields required]. Richardson’s claims that “it doesn’t even require an e-mail address to register.” (p.99) A new requirement added since 2006? ... most likely.

He also goes on to say that you can “make up” your name, but I’m just wondering if with so many subscriptions and accounts requiring me to remember usernames and passwords already ... will I possibly remember a name other than my own? (This isn’t to say I used my real name for my user name). I also wonder if I am setting up student accounts will I be able to manage those accounts if they don’t use their real names? I think at this stage I will begin with Richardson’s suggestion of using my account to “create unique tags for each of my students.”

When prompted to add bookmarking buttons or skip this step I was a little uncertain. With my computer already acting quite fragile, I wondered, “will it hinder it’s performance more?” I chose to skip. BIG MISTAKE! Everytime I wanted to add a new url I had to go back into the site. By adding the delicious buttons to the toolbar, I can add new sites (and tags) by just clicking the icon. Ready to try, and armed with this advice “The best way to learn how to use Delicious is use Delicious” (delicious/help/getstarted) I jumped in.

My first order of business what to create a “tag cloud.” I have seen them on a number of blogs and I determined to have one too. Not finding the answer in the delicious help sections, (it MUST be there ... but I couldn’t locate it!) I turned to Social Bookmarking in Plain English. Once again I find Lee Lever’s Common Craft YouTube series immensely helpful, and he gave me a better understanding of social bookmarking ... but it didn’t lead me to creating a “tag cloud”. Hopeful, that the following sites would
lead me to success, How to Make a Tag Cloud and Put Delicious Cloud Tag in Blog, my efforts were fruitless. (Hard to believe with Sites titled such as these!)

After hours of searching and experimenting, my efforts to create tag cloud (now located to the right) have resulted in something close but not yet it. I am not yet giving up. I will continue to press on and hopefully one day soon, when you look to the right a del.icio.us cloud tag will exist. Richardson reminds me “and while delicious is the top dog of social bookmarking, other sites are worth exploring” (School Library Journal, Taming the Beast: Social Bookmarking)

**What are the Educational Benefits of Social Bookmarking?**

When contemplating how social bookmarking can assist me in my role of teacher-librarian, I found web2tutorial, Web2.0PrimerforNewbies, and Will Richardson’s book Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms, helpful resources. Drawing from my own experiences and these resources, I have decided social bookmarking:

- Assists students by providing them access to quality, relevant sites that will assist them in their research. In return, they can share sites they find with me (hence making it ‘social’). I also again must return to the benefits of the Web Highlighting Tool offered by diigo (enabling students to highlight key ideas.)
- Assists parents by leading them to sites that will assist their children with homework and lead them to new publications.
- Assists colleagues by providing a network where they can explore lesson plans and resources to support their curriculum. Topic specific bookmark accounts can be created i.e “Math” or even more specific “Geometry”.
- Develops my own professional development by sharing bookmarks with other teachers with similar interests from around the world.

**Final Thoughts**

I need to remember to take breaks from the world of technology and give myself permission to start slow. In my journey to ‘master’ social bookmarking tools – both diigo and del.icio.us, personally and professionally, I am left in a state of information overload. Del.icio.us is by far the most recognized social bookmarking site, and yet, on my own little path of discovery, I am feeling that diigo may be the tool for me. The ease in which I got started, experienced success right away and could make sense of its more linear organization, helped it become my frontrunner. Perhaps with a ‘break’, more experience and support, my thinking will change and I too will realize the greatness of del.icio.us … time will tell.

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**Podcasting**

Podcasting … A Break From Visual Overload!
In a world of visual stimuli constantly dominating our day, podcasts give learners a refreshing option; an option, if you so choose, that allows you to sit back, close your eyes, listen and learn. Now obviously this ‘laid back’ way of listening and learning isn’t the only way we use technology to acquire and inspire new learning ... but isn’t nice to have it as an option?

**An Expanding Definition of Podcasting**

Podcasting, a blending of the words “iPod” and “broadcasting”, is thought of as the “TiVo for the radio” by Dr. Frankel, the managing director of Soundtree (a company invested in assisting educators interested in incorporating music with technology). According to WikiPedia, a podcast is “a web feed of audio files that is placed on the Internet for anyone to download.” However, people are now also applying this term to video casting, or videoblogging, as well. Created by Apple, in October of 2004, this relatively new Web 2.0 tool, has burst onto the technology for front with thousands of podcasts now being published on the Internet. According to Richardson, its success is due to the “sudden explosion of broadband connectivity” (allowing files to be download, saved and viewed much more quickly than ever before) and the “cheap memory” (such as RAM and hard drive disk space) available to upgrade our computers. (Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms, 2006) Audio (or video files) can be downloaded and listened to (or watched) directly from a website or you can subscribe to podcast sites where a script known as a RSS will automatically download and update your media player. The advantage of the latter is that you can listen (or watch) downloads at your own leisure (i.e. audio files can be enjoyed while going for a walk, going to the gym or driving in your car). Another reason for podcasting’s success is that ease in which ordinary, everyday people can easily upload and download, the topics that interest them.

**Hundreds of Published Podcasts available for Classroom Use ...**

So what is already created and available for us to use in our classrooms? It turns out there is actually a lot! Education Podcast Network and the iTunes Music Store are two places educators can start.

The Education Podcast Network is free to access and requires no sign up. It categorizes the audio and video files by subject areas helping you to narrow your search. Having said this, it was still time consuming to go through all the different podcasts in search of one that was relevant and useful. Adding to the workload was that some files are simply titled, “David” or “Wilson” giving you really no idea of the content.

iTunes Store is also free, but does require a download of Quicktime and the iTunes program itself. Both were easy and fairly quick to download and operate. “The iTunes Store offers more than 100,000 audio and Manideo podcasts from independent creators and big names like HBO, NPR, ESPN, The Onion, CBS Sports, and The New York Times.” I personally appreciated the ease in which I could read and navigate the support pages (offering how to find, play, download and save podcasts). There were also tips to avoid “podcast overload” (selecting preferences that help you organize, manage and keep or delete, the podcasts in your folder). Podcasts can be searched by popularity or by subject.
I spent some time watching podcasts from both sites and found the quality of the “home produced” casts to be similar. Without question, the quality of CNN was much more professional. But as Richardson points out, “Be prepared: this is not the highly polished, professional radio you might be used to. Cracks and pops, obscure music, and “ums” and “ahs” are all a part of the podcast genre.” (page 113) One videoblog I stopped to watch was by KidsKnowIt.com. It consisted of a lady known as “Nana Know it All” wearing a purple boa and purple wig, doing a science experiment with cheesy sound and visual effects in the background; ... and yet ... she caught my attention, made me want to try the experiment with my kids, and explained why and how the experiment worked! It drew me in and I kept watching ... I think my students would have similar reactions. The creators of KidsKnowIt accomplished what they set out to do ... create something others will watch and listen to.

Creating a Podcast

Richardson’s suggestion “I urge you to try it out first ...you need to experience what you are asking your students to do not only so you can support their technical use, but also so you understand what Web publishing really feels like” (Blosgs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms, 2006) once again rings true.

Armed with Richardson’s book and the endless advice provided by the search engine Google, I entered into the world of podcasting. What follows is, my personal journey, and without a doubt, I am certain that there is probably a quicker, more efficient way of getting there!

First ... what to record and upload? I chose to read aloud a classic story I use regularly in my classroom – Stellaluna by Janelle Cannon. Students will be able to follow along (using either the computer itself or on a mp3 player/iPod (the first available for $10 in the Walmart line up) while following along in a copy of the book. I hope that my recording will not only help them develop word recognition and comprehension skills; but will also model fluent reading (“reading aloud effortlessly and with expression; sounding natural as if speaking - National Institute for Literacy).

Second ... where to record? I chose Audacity based on Richardson’s recommendation (p.119). After downloading the program to my hard drive, it was surprisingly easy to get started and record. Now does one with no experience or knowledge of editing audio delve into such options such as altering bass or pitch? No! Happy with my success of actually recording my own voice, I left well enough alone.

Third ... how to convert to a MP3? Following Audacity’s advice, I selected LAME to convert my newly created audio file to a mp3 file.

(http://lame.buanzo.com.ar/Lame_v3.98.2_for_Audacity_on_Windows.exe)

Through trial and error, I managed to locate the audio file I created, upzip and save the lame_enc.dll file to convert my file to mp3.

Fourth ... how to upload so others can listen? I chose Podbean. With a huge sigh of relief and fingers crossed at this point, I found it easy to sign up and navigate. Success! An unexpected surprise was that Podbean creates a blog for you with your recordings inserted. I think this would work really well for me.
Rather than having my students walk the “create your podcast” journey I have just taken, under my direction, using my account they can record and then post their podcast to this same blog. It can become the “holding place” for all the podcasts (like Stellaluna) that I create. In addition, it gave all the directions on how to upload to the iTunes page.

Visit my podcast blog at:

http://reynoldsclan.podbean.com/

An absolute “must visit” site to support educators wanting to create and use podcasting with their students is:

Kidcast: Podcasting in the Classroom

Dan Schmit has created an entire series of blogs that allow educators to step into his shoes and see how he uses podcasting with his students. His easy to read and understand, writing style, makes it an enjoyable and valuable read.

Advantages of Using Podcasts in the Classroom

A Global Audience – In his article, Tools For The Teks: Integrating Technology in the Classroom, Wesley A Fryer advocates that “Education in the twenty-first century should focus on the development of authentic literacy skills for students.” This certainly rings true to my own personal philosophy of teaching literacy. When asking our children to write with purpose and for an audience (as simple as a buddy class, the principal, their parents or a school newspaper), it is my experience that they are motivated to write more and more likely to review their work in terms of revision and editing. Fryer agrees, “the most basic and powerful ways to increase student motivation is to write and communicate, is to change student perception of audience.” He goes onto suggest that, “teachers can now challenge students to publish for a global listening audience via a classroom podcast.” Maya Smart further supports this, “Web distribution of their work motivates students to put their best foot forward.” (Listening to Themselves: Podcasting Takes Lessons Beyond the Classroom, Edutopia). I find this intriguing ... a motivating and meaningful way of incorporating technology that doesn’t entail the same privacy concerns of online photo or video sharing. Of course it is still important that parents be made aware of the process and our intentions; but I don’t predict that many would have the same concerns as when sharing images of their children.

Inexpensive. “One of the frequent problems with new educational innovations is their expense. Classroom teachers rarely have direct control over budgetary funds, and school resources for new purchases are always limited.” (Freyer 2006) To get started with podcasting in the classroom, you simply need a microphone (often built into many of today’s computers or purchased inexpensively at any computer retailer); an audio editing software program (such as Audacity, available for download at http://audacity.sourceforge.net/); and a publishing tool (such as Podbean, available for free download at http://www.podbean.com/).
Support for Struggling Readers. Take a look around, iPods and MP3 are in the ears of almost all young people today. While riding the sky train this weekend, I purposefully made note of how many young riders (those that would still find themselves in the school system) were listening to some kind of mobile media player. Now this research is by no means official, but I did observe over half! The Pew Internet & American Life Project reported in September 2008, that 74 percent of kids ages 12-17 own iPod or MP3 player. It made me think. If listening to a mobile medial player is such an excepted social behaviour ... how can I use this tool to support my struggling readers? By podcasting chapters from the novel or textbooks they are reading in class, struggling students can follow along using their headsets. Socially, their pride and confidence is kept intact, and educationally, they are getting the support they need. In my school, we have fantastic Educational Assistant and parents that are always looking for ways to help out. They could certainly help with the recording (and it give the kids a break from always listening to my voice J). Once the podcast is created, teachers would have access to it permanently... particularly useful if they tend to do the same novel study or literature circle collections each year.

Supports Students with ADHD. “Podcasting can be used in an inclusive setting, hugely benefiting students who have attention deficit disorders. The teacher can arrange for the student to download lectures and other course materials from the computer, and the student can listen individually to it, without distractions.” (Beth Lynn, Podcasting in the Classroom, 2007)

Teaches communication skills. “Students quickly become attuned to their tone, intonation, speed of delivery, and expression (or lack thereof.)” (Fryer, 2006) In terms of curriculum, podcasting is a fit!

The B.C. I.R.P’s (2006 version) states that our students are to:

- “use speaking and listening to interact with others for the purposes of contributing to a class goal, sharing ideas and opinions, improving and deepening comprehension, solving problems & completing tasks,” and
- “use speaking to explore, express, and present a range of ideas, information, and feelings for different purposes and audiences, by staying on topic in a focussed discussion, recounting experiences in a logical order, using an effective introduction and conclusion, using details or examples to enhance meaning & explaining and supporting a viewpoint”

Promotes story telling. Now that’s the language of librarians! “Human beings are innately hardwired for storytelling: It is an activity dating back to the cave.” (Fryer, 2006) Dan Schmit, creator of KidCast: Podcasting in the Classroom supports this by saying “You get kids to massage the content in a way that really makes it their own. The ability to tell a compelling story is going to be one of the most important twenty-first-century skills that we can give our students.”

Provides a snapshot of classroom happenings. What an exciting and impressive way for students to share with their families what they learning and doing in school. I’m certain upon arrival, aunts and uncles would be greeted with, “Do you want to hear what I have done on the computer?” “Podcasts can provide a virtual ‘window’ into schools, permitting a variety of interested stakeholders to gain an in-
depth understanding of the issues students are studying, the new things they are learning, and the
evidences of learning.” (Fryer, 2006)

Final Thoughts.

With my head a bit foggy, I walk away from this experience elated and thinking, “I actually did it.”
Granted my understanding of how it actually happened in terms of computer programming is limited;
but with the assistance of ready to use programs like Audicity and Podbean, I am here. I think that this
Web 2.0 tool is one I will definitely continue to use in the long term. As I have suggested, there are so
many benefits and applications of using it! The one application I am ready to utilize right away in
September, is supporting my struggling readers by providing them with podcasts of text they can’t read
on their own. My journey using podcasts in the classroom has just begun… stay tuned and listen!

Post # 7

Virtual Libraries

"What time do you close?" Remember the days of propping your head up to stay awake, cramming in as
much research as possible ... before the doors of the library closed? Wow, how times have changed!
Thanks to the Internet and virtual libraries, we now have access to the resources we need 24/7 from the
comfort our own homes, a coffee shop or even a hotel room.

What are Virtual Libraries?

Interestingly, there is not one clearly defined universal definition of virtual libraries. Liz Burke defines a
virtual library as "an environment that encompasses the concept of the digital library, but is more than a
collection of digitised resources ... providing access to an integrated collection of print, electronic and
multimedia resources delivered seamlessly and transparently to users, regardless either of their physical
location or the location and ownership of the information." (The Future Role of Librarians in the Virtual
Library Environment, 2001)

Adding the element of community, Saracevic defines virtual libraries as “organized collections of digital
information ... constructed collections organized for a particular community of users, and they are
designed to support the information needs of that community.” (Digital Library Evaluation: Toward an
Evolution of Concepts, 2000)

Holly Gunn, (Virtual Libraries Supporting Student Learning, 2002) notes that like physical libraries, virtual
libraries serve three roles:

1.a place to share resources;
2. a place to preserve artifacts and ideas; and 

3. a place to bring people and ideas together.

She suggests that both physical and virtual libraries need to support formal learning (guided by instruction); informal learning (self paced, self directed); and professional learning (gaining work related knowledge). She goes on to say that the resources selected need to "support the curriculum that is taught there."

But if virtual libraries fulfill the same roles and foster learning like physical libraries; then why bother visiting your local school or public library? Well .... as I'm sure you'll agree, it's the smell of a new book (or even an old one!), the shelves and shelves of books calling out "pick me"; the excitement of receiving your first library card and being told you can choose any book you want; the enjoyment of taking that book home to read snuggled together on the couch or reading under the covers with a flashlight into the wee hours; the librarian - ready at a moment's notice, to share and entice you with latest publication ...

But alas, there is another reality. One that consists of deadlines, research papers and desperately needed resources. Ahhh ... the need for virtual libraries.

**What are the Advantages of a Virtual Library?**

**Immediate Access** ... Where as you must 'physically' visit a physical library during their hours of operation; virtual libraries are always open and can be accessed from any location with an Internet connection. Convenient for ... anyone living in a rural community ... anyone at home with young children ... anyone who just doesn’t feel like getting out of their p.j’s and slippers to head out to their local library.

**A Wealth of Resources** ... “A paradigm shift takes place from libraries as collectors of items to libraries as facilitators of access to all kinds of information, provided by anybody, located anywhere in the world, accessible at any time.” (Grothkopf, Libraries On and Off the Web, 2000) Utilizing the power of the World Wide Web, virtual libraries can access an unprecedented number of resources. However, the University of Alberta Libraries urges us to remember, “Unlike most books and journal articles, which undergo a peer review process prior to publication, anyone can publish anything on the Internet. For that reason, it is imperative to critically evaluate all information taken from resources on the Internet.” (Lamb & Callison, On Line Learning and Virtual Schools, 2005)

**Personalized** ... Virtual libraries can be organized and customized to meet the needs of each unique community. Libraries will differ from school to school depending on their individual needs. Gunn points out, “a variety of formats in presentation and navigation is quite different from that of a physical library. (Virtual Libraries Supporting Student Learning, 2002)
Readers Becoming Authors ... McKenzie calls on media specialists “to build a different type of library collection in virtual libraries, a new vertical file of student-created art, photography, oral histories, local histories, and local survey data on the school server, which would be used to support the local curriculum. (From Now On The Educational Technology Journal, 2000) As discussed in my last post, “Listen Up ... Podcasting in the Classroom”, writing and creating for a global audience motivates students to write thoughtful, authentic pieces and review their work in terms of revision and editing. Do I believe that making my student’s work available on our virtual library would inspire them to put forth their best effort? Yes ... if clear expectations and criteria were first established with the students. It certainly couldn’t become a venue where just anything could be posted. The bar needs to be kept high.

In the article, "Online Learning and Virtual Schools, May 2005" Professor Laurel Anne Clyde, Professor of Social Sciences, summarizes the following purposes of websites designed for library media centers:

• To provide direct access to the Internet for students.
• To help students save time in locating valid and current information through the Internet.
• To provide a guide for teachers to locate Internet sites relevant to their curriculum.
• To provide information to parents and to increase involvement of parents in the school and the school library media center.
• To create a library without walls and access to information 24/7.
• To serve as an electronic brochure in describing activities of the school and the library media center.
• To encourage positive public relations between the school and the community.
• To provide links to the school’s online catalog as well as access to the online catalogs of other schools, the public library, and even a local academic or government library.
• To support the curriculum with links to homework help, standards, and typical remedial assignments.
• To showcase student work—the best in student achievement from essays, to book reviews, to student website design, to student produced multimedia.

What are the Challenges of Virtual Libraries?

Access ... Without an Internet connection, one cannot access a virtual library. Although Internet access is widely available, we cannot assume it is for all of our students. “Digital divide” refers to the “gap between those people with access to the Internet and information technology tools and those without.” (Digital Divide Basics, 2002) I can certainly speak to this ‘divide’ being true in my school community. Many of our students do not have a computer in their home or access to one other than at the school.
Lack of Support ... What if our students do not possess the technical or research skills to independently locate the resources they are looking for? In a physical library, assistance from the librarian is available, in some cases to navigate the virtual library. “The teacher-librarian is needed more than ever in this virtual library guiding students in their selection, evaluation, and use of the many electronic options.” (Gunn, Virtual Libraries Supporting Student Learning 2002)

Time ... finding and uploading relevant resources; keeping it current; maintaining and organizing; eliminating irrelevant or inappropriate sites; supporting students and staff ... all while maintaining, operating and teaching in a physical library... time!

What Local Virtual Libraries Are Available?

Investigating what the city and schools in Nanaimo have to offer in the world of virtual libraries?

The Vancouver Island Regional Library

"The Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL) is the third largest library system in British Columbia. It serves more than 400,000 people on Vancouver Island, the Queen Charlottes and the Central Coast (Bella Coola) through 38 branch libraries and a books by mail service."

A "jackpot" of resources for local community members. This virtual library is professional, resourceful and "clean" (not a lot of clutter or unnecessary gadgets). I liked it's simple, easy to follow organization - where I'm certain even the most novice user will find success. At a glance, you can see what services it offers and how to find them. Found under the 'online resources' section - "Homework Help" provides list of useful and kid friendly search engines (eg. searchasaurus), online resources (eg. Worldbook Kids) and websites (eg. KidSpace @ The Internet Public Library) for kids to access (with a library card number). This site offers something for everyone. On-line resources, newspapers, journals, magazines, books, novels and even audiobooks. The databases can be accessed alphabetically or by subject. I liked that the site offered it's users assistance in two ways:

- Ask a VIRL Librarian Email your question to us Anytime!

- Real People. Real help. Online Chat, get help now! 10-10 Sun to Thur 10-5 Fri & Sat

Every year I take my class to this library. Any children, not already possessing a library card, are issued one. This gives every child in my class access to this site! (assuming they have access to Internet). This will definitely become a resource I promote this fall.

Nanaimo Chinatown Project

"While few physical vestiges of Nanaimo's once thriving Chinese community remain, the story of Chinese settlement offers fascinating insight into one of Nanaimo's oldest, and the important economic and cultural role it played in the City’s development."
Created by Malaspina College (now University of Vancouver Island), this virtual library is another example of a resourceful and 'easy to navigate' site. A treasure in preserving and educating others about an important part of our local history. This site offers viewers opportunities to search photographs, images of artifacts, maps, documents, interview and on-line resources. I am certain this will become an invaluable resource for our grade six teacher's literature circle collection about China.

**University of Vancouver Island**

This virtual library, similar to the University of Alberta's, offered links about the library services, a search for library resources and a search catalogue option. It provides a reference email to ask questions. To access the resources a University ID and password are required. This virtual library is not intended for elementary students.

**Cedar Community Secondary School**

C. Vosshans, local teacher-librarian, maintains this virtual library for her secondary students. This site offers links to directories, search engines, resource pages, "fast info" (ie. today's weather report) and research support. Upon entering the site, students will discover a wealth of curriculum related, online resources, to access. (ie. Social Studies 11).

**John Barsby Community School**

Another high school in our school district, offers students 'book recommendations', 'research sources' and access to 'online encyclopedias' to help with their research and learning. This site does not offer the expansive list of sites, categorized by subject areas, that Cedar Secondary does. Because the curriculum is the same ... students from this high school could certainly access the sites of the first high school mentioned.

**Dover Bay Secondary School**

Another quality virtual library (user friendly, resourceful and well laid out) offering students "great reads" advice, "new books" perusal, "library news and happenings" and "on line resources" that support the curriculum.

I did not locate an elementary virtual library in my district ... but, hmmmm... imagine the possibilities! Perhaps it is time ...

Teaching Your Student to do Research? You've got to check out this virtual research site!

"The Kentucky Virtual Library offers selected links to electronic databases, library catalogs, self paced tutorials, digital collections, a virtual reference desk, and access to government information."

This site 'walks' students through and supports the process of writing a research project. It starts with accessing prior knowledge, asking questions, finding relevant information on line, using graphic organizers and presenting a final copy. It includes tools like a thesaurus and dictionary. It is both interactive and appealing. Check it out!
Kentucky Virtual Library

**Final Thoughts ...**

The virtual libraries I have investigated above have not left me disappointed! I easily see the value and place for them in my school's library and in the homes of my students. They share some common characteristics that I believe makes them a success - clearly organized, relevant, suited to meet the needs of their unique community, and easily accessible (assuming you have a user name and password). This inquiry has certainly inspired me to share what I have learned with my staff in September. I am confident they will be as inspired and excited about how our local virtual libraries can support the learning of their students. I highlight the word support, because as Gunn points out, "The mere presence of virtual libraries, however, does not cause learning to occur. It is how these libraries are utilized by students and teachers that will enable learning. They present a new paradigm for learning in school libraries. They have the ability to transform the relationship between learners and resources, facilitating both formal and informal learning. With careful design and the support of skilled information professionals, virtual libraries can provide powerful environment for student learning." (Virtual Libraries Supporting Student Learning, 2002)

**Post # 8**

**Wikis**

“REPLY” ... “REPLY ALL” ... “CC” ... “FORWARD” ... “Did you get that last email?” ... “You mean the one sent by ...” “No, the other one ...” “Ugh, can we just call a meeting so I can get this straight?”

We've all been there ... organizing an event via emails. If there are only two, maybe three at the most, people organizing the event; well then maybe email will work just fine ... but what if twenty people are all contributing to the conversation? Then it is time to utilize a wiki!

**Wikis defined ...**

“Two heads are better than one” certainly encapsulates the value of a wiki. By contributing the very best of what each person knows, a solid, unbiased, accurate end product is achievable. This is certainly illustrated in the following definition of what a wiki is. Many definitions are available; but none, in my opinion, were of the same calibre as this one created by a group of people working and reworking the language to best define the word “wiki” ...

“A Wiki can be thought of as a combination of a Web site and a Word document. At its simplest, it can be read just like any other web site, with no access privileges necessary, but its real power lies in the fact that groups can collaboratively work on the content of the site using nothing but a standard web browser. Beyond this ease of editing, the second powerful element of a wiki is its ability to keep track of the history of a document as it is revised. Since users come to one place to edit, the need to keep track of Word files and compile edits is eliminated. Each time a person makes changes to a wiki page, that revision of the content becomes the current version, and an older version is stored. Versions of the
document can be compared side-by-side, and edits can be “rolled back” if necessary.” (Using Wiki in Education, Last edited April 2009)

Stewart Mader, the author of the book Using Wiki in Education and a leader in the adoption of wiki use in organizations, acknowledges two types of wikis: Internet Wikis (public) and Enterprise Wikis (private).

“Internet wikis”, like Wikipedia and Wikitravel, have their content stored in one place, and is open to anyone worldwide: to access, add to, edit, erase or replace what is written, anywhere on that site. Mader claims that on public wikis, “we often speak of the 90-9-1 Theory, which explains that 90% of users will “lurk” or simply browse pages, 9% will contribute occasionally, and 1% will contribute frequently, and account for most of the contributions to the wiki.” (Five Key Differences Between Wikipedia and Enterprise Wikis, March 2009). These statistics are surprising considering Wikipedia claims “there are 65 million visitors monthly and more than 75,000 active contributors working on more than 13,000,000 articles in more than 260 languages. As of today there are 2,969,158 articles in English and every day, hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world collectively make tens of thousands of edits and create thousands of new articles to augment the knowledge held by the Wikipedia encyclopedia.” (Wikipedia, July 2009)

“Enterprise wikis”, like the ones many business, corporations and educators opt for, provide a more secure option by granting access to a specific group of people with a user name and password. These kinds of wikis can also be organized or set up so users have full access to some areas and a ‘read only’ access to others. These kinds of wikis are much more specific in content and purpose. They are generally established to meet the needs of a specific community. In contrast to internet wikis, Mader claims “the contribution level is much higher based on the fact that people are contributing as part of the daily course of their work, as opposed to voluntarily contributing to a public, Internet wiki.” Conceivably this is true in a large corporation, but in on a school based wiki ... perhaps?

The Wikipedia Phenomenon ...

Created by Ward Cunningham in 1995, Wikipeidia is a growing online encyclopedia website empowering people to publish what they know to be true from anyplace at anytime. What makes Wikipedia, or any wiki for that fact, so interesting is that anything published; can also be added to, fixed, erased or edited by anyone as well. Cunningham wanted to create a tool that was easy, hence the word “wiki” (short for “wiki-wiki” meaning ‘quick’ in Hawaiian) and that would encourage people to become authors themselves and publish their knowledge. He has succeeded!Wikipedia is perhaps one of the most known and used sites on the World Wide Web ... "65 million users a month!"

So how can anyone trust what has been published on Wikipedia? Richardson reassures us, “Thankfully, there are vastly more editors that want to make it right than those who want to make it wrong ... the collaborative efforts of the group set it straight, usually very quickly.” (Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms, 2006) He goes on to suggest that “we” act like community watchdogs, aiming to collectively create neutral, unbiased articles.
But is assuming that the community as a whole will overlook and ensure the accuracy of everything posted on Wikipedia sufficient? Studies have been conducted to test Wikipedia’s accuracy. According to Richardson (p.61):

In 2004, Alex Halavais, from the University of Buffalo, deliberately posted 13 errors on different posts ... all were corrected within a few hours.

In 2005, the magazine Nature compared the same 43 entries in Encyclopedia Britannica and Wikipedia ... and Wikipedia was found to be “only slightly less accurate.”

“Wikipedia can provide a great starting point for research, in part because of the wealth of high quality links within many of the articles.” (Gross, Wikis in Education-Design, 2008) Will the risk of something not true or accurate being posted, ever be eliminated? No. It is a reality that we as teachers must accept. We either venture in knowing that these risks exist; or we don’t. We can choose to stick to published works that are peer-edited for accuracy; however in doing so we must also accept that perhaps we may be closing the door to the concept that “collectively we can produce information that is as high quality as what a trusted few produced in the past.” (Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms, 2006) Which I would suggest is a pretty empowering message to give to today's students preparing for tomorrow's world. It is also important to consider that a site like Wikipedia, shouldn't be a student's only resource when gathering information.

**Wikis in Schools ...**

Not only does using an “internet wiki” like Wikipedia for research offer students an easily accessible resource to acquire the information they seek; but it can it can also be used as a medium for writing. Although Richardson suggests that “teachers on the K-12 level are going to be hard pressed to justify the use of such an open venue for the publication of student work”; some teachers find it a useful tool, sparking interest and discussions in how their contributions are edited, or not, in the World Wide arena. Richardson points out, “In using wikis, students are not only learning how to publish content; they are also learning how to publish content; they are also learning how to develop and use all sorts of collaborative skills, negotiating with others to agree on correctness, meaning, relevance, and more. In essence students begin to teach each other.” (Richardson, 2006)

**Benefits of Using a Wiki in Schools ...**

If considering subscribing to wiki to be used as tool in the classroom, there are many “enterprise” wikis to choose from. By subscribing to a web-based wiki site that requires a password; the likelihood of malicious or inappropriate edits occurring are greatly reduced. One of the benefits of a wiki is that a “history” option allows the site manager to go back and see who has made which edits. Another benefit is that if the content does take an inappropriate turn, the site manager can revert the document back to a previous edition.
Using a wiki in the classroom is uncomplicated and is relatively free of technical glitches, enabling students to spend more time developing the content of their research and writing. “Since wikis are innately easy to use, their use can eliminate many of the common technological obstacles that go along with projects involving student created websites.” (Gross, Wikis in Education – Design, 2008) Another advantage of a wiki is that students can import in videos, pictures and sounds to enhance their text.

Students are often asked to collaborate and work together and create a final project showcasing an accumulation of each member’s knowledge and thinking. "A wiki pulls together group members onto a known space, strengthening community as all members have equal access to the most recent version of the document." (Pearce, Using Wiki in Education, 2007) Merging the ideas and content from each member can be a difficult and time consuming task. Wiki’s interactive nature allows this merging to be on-going. Teachers can monitor each member of the group’s contributions using the history feature. In contrast to simply receiving a summative mark at the end of the project; using a wiki individuals can also receive formative feedback form the teacher (and possibly peers) throughout the process. “The use of wiki software provides unprecedented ease of managing each writer’s contribution, as well as continual assessment of contributions from group members.” (Gross, Wikis in Education – Design, 2008)

Need a break from so many long staff meetings? Wikis are also an efficient tool to enhance staff collaboration and communication. This tool can be used to organize lesson plans, resources or agendas. “Schools are constantly collecting data, (isn’t this the truth!) and this can be enhanced through the use of a wiki, which can eliminate paper and email chains that often have to be compiled, wasting valuable time and resources” (Teaching Effectiveness Program –Wikis in Education, 2006)

What about using a wiki as a school web page? In lieu of a more traditional web page, some school are finding that a wiki provides a quick and efficient way of updating and managing school information. By allowing trusted individuals access to the site, the philosophy of “many hands make light work” rings true. PAC, individual teachers, librarian and music specialists can easy create pages linking from the home page. Ummmmm ... “a one stop for all” kind of format. An interesting proposition for a upcoming teacher-librarian wanting to create a web site that meets the unique needs of her community.

Arborheights an elementary school in the Seattle area has done just this. It is very impressive, check it out! On the home page there is a picture of the school, relevant newsfeeds and side bar of links relating to school like PTSA, Fundraisers and Activities. From this page, viewers can link to many different pages ... “classroom pages”, “fundraising”, “sporting events”, “announcements” to name a few. Each staff member is assigned a page. What they chose to post on their page varies ... some keep it simple with a quick introduction and their school district email; others are much more extravagant with class slide shows, class happenings and individual blogs for students to showcase their pictures, assignments & published writing. (Did I mention this was a grade three class?) Check out Mr. A’s Blog ... Amazing!

**Drawbacks of Using a Wiki in Schools**


Although the premise of this document is that wikis definitely have a place and a great deal of value in a school setting; one cannot simply look through rose coloured glasses. The larger a wiki grows, the more difficult it is to manage (eliminating any unwanted, inappropriate or even outdated material). A second consideration is that when students (or adults for that fact) disagree and are not able to come to consensus, it could “potentially cause an edit war, which occurs when users continuously edit the content of a document so that it fits a particular agenda.” (Duffy & Bruns, The Use of Blogs, Wikis and RSS in Education: A Conversation of Possibilities, 2006) Duffy and Bruns go on to suggest “The easiest way to circumvent such disagreements is to place a block on the page edit functionality for a period of time.” Thirdly, if there isn’t a page locking option, one contributor’s changes will be deleted if two contributors are editing the page at the same time. And finally, “by encouraging the use of wiki software and content, schools might ultimately encourage students to favour knowledge built by consensus, which is problematic when the consensus arrived at is undesirable.” (Gross, Wikis in Education – Design, 2008) Consider a student discussion about something such as “What makes our school a great place to be?” Their consensus may not be what we as the adults in the school deemed the appropriate kind of answer.

**Creating a wiki …**

When deciding to create a wiki, your journey begins by first deciding which wiki provider to choose. Thanks to Tracy Poelzer, a recent graduate from the University of Alberta, a list of recommended programs is available on her wiki at http://techitupwebtools.pbwiki.com/. I selected PBworks, after all anything that is “as easy to create as a peanut butter sandwich” is for me. The second part of its name “wiki” has now been changed to “works” to reflect how the tool allows users “to work together more efficiently, effectively and productively. (PBWorks Help Page). PBwiki claims that you can "sign up in 60 seconds". Sign up maybe … but up and running .... for me it was much, much longer. I personally found this site frustrating. Inviting and adding new members to my group wasn't nearly as easy I thought it would be; the choices to personalize my front pages were limiting and my page seemed to get lost in all the additional pages (created by pbwiki) making it confusing. Perhaps if I had paid to upgrade, I would have had a different experience?? I decided to go back to Tracy list and choose a new wiki provider "wikispaces" …. success! This site, in my opinion, was "cleaner" (clutter free), more organized and easier to navigate. My son became an invited member easily (contributing to page in green font within a minute); I had many differnet template and colour choices to choose from; and the layout visible to my invited guest is nicer. There is 'Ads by Google’ side bar that can be eliminated with an upgrade. For my school site I would choose this option. Check out my new wiki at:


**Final (Muddled) Thoughts …**

Just when I thought the sun was beginning to peek out from behind the clouds, a new Web 2.0 tool steps onto the scene! Wikis are causing me to reconsider how I can best create a web "home page" for my school. Blogs, social networking and bookmarking sites, online photo and video sharing, podcasts and now wikis! So much potential ... but realistically, so little time. So does one just getting started on a
Post # 9

Multimedia Sharing

Why choose just one media tool when you can use some or all of them all in one place ... welcome to the world of multimedia sharing!

Multimedia sharing sites facilitate the storage and sharing of audio, images, photos, and video all in one application, to share with friends, family, and even the world, if you so choose. And the brilliant thing is not at the expense of your computer's hard drive or memory. Thanks to broadband connectivity, what would have required huge amounts of computer hard drive, can now take place as a web based application - alleviating your computer from having to store it all.

Relatively new to the 2.0 world, Eric Schnell suggests that "mashups (a web application combining two or more sources to create a new service) are revolutionizing application development in an era of the participatory and interactive web, in the same way that blogging has revolutionized online publishing." ("Mashups & Web Services" found in Nancy Courtney's book Library 2.0 and Beyond, 2007).

Want to Dazzle Your Friends with Text, Music & Pictures ... Try Animoto

The creators of Animoto have "developed a patent-pending, Cinematic Artificial Intelligence that thinks like an actual editor and director." Sound like jargon? Don't worry they have done all the work for you. They claim they can "produce TV-quality music videos using your photos in just minutes!" Well they certainly proved this to be true. Skeptical? Don't be. Signing into the free account is quick and in three EASY steps you are on your way to creating videos that will 'dazzle' your friends.

Step One ... Upload pictures from your computer's hard drive

Step Two ... Upload music from the many free tracks from "Community Commons"

Step Three ... Hit create! (be patient it takes a few minutes)

Here are three I created in less than fifteen minutes:

I Wanna Be a Builder

Maui Fun in the Sun

Flowers Make me Smile
Advantages ...

• Photos are displayed with the beat of the music ("Since your song-selection essentially determines the pace of the video, choose a slower song to get a slower video")

• Many free music tracks to choose ("you can use most Creative Commons music which is offered restriction free and at no cost")

• Text can be included (Click the box with a T in it along the bottom to add text to your video)

• Videos can be remixed if you don't like the arrangement ("Producing a totally unique video each time, no two videos are ever the same")

• Offers many different ways to share videos ("Add them to your MySpace & Facebook profiles, on your blog, e-mail them to friends, put them up on YouTube or download them onto your computer")

• Privacy ("All videos are totally private unless you active share your video's link with others/post it elsewhere. No one can stumble across, search for or access your video without you allowing them to")

Frustrations ...

• Limited options ... with the free subscription. By purchasing a subscription, you can create longer videos, adjust the speed of the photos and manipulate the music (ie. choosing parts of a song rather than starting at the beginning).

• Time ... it takes a few minutes to upload images and again to render the video (imagine the program not providing instant gratification!)

• Limited number of photos ... the program will do its best to "fit in" what you submit, but ultimately has to cut out ones that it can't fit. ("Animoto videos stop either when the music runs out or when there are no more images left to display... whichever comes first.")

Animoto for Educators ...

"Mix relevant messaging, statistics and quotes among the pictures your videos to educate your audience and inspire them to action." Animoto is offering educators free access to "full length options" of their program. (I have submitted my application; but have yet to hear back). In return they ask that teachers share examples of how it is being used in our schools and classrooms. Sent in by educators from all over the U.S., here are a few examples from the “case studies” section. Be prepared... the Civil Rights one is sure to give you goosebumps.

1. "Children's Crusade" from Sayreville, New Jersey

“Showing the Civil Rights struggle of the 60s via song and images for an in-class presentation.”

http://animoto.com/education/casestudies#civilrights
2. "Be a Buddy, Not a Bully!" From Jefferson-Morgan Elementary School

“This is our fourth grade students' latest Animoto production. This anti-bullying video is entirely student made from digital pictures and PowerPoint story boarding.” – Jim Hopton & Peggy Barger (aka JPe

http://animoto.com/education/casestudies#buddy

3. "The Alphabet" from Christina Gemano

“Engage students using online tools.”

http://animoto.com/education/casestudies#alphabet


“Used Animoto to chronicle the schools' annual balsa wood bridge building contest.”

http://animoto.com/education/casestudies#bridgebuilding

The Value of Sharing: I'm Left Inspired and Excited to Share...

In his book, Leading with Passion and Purpose, Christopher Spence suggests that, "Today, more than ever, teachers have opportunities to make a significant impact on educational change, perhaps without even leaving the classroom." (p.32). It is my opinion that Web 2.0 tools, including multimedia sharing sites, are enabling teachers to do just this. By uploading their vision and uses of such a program as Animoto onto the Internet; these teachers are impacting and promoting educational change. All four of the aforementioned Animoto videos, posted by educators, immediately ignited possibilities and connections how of Animoto could be utilized in my own school setting.

Just to name a few ... each year our grade 3's and 5's do an in depth study of the civil rights movement during Black History Month (February) and later in the spring our grade 6's study the Holocaust. The student's in these classes write "capture the essence" poems (phrases and individual words to tell a story) and a create "collages" of images and words. Sayreville's "Children's Cursade" video encapsulates both these projects. I'm not suggesting that the teachers at my school forgo the poetry and collages (the students think deeply, engage in important conversations and create beautiful displays) ... but wouldn't taking the background knowledge from these projects enable them to create something equally powerful using a multimedia sharing site? Parents have always been invited to come in and celebrate their presentations. Imagine having the student's Animoto videos running on a loop? The fact that the
videos are one minute in length will keep an audience engaged and it allows for everyone's work to be showcased.

"Be a Buddy, Not a Bully" video by Jefferson Morgan Elementary school, guaranteed, will inspire conversations and springboard project ideas when developing Character Education messages, a school wide goal of ours. "The Alphabet" by Christina Gemano showcases how our primary teachers can utilize multi-media sharing tools as well. Imagine our Kinders creating their names using the different manipulatives and then creating an Animoto video. As they watched it (I'm sure daily) they could read aloud their classmates names as they flashed up on the screen - Note we have computers in each of classrooms). The possibilities of using such a tool are endless. A video of 'books worth checking out' embedded on my "Library Happenings" blog perhaps? "As one of the more eye-catching and easy-to-use programs available in this remixed 2.0 world, this is a definite must-have, must-share tool for every school librarian's toolkit." (Brisco, "School Library Journal's 10 Best Digital Resources for 2009", 2009)

It has been suggested that perhaps these videos don't engage students in enough critical thinking. I disagree, I would argue that by setting criteria such as "include your ten best images, ten slides of thought provoking text, a title that hooks the audience and a closing slide that leaves the audience thinking" ... that our students would be thinking very critically.

I am awed by the critical thinking of Sharon Doyle in this Animoto video titled, "Position Statement2" - A must see!

**A 21st Century Library Mashup**

**Calling All Scrapbookers ... Try One True Media**

User friendly, One True Media, is similar to Animoto in that it allows you to upload photos and videos, choose music and text; and the program creates a professional looking video for you. However, this program is different in a few ways. The photo transitions in One True Media are similar to the familiar choices of a program like "PowerPoint" (i.e. from center out, left to right, dissolve), where as Animoto's uses these kind of transitions, as well as other "collage"/ "jigsaw" fancier-type transitions. Using their technology, both programs automatically create video shows; but One True Media also allows you to "step in" and change or edit any of the transitions. It also has artistic embellishes for your photos. Both programs give users many 'free' music choices and text options. One of the features I particularly like is that the One True Media allows you to upload many more photos at one time and the finished product is longer. The quality of the pictures seems quite grainy ... would clarity be improved with an upgrade or changing the size of the photos? Perhaps.

But what about using it in the school setting? For student use, my personal feeling is Animoto is the better choice. Less options ... bigger bang! As Brisco suggests, "this program can also be easily used with students without requiring instructors to have any previous experience with video-production software."
Here is my first multimedia site using One Tre Media:

Tammy's Montage 7/29/09

Want to Include Voice in Your Multi-Media Site ... Try VoiceThread

Founded by Benji Papell and Steve Muth, VoiceThread has steadily grown since its launch in 2007. It’s creators describe it as a “collaborative, multimedia slide show that holds images, documents, and videos and allows people to navigate pages and leave comments in 5 ways - using voice (with a mic or telephone), text, audio file, or video (via a webcam).” As an educator, I decided to further investigate this tool by subscribing to VoiceThread’s ‘sister’ educational site: EdVideoThread.

Check out my first attempts at VoiceThread titled:

"Nanaimo" at

http://ed.voicethread.com/share/570904/

VoiceThread for Educators ...

In her blog "New Tools: VoiceThread and BibMe", Joyce Valenza, shares the potential of VoiceThread, "a single photograph, capturing a single moment, can represent multiple stories. This site collects those stories and invites participation in the telling. You can focus on one image or create a slide show. Images of storytellers appear around the images. Users zoom in to see details and out to see the big picture." (2007)

When exploring VoiceThread's K-12 Solutions Page, right away I was impressed with the boundaries they've put in place to protect the identity and safety of our students.

• An accountable environment where all users on the network are known users, responsible for their content and behavior.

• Restricted to K-12 educators, students and administrators, all content is created or vetted by registered members of the community.

• There are no Free accounts, students may only participate after being added by their teacher or school, and student email addresses are not required.

Other restrictions include: only the students first names are made visible and other schools or classes can only contribute if both teachers/administrators agree. The only technical requirement for Ed.VoiceThread "is a web-browser equipped with Adobe Flash 7+, presently installed in 99% of personal computers and a broadband connection."
I found it very easy to get started with VoiceThread. I was prompted to upload images or video from my computer’s hard drive. After labelling each of the images, my voice was easily added. I am not sure if I would consider it "easy" in my school setting (hooking up a microphone and possibly a program to record sound; but here at home I have the luxury of a newer laptop with a built in microphone. VoiceThread recognized my voice immediately. I appreciated that I was able to record (and record again) my voice until I was satisfied. Once happy with how it sounded, I then pressed "save". Voila! The program created a multimedia site for me. Options to share ... via email, Facebook, blogs etc. were all made available. The recording (and rerecording) feature will be very important when working with kids. Even though they would be expected to preplan and write out what they were going to say ... giggles and mistake are inevitable. VoiceThread offers a plethora of possibilities ... book talks, story telling, retelling of family history, procedural talks, oral reports to name just a few.

On her blog "InfoTech4Learning" Colette Cassinelli, is developing a list of advantages using VoiceThread in the classroom.

And many sites offer examples of how VoiceThread is being utilized in classrooms:

Voicethread Examples in Education
Ann Oro's voicethread Bookmarks
Mental Math in Grade Six
GradeThree Winter

What about copyright?

As schools embrace multimedia sharing sites, conversations and instructions around copyright rules are warranted. Schenll points out "an issue that all developers face is the protection of intellectual property versus fair use." (p.71) The Center for Social Media provides a great deal of information for teachers and librarians on the site titled: "Copyright & Fair Use in Teaching" . Embedded on this site is an excellent video titled: Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Online Video.

Final Thoughts ...

First, computer programmers and creators need recognized and appreciated. These forward thinking individuals create programs like Animoto, One True Media & VoiceThread allowing non-techies like myself to create really amazing finished projects. I feel my experiences with these three multimedia sites have been 'toe dipping' experiences. It is clear that there are many more options within all three multimedia sharing sites that I hope to further explore. Schnell suggests "librarians need to use SOA (service-oriented architecture), web services, and the mashup to strengthen collaborative efforts if we are to remain significant in the increasingly competitive information marketplace. ("Mashups and Web Services, 2007)"
Post # 10

Social Networking

What is Social Networking?

According to Mathews, the self proclaimed Ubiquitous Librarian and author of “Online Social Networking” in Nancy Courtney’s book Library 2.0 and Beyond, online social networking has become “a communication phenomenon”. And what a phenomenon it is! Did you know that two-thirds of the world’s Internet population routinely visit social network or blogging sites, accounting for one in every 11 minutes online? (The Nielsen Company, 2009)

Social networking, based on “the six degrees of separation concept” - the idea that any two people on the planet can make contact through a chain of no more than five connections, [which by the way, is constantly being tested and often scrutinized i.e. Famous Six Degrees of Separation Study a Fraud?], “establishes interconnected Internet communities (sometimes known as personal networks) that help people make contacts that would be good for them to know, but that they would be unlikely to have met otherwise.” (Whatis?com, 2006)

As the authors of Whatis?com point out that “while social networking has gone on almost as long as societies themselves have existed, the unparalleled potential of the Internet to promote such connections is only now being fully recognized and exploited, through Web-based groups established for that purpose.” (2006)

Mathews suggests that our social networks exist on two levels. The “primary level” representing the individuals we know in person (family, friends & co-workers) and a “secondary level” a connected expansion of the first (friends of friends). “The allure of online social networking websites is that not only do they provide a virtual environment allowing member to interact with family and friends, but they also greatly expand the channels to social discovery.” (Mathews, 2007)

Although Facebook is a frontrunner with “more than 250 million active users and more than 120 million users logging on to Facebook at least once each day” (Facebook Statistics, 2009), it is certainly not the only choice. Wikipedia’s “List of Social Networks”, lists over 100 some notable, well-known sites, including MySpace, Twitter, Friendster & Ning.

Illustrating just how "big" Facebook has become is the following comparison, “if Facebook were a country, it would be the eighth most populated in the world, just ahead of Japan, Russia and Nigeria. (Owyang, Jan 11, 2009), and it is used in more than 35 different languages and 170 countries and territories. (Zuckerberg, Jan 7, 2009)

What Are the Commonalities of Social Networks?
Although there are many different types of social networks “most are built around a core of set features.” (Mathews, 2007) He outlines the following:

“User profiles” - where users input personal information (such as age, gender, education, employment, geographical location, relationship status, hobbies, interests, favourites) which is not only used to tell about yourself; but enable you to connect with other individuals with similar characteristics or interests.

“Friendling” – key to building a social network, is this process of linking and connecting to other users. Both parties, one to initiate the request and the other to accept, are required for this to occur.

“Groups” – environments where individuals can come together based on similar interests (i.e. movies, music, politics, fan clubs, sports, hobbies)

“Individual messaging” – is an option for two members to communicate privately within the site. In contrast to email, there isn’t an attachment option and the length of the messages can be limited.

“Announcements” – (also referred to as “posting something on your wall”), are often short and quick bits of news, thoughts, ideas or questions that you want to publically share with your “friends” in your network.

“Message boards” – this is where “friends” can publically post comments, reactions or questions on each other profiles. It allows for quick communication between members.

“Photos” – easily uploaded and linked to the user’s profile where “friends” can view and comment on them.

“Icebreakers” – symbolic displays (i.e. ‘poking someone’) to initiate an interest in having a conversation.

“Searching” – allowing users to “find” one another based on certain criteria.

“Privacy controls” – varying with different sites; are used to block users that are not “friends” from viewing your profile.

Social Network for Little Ones?

Yes, it's true. Even our little ones can get a taste of social networking. Take WebKinz for example. This phenomenon swooped through my home and school community with a vengence a couple of years age. Stores couldn't keep them in stock. Children weren't content with just one or two ... they wanted twenty! What was the draw? The ability to use the special code, unique to each stuffed animal, to enter a virtual world of fun and games on line. Built with this site is KinzChat ... a social network exclusively for members of the Webkinz community. At first glance KinzChat appears to be a protected, safe, online community for little ones. After all "kids use our pre-constructed chatting system called KinzChat. Members cannot type in their own words in KinzChat; they can only use the phrases and words we've created." and for ones a little bit older there is KinzChat PLUS where "we've given our members a bit more freedom. They are able to type in their own phrases and words, as long as they are in our acceptable word and phrase dictionaries. Words and phrases that we deem unacceptable cannot be
sent in KinzChat PLUS (the words will change color in the text box and the member will not be able to send them)."

But what about privacy? Look closely at the user agreement and here is what you'll find:

"Ganz may collect personal information that is voluntarily provided by you when you order a product, enter a promotion such as a sweepstakes or skill contest, answer our polls or surveys, register as a member on some of our Websites, sign up for additional services on our Websites, or communicate with us by mail, telephone or electronically. The type of information we collect and maintain may include your name, mailing address, email address, telephone number, gender, date of birth, purchase history, credit card number, chat room communications, complaints you may have about our products or services, a record of promotions offered to you, your Ganz product preferences, such as favorite pets and themes. This type of information is collected, used and disclosed in accordance with the form of consent required by applicable law and its use is limited to the objectives for which it was collected as described in this Privacy Policy. We may collect information through technology (such as logging IP addresses) for routine system administration purposes, to make our Websites more interesting and useful to you, or to manage content delivery. Ganz may also collect information that is stored in cookies, and we may associate this information with your personal information. Cookies are small pieces of information stored on your hard drive, not on our Websites. We use cookies for a number of reasons. Cookies allow you to store your password without having to constantly re-enter it" and here's a BIG one ...

"We reserve the right to collect, use and disclose your personal information without consent where required or permitted by law."

I'm NOT suggesting that Webkinz isn't an okay place for children to explore social networking. What I am suggesting is that perhaps we (myself included) need to take time to really explore what it is we are "accepting" or signing up for. After all, these companies have iron clad, legal wording to protect themselves. If we are dissatisfied with how our information is used ... we agreed to their terms.

**Social Networking in Schools ... Possibly?!**

Quite honestly, if you had asked me a few weeks ago if I thought there was a place for social networking in schools, I would have, without hesitation, answered “no”. But once again, taking the time to explore and observe how other educators and schools are incorporating the use of Web 2.0 tools, causes one to stop and possibly change her opinion.

In his blog, “weblogg-ed”, Will Richardson shares, “more and more I’m starting to think that Facebook may just be the engine that drives school change around technology. The numbers right now are pretty compelling. Six hundred thousand new users PER DAY, and fully three-quarters of the 175 million users are over 25. In fact, the fastest growing segment is women over 55. Whoda thunk that? I read that as a whole lot of parents and teachers are dipping their toes in the pool and at least beginning to come to terms with social networks. Whether they can see the potentials for learning is another discussion. But I can’t help but think this conversation for reform which includes teaching kids how to learn in networked publics and online communities will be given a boost by their participation.” (Feb. 14, 2009)
And yes, social networking is even beginning to find its niche in the elementary school system...

Take a look at how these two schools are using Facebook to keep parents and students abreast of the latest happenings. Notice how professional, factual and unbiased the posts are. Both sites, in my opinion, are representative of the kinds of information one would find in a school newsletter.

JJPS Elementary School

Woodbridge Elementary School PTA

Darren Alff, author of SocialMediaSchools (a site aimed at helping school administrators with the integration of Internet and social media technologies into the public and private school systems as a means of communicating with, educating and inspiring their local communities) isn't shy when sharing his thoughts about social networking in the school system, "It's a no brainer! Of course your school should be using social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr to keep in touch and communicate with the people in your “tribe”. Social media sites such as these are a great tool for school officials to have. The tools are free, easy to use, can be run by a single person within your organization, and best of all - your parents, teachers and students are already using these services." (Alff, June 10, 2009)

He goes on to predict that "we will see hundreds, if not thousands, of schools take to social media websites like Facebook and Twitter as a means of communication between school administrators and the people in their immediate locale (i.e. parents, teachers, etc.)." He suggests that "the private schools will probably take to social media first, as they are smaller, filled with less bureaucracy, and can move a whole lot faster than the larger public institutions" followed by public schools "playing a nasty game of catchup." Alff argues that school districts must see the value of social networking as a communication tool first and then move towards using them as an educational tool in the classrooms. His final point is this, "but before any of that can happen, at least on a larger scale, the first step is going to be getting school administrators well versed when it comes to using these new online tools as a means for feedback, support and communication." (Alff, June 10, 2009)

In a Time Dispatch article, Shawn Smith, an assistant director for community relations for the Chesterfield school system, demonstrates how this very thing is happening his county. Smith describes how "it's important for the school system to go online where people obtain their news" explaining the move to establish both Twitter and Facebooks accounts for their district.

"The school system's presence on the social-networking sites comes as it has launched a redesigned Web site. One goal in redesigning the Web site was to make it easier for people to find information and to promote students' accomplishments. The school system will use the sites to improve communication between parents and schools and correct any misinformation that may be out there." (Smith, July 2009) Even the Superintendent, Marcus J. Newsome, will have a Twitter account, in addition to a blog on school topics. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that many district administrators will be watching Dr. Newsome's lead.
Planet Connect ... A Social Network Making a Difference

A green Facebook site for teens! Planet Connect "is a place where students who want to learn more about environmental issues will find a wealth of teen-friendly information, as well as information about environmental clubs and activities around the country. They can also create profiles, "friend" each other, and post articles of interest and create groups—all while sharing their concerns about pollution, climate change, and biodiversity."

Cousteau, a NEEF board member and founder of EarthEcho.org, which aims to restore and protect our oceans, says “More than five million American teens are already using social networking sites, giving them a place to interact constructively while working toward real solutions to environmental problems and getting ideas for school and careers.” (School Library Journal, 3/11/2009)

Social Networking in the Library

Mathews promotes that "social networking websites provide new and exciting opportunities for libraries to interact with patrons" and suggests that "libraries need to reexamine their roles and identities, and to rethink strategies toward remaining visible and valuable to users."

Mathew suggests using social network in today's library to:

• Gain the attention of our students by "entering the social sphere of these younger patrons and to present a modern image"

• Highlight the "character and uniqueness" of what your library has to offer

• Gain insight to users needs and perceptions

• Promote resources

• Promote special events

• Stay connected with parents and students

• Educate by providing information (ie. online safety tips)

Privacy Concerns

The authors of "7 Things You Should Know About Facebook" points out that “concerns about facebook center on it being public even though it feels like a private forum.” I can understand how users believe this ... adults and teens alike. The process of having to be invited in as a "friend" creates a sense of privacy and safety; but I wonder how many users actually take the time the "privacy" literature within the site and user agreements? The authors of this article go on to point out, “the number of connections you have is sometimes considered a measure of personal popularity, and the desire to have a cool profile and large groups of friends tempts users to post information or photos that in other contexts they would keep private, such as embarrassing pictures.” Although some students understand how and
when to separate private from public content, many lack the discretion to present themselves –and others – online.” Haven’t we all heard of these horror stories? “Questions of libel and copyright come into play when users post content created by others or comments about other people. Internet caching exacerbates this problem, making Web content available even after it has been changed or removed from a Web site.”

**So what role do we play as educators?**

Divalatte suggests we “have to teach our kids how to ethically move in this fluid informational environment. You can’t lock up information in a glass case – remove the books from the shelves – or cover their eyes so they can’t peek. With technology our kids have access to everything, every day, every minute. We have to teach our kids to police themselves, to be smart, and to make decisions with integrity.” Zmuda & Harada point out “digital footprints exist and are real, and we must ensure that students understand that point. Teens don’t often understand is that posting something for the world to see on the Web can impact not only today; future employers will use these sites to find information during recruitment.” (Librarians as Learning Specialists: Meeting the Learning Imperative for the 21st Century, 2008)

“In short, library media specialists can no longer be the gatekeepers to information. The ethical imperative is to teach children how to be their own gatekeepers” (Warlick 2007)

**The Dark Side of Social Networking**

Unfortunately, risks are a reality and keeping today’s youth safe is critical. North Carolina's Attorney General Roy Cooper, says, “Specific reforms have been advocated by our coalition—age and identity verification, and parental permission—that all the social networking sites should adopt immediately,” Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal warns us by saying “Convicted sex offenders with profiles on MySpace have been arrested in Connecticut and other states for violating their parole and probation. Systemic change to stop the profiles and protect children is absolutely necessary.”

Alarm bells ringing yet? ... consider this: Cooper adds, “Social networking sites are the new playground for predators and since July, MySpace has uncovered more than 29,000 registered sex offenders on its site, four times more than its original estimate. That number includes just the predators who signed up using their real names.” (School Library Journal, 8/23/2007)

In Nancy Courtney’s book, Library 2.0, (2008)Mathews identifies the risks of social networking as: online predators “although privacy controls are becoming more sophisticated, assurance of authenticity will continue to be a problem”; spyware and viruses "through embedded links within profiles"; identity theft and stalking "users tend naively to disclose private and intimate details of their lives, assuming the audience consists exclusively of friends."; cyber bullying "users can hide behind anonymity"; invasion of privacy "police and school administrators have also reportedly used social websites to track underage drinking, drug use, and other dubious behaviour"; addiction "giving rise to the concern that users are replacing real-life experiences with a virtual substitute" (p. 80,81)
Another Option? What about a Ning?

Ning meaning "peace" in Chinese is social network that enables people to create their own social networks "around specific interests with their own visual design, choice of features and member data." (Wikipedia, 2009). Nings allow for a controlled membership that focuses on specific theme or area of interest.

I have recently joined two Teacher Librarian Nings. I believe both will provide much needed discussions and support as a new Teacher Librarian.

http://teacherlibrarian.ning.com/

http://albertaschoollibraries.ning.com/

I haven’t joined this one but intriguing is that Ning in Education offers 955 replies to "introduce yourself and tell us how you are using Nings in Education".

My Experiences ...

I rejoined the world of Facebook for the purposes of the course. Ironically, I had inadvertently created an account a few years ago when my tech savvy student teacher sent me an email inviting me to be her friend. I thought to myself, “Well of course I want to be your friend, why do you ask?” Having no idea what Facebook was (I know hard to believe; but nevertheless true) I followed the link ... I accepted, entered my name, and created a password. But then what? Well in my case – nothing! My profile sat untouched until just a few weeks ago. Now somewhere in between my initial registration and the beginning of this course, I did come to discover what Facebook was. I listened at work while others chatted about it and I watched over the shoulders of my own kids while they navigated the site ... but I didn’t jump in until now.

It’s been a pleasant experience. I am catching up with people I haven’t talked to in a long time and I enjoy knowing what is new in their lives and perusing their walls. Truthfully, I haven’t yet dabbled into available features like “starting an interest group” or “taking a quiz.” For now I am quite content posting comments and adding occasional responses. There are days where I don’t feel like I have much to share; I think to myself, “What can I say that I haven’t already said? (i.e. do I dare post “busy doing homework again”?) ... I long to have new and interesting adventures to share ... “discovered a new lake on a hike today ... river rafting ... off to Vegas” ... but alas it’s not my reality ... I really am busy doing homework again!” My inquiries into the world of social networking made me wonder ... how were my children and their friends using it? I asked nine teens in my neighbourhood the following questions ...

How long have you been on face book?

How often do you go on facebook?

What features do you use the most?

Is it important to have lots of friends? How many friends do you have?
Do you join groups? How many groups?

Has anyone ever posted anything about you that made you mad or uncomfortable?

Are any of your teachers on your friends list?

Far from scientific, here is what I discovered:

• Facebook has replaced MSN messaging

• They all use the private messaging (rather than the "wall") option to talk to one another

• They all posted pictures (lots of pictures)

• They felt the number of friends they had wasn't important and yet they each had hundreds of friends

• The games, quizzes, status features were a big draw.

• They are accessing Facebook from their ipods, iphones, PSP's (leading me to believe that they weren't completely truthful when admitting how many times a day they access it... I did get the feeling that they thought there was a “correct answer”)

• Not one of the kids asked had any of their teachers as a friend.

• They all felt safe and all but one hadn't felt anything inappropriate had been posted about themselves.

Note: Despite many attempts ... I am unable to attach the word document/pdf file of the actual survey and it's results :( 

A social networking site, such as Facebook, permitted me “snapshots” into the personal lives of my fellow classmates; and I do believe that getting to know them in and out of the academic arena allowed for stronger connections and enhanced relationships. We have become a community of learners.

A Final Thought ...

Danah Boyd, who recently completed her PhD at the University of California (Berkeley) in how American teenagers socialize in networked publics like MySpace, Facebook, LiveJournal, Xanga and YouTube, says "Social media is here to stay, and it's increasingly a part of everyday life. Educators have an important role to play in shaping how young people understand and interpret life around them. It would be tremendously valuable if educators would learn how these systems work and help young people engage with a world that is shaped by these systems. Librarians are trying to help young people understand the world around them. If they recognize the ways in which new social media extends old practices, they can help provide guidance in a meaningful way. An educator's role is fundamentally about helping people build roots and grow wings. Understanding the relationship between new media and old media is critical. Putting sociotechnical changes in context is what librarians do best." (School Library Journal, 3/25/2009)
Am I really the “Grinch” of Twitter?! Is Twitter the Web 2.0 tool that is going to enhance my life both personally and professionally? Quite honestly ... I am not convinced that it is. Granted, my experiences thus far have been short and limited; but my "toe dipping" experiences have yet to “hook” me in. The features of Facebook (the pictures; the conversations; the ability to write as much or as little as I want) are a much bigger draw and are more appealing. On Facebook it has been easy to connect with many friends of yesterday and today ... sadly, not the case on Twitter (just 7 followers ... thank you my Ed 501 friends!) but then ...

... this teacher librarian puzzled and puzzled till her puzzler was sore. Then she thought of something, she hadn't before! Maybe Twitter she thought, isn’t just about friends. Maybe Twitter ... perhaps... is about a little bit more!

**What is Twitter?**

Created in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Twitter is a micro-blogging site ("typically smaller in actual size and aggregate file size" than a blog. Wikipedia, 2009) that allows members to post and receive messages known as “tweets”. Tweets can be no longer than 140 characters long and can be sent privately to a member in your network (although not recommended by Mack Male, an Edmonton-based software developer) or openly to the public at large. “Twitter ranked as the third most used social network -based on their count of 6 million unique monthly visitors and 55 million monthly visits.” (Compete.com Feb. 2009). Presently, Twitter has 25 million registered users which is quite small in comparison to Facebook with 250 million registered users. (Mack Male, Aug. 2009). Creators of Twitter believe "simplicity has played an important role" in it's success. Conveniently accessible from your home computer, laptop, mobile phone or hand held device (i.e. iTouch) ... anywhere there is Internet access ... "tweeting is possible!"

As always CommonCraft’s "In Plain English" series provides an excellent introduction in the world of Twitter.

Twitter in Plain English

The following YouTube video from KMBCTV (a t.v. station in the U.S.) provides another good introduction and description of Twitter.

KMBCTV - Introducing Twitter
Do you Speak Twitter?

When first exposed to Twitter, I was confused by what seemed like just random letters in the posts I was reading. Thanks to Mack Male, I have now acquired a few key Twitter phrases and am better able to "crack the code". I have since learned that this new developing language is also being called "Twitterspeak".

"tweet" - a message 140 characters or less

"twoosh" - a message that is exactly 140 characters

"hashtag" - short abbreviation tags, created by users, to identify groups or locations (ie. starting a tweet with "YEG" represents Edmonton)

"retweet" - a vote for a good tweet ("rt" stands for you should read this)

"tweet up" - a "meet up" of Twitter users (i.e. an organized picnic or bbq).

Want to learn more “Twitterspeak”? Check out Pete Cashmore's blog, "Twitterspeak: 66 Twitter Terms" (Nov. 2008) After repeating each of the 66 terms you are sure to be twongue twied!

Twittering Teachers?

Laura Walker, Director of E-Learning at a UK Secondary School suggests nine reasons for educators to use Twitter. (For a full description of her nine reasons visit her blog @ Laura Walker, 2009)

1. **Together we’re better** - “Twitter can be like a virtual staffroom where teachers can access in seconds stream of links, ideas, opinions, and resources from a hand-picked selection of global professionals.”

2. **Global or local: you choose** – “With Twitter, educators can actively compare what’s happening on their continent with others on different continents. GPS-enabled devices and advanced web search facility allow searches that tell you what people are tweeting within a certain distance of a location, so if the other side of the world isn’t your bag, you can stick with your own patch.”

3. **Self-awareness and reflective practice** – “Excellent teachers reflect on what they are doing in their schools and look at what is going well in order to maintain and develop it, and what needs improvement in order to make it better. Teachers on Twitter share these reflections and both support and challenge each other.”

4. **Ideas workshop and sounding board** – “Twitter is a great medium for sharing ideas and getting instant feedback. You can gather a range of opinions and constructive criticism within minutes, which can help enormously, whether you are planning a learning experience, writing a policy, or putting a job application together.”
5. **Newsroom and innovation showcase** – “Twitter helps you stay up-to-date on news and current affairs, as well as on the latest developments in areas of interest like school leadership and technology.”

6. **Professional development and critical friends** - “One of the best things about training days is the break-out time between sessions, when teachers can get together to talk about what they are working on or struggling with. Twitter enables users to have that kind of powerful networking capacity with them all the time. It’s just a matter of finding the right people to follow.”

7. **Quality-assured searching** – “Trust the people you follow. Hone and develop the list of people whose insights you value. Once your Twitter network grows past a critical mass, you can ask them detailed questions and get higher-quality information back than a Google search would generally provide.”

8. **Communicate, communicate, communicate** – “Expressing yourself in 140 characters is a great discipline. You can become better at saying what needs to be said in my professional communications with less waffle and padding (even without txtspk).”

9. **Getting with the times has never been so easy!** – “Twitter is anything but complicated! You simply visit Twitter.com and create your account. A little light searching using key words for your areas of interest will soon yield a list of interesting people to follow. There are plenty of Web sites offering advice on getting started and how to avoid a few common beginners’ faux-pas. Your biggest challenge is likely to be getting the twitter.com unblocked on your school network if your main usage will be at school.”

What I notice right away about Laura’s first seven is that they are all reliant on making the right connections, following the right people. So how does one go about this?

"Tweet" I’m Following You!

In Meryl Evan’s blog "Find the Right People to Follow" she gives the following advice, "in order to get the most out of it (Twitter) and not be overwhelmed, it’s important that you follow those that are useful for your field or business, and not every single soul on Twitter.” (Apr. 2009)

**But how do you find the right people to follow?**

1. search.twitter.com - provides results every time a keyword is found in a tweet or profile information.

2. Twellow (self titled "the Twitter yellow pages) - searches bios, names and locations; but ignores tweets. This greatly reduces the number of results (which is a good thing). Twellow also categorizes people according to their bios. A good reminder to make sure your bio is explicit and detailed.

3. TweeterTags - allows you to add tags (based on your interests) to your Twitter ID. You can then click to see who else uses the same tags. However, this search will only find the people who have tags added to their profile.

4. Mr. Tweet - suggests people for you to follow based on your own Twitter usage.
5. Twubble - makes suggestions based on your current Twitter friends.

First I tried Twello ... my experience was somewhat disappointing, only 66 "K-12" hits and they weren’t all my definition of a K-12 educator (one was educating us about the vitamins she sold, another teaching about tarot cards etc). Perhaps I missed a key tip in better searching?

Next I tried TweeterTags ... again my experience was disappointing. I entered the tag "librarian" and received only 8 hits (3 of which seemed very inappropriate ... i.e. other tags in the profile included "nude" "erotic")

Then I checked my tweets and got this great advice, "go to twitter site and look at people you are following; who are they following?" And you know what .... it worked! Thanks Joanne :) By doing this I was able to find many teachers and teacher librarians to follow. Now when I open my Twitter account there are many more tweets that are personalized to my needs.

Oh the Places You’ll Go!

But are the tweets that recommend links really useful? I decided to follow the links suggested by my Twitter “friends” and here is where they took me ...

Joyce Valenza suggested Liz Strauss’ blog “What Three Tools Should Any New Twitter User Adopt?” (Aug. 4, 2009) 40 contributors suggested their top three tools. Liz Strauss’ sums up the results beautifully, “the point is we all have our own way of looking at this social tool and our own way of using it. Kind of like the way we have our own way of making use of paper and pencil .... it’s all in the messages and connections that come through what you do with it.”

In need of some words of wisdom? This then led me to Liz Strauss’ blog “25 Words of Social Media Wisdom – Pass it On” (Aug. 5,2009). Here are four of the quotes that spoke to me ...

“Ever find yourself in situations where you’d like to contribute, but others monopolized the conversation? Social media levels the field giving voice to the voiceless.” Avil Beckford

“Social media gives voices to individuals marginalized and ignored by traditional media, enabling the world to hear these voices for the first time in history.” Glenda

“How to be Successful on Twitter ... Be human, Be humane, Be yourself, Be interesting, Be brief, Share, Laugh, Listen, Learn, Respect. That’s all you need.” Lorraine Ball

“A community that shares together, listens to each other, offers support and wisdom without expecting payment in return, between two, between many, numbers aren’t important.” ANDI

Kris Jacobson, a high school librarian, recommended "26 Places to Find Free Multimedia for your Blog" (Aug 4, 2009). Her blog discusses Creative Commons, something I have been interested in learning about and provides, as promised, 26 links to find free multimedia.
#followalibrarian ... ahhh! here's what I was looking for - a site where teacher librarians find one another.

So yes ... the recommendations have proven fruitful. Phew!

**Using Twitter in the Classroom or Library ...**

• To develop metacognition and critical thinking skills "As a tool for students or professional colleagues to compare thoughts about a topic, Twitter can be a viable platform for metacognition, forcing users to be brief and to the point—an important skill in thinking clearly and communicating effectively." (7 Things You Should Know About Twitter, July 2007)

• To post updates, news, announcements on Twitter allowing your community quick and timely access to information. One concern ... your public may become so reliant on this tool being the end all, that they stop paying attention to news distributed in other forms. This presents a lot of pressure for the webmaster to make sure that ALL news is posted ... no forgetting or falling behind!

• To stay abreast of the latest current events and news with your students. By selecting the right feeds, students could watch global events unfold. As always ... discussions of creditability and validity of feeds are essential!

• Used as communication forum amongst students. The 140 character limit "gives students direction rather than clog the discussion forums" (Twitter in the Classroom, Aug. 2007)

This YouTube video demonstrates how one highschool incorporates Twitter as a means of enabling all 40 students to participate in a conversation at once. A five minute, easy to watch, inspiring video.

**The Twitter Experiment**

This YouTube video demonstrates how students at Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis are also using Twitter to engage students

**Is Microblogging the new Blogging?**

According to Robb Sutton in his blog, Micro-blogging – Are Facebook and Twitter Replacing Personal Blogs? (July, 2009) , the answer is "yes". He predicts, “9 times out of 10, even Joe blogger is going to either start or convert to Twitter and Facebook for one simple reason ... ease of use.” He goes on to suggest, “we often see these blogs fall off the map as people realize that they can reach a larger audience with a more efficient platform to achieve the same goal. Micro-blogging can also be accomplished on the fly through the aid of a cellular device or mp3 player that makes providing instant information easier than fastening your seat belt.”

Sutton reassures us that all is not lost for bloggers. There is still a niche for bloggers:
Business Builders – “Business builders have a defined goal and the willingness to put in that extra work that creates a successful blog years down the road. These individuals will look to micro-blogging to compliment their blogs, but never replace them.”

Writers – “It is an outlet for their thoughts and they find pleasure in putting words on a page. Blogging has opened a whole new avenue for them as they continue to hone their skills as a writer and share their type with the world. For the writer, micro-blogging will never satisfy the itch to put down some serious content.”

Need more than 140 characters! – “These bloggers need to efficiently distribute much more content than micro-blogging is designed to publish.”

After participating in our e-class live session with Mack Male, Aug 2009, and hearing his opinions, I am convinced there IS a place for BOTH blogs and micro-blogs such as Twitter. As he said, "blogs allow for longer, more elaborate thoughts that can then be linked to Twitter and are archived for easy retrieval". In essence he is suggesting we take advantage of the best of both of tools. I was also intrigued by his suggestion that "social media sites are redefining what it means to be a website and that "RSS" and the interactiveness of the "comments" feature are essential in websites today."

Too Much Twitter?

Here is a YouTube video sure to make you smile ... suggesting it is possible to Twitter too much!

Twouble With Twitters

Final Thoughts ...

In hopes that I don’t sound like a broken record ... once again taking the time to explore and think deeply about each of the Web 2.0 tools allows for a transformation of thinking. Although I'm not completely convinced that it is the most essential tool in my Web 2.0 tool box; I'm not prepared to put it up on the shelf either. I see it's professional value. Although I like the personal nature of Facebook; I can now see first hand how Twitter can help me draw from the expertise and ideas of so many. As Mack Male pointed out, "social media can echo your beliefs or it can open your eyes to lots of different view points." (Aug. 2009)

So with the words of Dr. Suess resonating, “The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.” I will tweet on!

Post # 12

**RSS**

ATTENTION ALL EDUCATORS! RSS IS “THE ONE TECHNOLOGY YOU SHOULD START USING TODAY, RIGHT NOW, THIS MINUTE ... AND TOMORROW, YOU SHOULD TEACH YOUR STUDENTS TO USE IT.”
RSS an Indispensable Tool!

It is hard to believe that something I consider to be such an indispensable tool … has only been a part of my technology repertoire for the last six weeks! Prior to taking “EDES Web 2.0 for Librarians”, I hadn’t even heard the words “RSS aggregator” … and now here I am relying on it daily (well, let’s be honest I’m TRYING to follow Will Richardson’s advice to “build up a habit of checking to see what’s new on a daily basis.” p. 86) to help stay abreast of an inordinate amount of information available on line.

In their report, “Rightly Sore Subscribers: Where Libraries Are Going Wrong with RSS?” Blackburn & Walker clarifies the role of RSS in a Web 2.0 world, “RSS has been associated with a group of other information sharing technologies, especially social software like blogs, social networking sites, and wiki. However, unlike these other technologies, RSS does not produce new information; rather it creates a more efficient way to disseminate the information held in other places.” (From Brick and Click Libraries Symposium Proceedings, Nov. 2008)

To embrace, locate and digest the plethora of never ending information on the Internet; Will Richardson, author of Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms 2006, advocates that RSS is the one tool we as educators MUST embrace (and I would suggest he would expand this to include not just educators, but any one wanting to use the Internet to stay abreast of the latest news and research). My experiences thus far make it easy to agree. Knowing little about it, I chose to “jump in with both feet” and explore this tool by poking around with trial and error approach. Richardson’s words ring true … “Don’t be surprised if at first you think RSS is adding to your information overload instead of easing it … but you’ll begin to understand … why it will make you and your students smarter, more effective consumers of information.” (p. 77)

What is RSS?

According to “What is RSS? RSS Explained”, RSS short for “Really Simple Syndication” or “Rich Site Summary” is a “format for delivering regularly changing web content.” Rather than perusing each one of your favourite sites individually, a RSS aggregator or a “feed reader” brings the most recent feeds from all those sites to you! By “subscribing” to the sites the RSS aggregator collects the XML codes all in one convenient location making it easy to receive the latest posts and news from the sites you are interested in. RSS Explained points out that “once you have your Feed Reader, it is a matter of finding sites that syndicate content and adding their RSS feed to the list of feeds your Feed Reader checks. Many sites display a small icon with the acronyms RSS, XML, or RDF to let you know a feed is available.” I was surprised to learn that in the beginning (which is only a few years ago!), RSS readers were just used to collect the latest activity of syndicated blogs. Today, a variety of sources can be syndicated - blogs, wikis, podcasts, video, images, websites … etc. Impressively, Quentin D’Souza, demonstrates this shift in the following visual found in tis document 100+ 2.0 Tools for Educators:
Choosing an Aggregator

In his book, Will Richardson suggests using Bloglines because “you can access it from anywhere you have an Internet connection.” Further supporting this choice is Stephen Abrams, vice president of innovation, in his Dec. 2006 blog titled Bloglines. In this particular blog he refers to checking bookmarks as “sooooo last century!” and shares that he “follows 500 blogs in 15 mins twice a day!” He goes on to say that although there are other aggregators available but he was “too old and lazy to change (LOL).” (I wonder if he still feels this same way now that it is three years later? I also wonder if the number and types of feeds he follows has changed?

Although it was only three years ago, while both these men were publishing their thoughts, GoogleReader only had beta status (“testing allowing the software to undergo usability testing with users who provide feedback, so that any malfunctions users find in the software can be reported to the developers and fixed.” Wikipedia 2009). GoogleReader was not officially released until May 2007. As long as you have an account with Google you will be able to access Google Reader, (also a web based reader like Bloglines), from anywhere an Internet connection is available. There are MANY more aggregator programs to choose from as you can see from Stan Schroeder’s “The Ultimate RSS Toolbox” providing a list of 120+ RSS resources.

How Do They Compare?

I choose to compare Bloglines and Google Reader. Both programs offer similar features:

• Free and easy to download
• Web based applications
• Lists of most popular subscriptions
• Option to manually add subscriptions (by copying and pasting urls)
• Indication that new information is added
• Ability to organize subscriptions into folders
• Renaming and editing options
• Options for viewing (i.e. newest, oldest, auto)
• Easy and quick accessibility

My Choice of Aggregator Reader

I chose Google Reader as my RSS tool. Because I have a Google account and iGoogle is my Internet Explorer homepage; GoogleReader was an obvious choice. Conveniently located in the Google tool bar it
is quick and easy to access. As I scour the Internet in search of relevant, interesting sites (something I do a lot of lately!) I simply click on the on the feed symbol or icon of the sites I want to stay connected to and I am automatically taken to GoogleReader and prompted to subscribe. Any new posts from those sites are now all displayed all in one place. Through trial and error, I have realized that that if the RSS feed symbol is not available (or I can't find it), then I simply copy the URL and paste it in the “add a subscription box” in GoogleReader. If the site contains a XML feed it will then be added to my reader. When determining if a site has a syndicated feed look for the following symbols:

I am currently subscribing to many blogs, sites, news feeds. GoogleReader allows you to search and subscribe to topics that interest you. For example, using the keyword “Nanaimo” blog feeds and news feeds about my hometown are now being captured. It has already been a big hit with my family checking to see what's new. At this time, my subscriptions are stored in one of the following folders: “Children’s Books”, “Libraries Web 2.0” (originally I had Libraries and Web 2.0 but because there was so much overlap I needed to create a new folder titled, “Web 2.0 Libraries”) “Nanaimo”, “Ed 501 Students” & “Just for Fun”( recipes, style magazine etc). One of great features is that I can create new folders and add new subscriptions, based on my needs anytime. At this time, these categories are most relevant and useful. As I continue on my learning journey, I am certain I will want to maintain these categories but most likely add new ones.

Want a Visual to Get You Started?

Once again you can count on YouTube and TeacherTube for inspiration. This two minute YouTube video provides an excellent introduction in how to get started with GoogleReader:

Getting Started with Google Reader

Leah Stephenson has also created a thorough slideshare explaining how to sign up for Google Reader and access and utilize its features; but with the lens of how it can benefit administrators and educators:

What is RSS and Why Should I Care? - Information for K-12 Educators and Administrators

Tailor Your "Reader" to Suit You!

If your want your RSS tool to make your life easier and more productive, then you need to tailor it to do so. GoogleReader allows you to complete “News” “Blog” “Sites” “Images” “Video” searches. By entering keywords, Google reader will collect the syndicated sites with those keywords. Another way to find the right sites is by utilizing the expertise of others. By starting with suggestions from fellow educators, you are given a “road map” to find your way to those "must keep sites". (ie 100 Best Blogs for Future Librarians). The nice thing about a map is that there are often many different ways of reaching your final destination. Simply subscribing to each of the sites that someone else has recommended is an okay starting place; but then you need to be critical of which those sites are leading you to your destination. If a suggested site isn’t doing this, then “unsubscribe”. It’s as easy a click of a mouse. With so much information available on the Internet and coming to you via your reader, you need to be selective so that your time is spent most wisely.
When looking at the latest feeds in my reader, I personally prefer to have the “list” option activated. This shows me only the title and the first sentence from each site. From here I can easily open any sites that catch my attention. (This has certainly made it clear to me the importance of clearly defined title!) Richardson reassures us that with practice, we will develop our skills in scanning and spotting the most relevant information as we examine the newest information picked up by our reader.

Using RSS Feeds in Schools and Libraries

Sharing my excitement and what I have learned about the usefulness of RSS feed with my staff will be easy and is certainly on my “to do” list in the fall. But what about my students? Richardson advocates that teaching our students how to utilize an aggregator reader is a must. “Given the fact that amount of information going online shows no sign of slowing, if they (students) are unable to consistently collect potentially relevant information for their lives and careers and quickly discern what of that information is most useful, they will be at a disadvantage.” p.77)

Some possibilities of how an aggregator feed can be used in the school or library setting might be:

If your students are already communicating and demonstrating their learning with blogs; rather than opening each student’s blog individually, an aggregator will collect their work in your reader so it easy to read and mark their work all in one place. By clicking on any one of the student's posts, you can open their blog and comment on their work.

By having students each open their own RSS accounts, they can subscribe to well respected news feeds like CNN or Global to keep up with current events and news feeds. Using the built in search options, students can collect the lastest feeds about any topic they are studying. Today I stumbled across Google Alerts. At first examination, it appears to be an easy and effecient way of doing this.

As a new teacher librarian, setting up feeds searching for news of favourite authors, book reviews and releases will be invaluable. I can imagine I will encourage my students to do the same thing to stay in touch with their favourite authors.

So How Does RSS Contribute to Professional Development?

"Great teachers help create great students. In fact, research shows that an inspiring and informed teacher is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement, so it is critical to pay close attention to how we train and support both new and experienced educators." (Edutopia, March 2008)

Truly, the beautiful thing about RSS is not only does it bring the most up to date current information from the Internet to you; it enables you to then share it with others. The article, Google Reader's Social Evolution (July 2009), describes the evolution GoogleReader has gone through in determining the best way of sharing. Ultimately, "FriendFeed, a service that helps you share and discuss interesting web pages, solved Google Reader’s problems without complicating the interface. If your FriendFeed page is public, all your actions are visible to your subscribers. When you "like" an item, you automatically share it and you can also add a note."
One school using blogging as a professional development tool, definitely worthy of mentioning, is Arapahoe Highschool. Karl Fisch, the webmaster of his staff’s blog “The Fischbowl: Teachers Exploring Constructivism and 21st Century Learning Skills”, shares the thought and learning of both staff and students at his school. Along the right hand side of the blog are links to staff, class and individual student blogs. A truly all inclusive, amazing site!

Fisch points out that personal learning networks have existed for a long time but what is new “is the reach and extent that is now possible with technology and global interconnectedness providing the opportunity for a much wider, richer and more diverse personal learning network than ever before.” (Feb. 2008)

On a more recent blog he shares his thoughts about this profound idea (he points out that this isn’t a completely developed idea yet)... 

“Who you know is what you know”

“If you have a well-developed, well-nurtured learning network, and you have the access and the skills necessary to utilize it, then you “know” more than someone who does not. You truly have the ability for “just in time” learning. You can reach out to your personal learning network with a question, with something you want to know more about, and they can help you learn about it. Even if someone in your network isn’t an “expert” on the topic, more than likely someone in your network knows someone who is.” (July 2009) This quote speaks VOLUMES when reflecting on the learning I have done WITH my fellow EDES 501 classmates!

In his blog, “Education With Technology (Nov. 2006)” Tuttle speaks from experience suggesting a number of valid reasons to use a blog in a professional development session. (Ummmm ....they seem particularly similar to our experiences in Ed 501!) He lists the advantages as:

•Honors each person’s thinking and ideas
•No one dominates the conversation.
•People make thoughtful insightful statements since they have time to reflect.
•People can read all the comments of the other people and then make general or specific reaction comments.
•Often when a person writes a very insightful statements, others become aware of being more insightful.
•Blog “conversations” are on topic.
•Initial blogs serve an assessment of the participants’ level of knowledge about the topic.
Monitor understandings and misconceptions “Are they seeing the “big picture” of the professional development? Can they apply it?”

My Five “Top Picks” I Subscribe to Using RSS for Professional Development:

At the beginning of the course we were asked to subscribe to five professional blogs to stay abreast of the latest research. My initial five have since changed and to be truly honest, my first five were really just guesses. Having spent a lot of time reading and listening to the 'voices' of many leaders in the Web 2.0 world, I am selecting the following sites as my "top picks" to guide me professionally. As you can well imagine, it is not easy to select just five!

Will Richardson, Weblogg-ed. The author of our required reading and a public educator for twenty two years, I appreciate how he uses his "voice" as a forum for discussions about Web 2.0 in classrooms. His posts are relatively short and to the point, he definitely seek responses and conversation with his readers.

Joyce Valenza’s Neverending Search. Referred to as the "Information Goddess" by her daughter :) Joyce is definitely the most referenced "voice" during our class discussions! I am constantly amazed by the amount of new information and cool tools she herself uses and shares.

David Warklick’s 2CentsWorth. A "voice" that is cited OFTEN in many of the blogs and articles I read. He shares, “It is a conversation. I blog to learn. I do not promise answers here. I will ask far more questions.”

Jenny Levine’s The Shifted Librarian. She shares "To my mind, the biggest difference is that they expect information to come to them, whether it's via the Web, email, cell phone, online chat, whatever. And given the tip of the iceberg of technology we're seeing, it's going to have a big impact on how they expect to receive library services, which means librarians have to start adjusting now. I call that adjustment "shifting" because I think you have to start meeting these kids' information needs in their world, not yours. The library has to become more portable or "shifted."

Judy O’Connell’s Hey Jude. She shares "As an educator and information professional I am fascinated by emerging technologies, innovation with Web 2.0, and what this all means for schools and school libraries."

Final Thoughts

Although I am uncovering the true power of RSS feeds, I am still in that “experiment and play” stage of learning. When scroll through Quentin De’Souza's 50 pages document "Web 2.0 Ideas for Educators: A Guide to RSS and More" it is crystal clear how much I have yet to discover. I am pleased to admit that I am becoming a better “scanner” of material to find and locate the information that is most important to me, a skill making me a "more effective consumer of information" (Richardson, 2006). RSS is something I will continue to develop and tailor to become the “must have” tool in my Web 2.0 toolkit. Right now, I know I am subscribing to too many syndicated sites; but that is okay. Knowing my goal is to eventually have a collection of sites most pertinent to my professional and personal needs, I will “weed out” the
ones that don’t “fit”. Building in the time to check recent posts has been easy. I am already accustomed to checking my emails each morning so now I check Google reader at the same time. Although I’m not ready yet ... sharing my RSS feeds with colleagues lies in my future. Inspiration to endure comes from Blackman and Walker, "As libraries continue to develop RSS services they will need to keep end user needs and internet trends in mind. Since libraries are currently a large disseminator of RSS knowledge they have the potential to lead the way for all RSS users." (Rightly Sore Subscribers: Where Libraries Are Going Wrong with RSS Nov. 2008)

**Post # 13**

**Final Reflections – Where Next?**

"One may walk over the highest mountain one step at a time”

~ John Wanamaker ~

and as the image suggests

... hopefully not alone

**READY OR NOT!**

In his book, "Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for the Classroom", Will Richardson points out that the future of Web 2.0 (or Read/Write Web) technologies in our classrooms will be "defined by two unstoppable trends":

First, there are already more than 10 billion pages on the Web, and that number is only going to increase as the Internet "explodes as the most comprehensive source of information in history." (p.125). One can't not argue with Richardson's claim, "There's no doubt that the ability of our teachers and students to use that knowledge effectively is of the highest importance."

Secondly, more and more the content that is being created has collaborative tools built in. Richardson points out that the "painfully clear" disconnect between a traditional educational system (where by in large, students are asked to work independently and for a very small audience, often just the teacher) and the expectations of post education where "the odds are pretty good that they will be asked to work with others collaboratively to create content for diverse and wide-ranging audiences".

The good news? "teachers are employing Weblogs and wikis ... and transforming the curriculum allowing learning to continue long after the class ends ... the walls of the classroom are literally made irrelevant by the creation of communities of learners that span oceans, races, genders, and generations."
DEFINING MYSELF AS AN EDUCATOR

I do know I am eager to embrace Web 2.0 tools as I step into my new position as the Teacher-Librarian, Literacy Lead (and potentially Tech support) of my K-7 elementary school. I do know these things to be true ... I am "committed to doing my best", "passionate about providing my students with an excellent education" and a "believer of lifelong learning".

But is it enough? Along with knowing these things about myself ... I also know I bring along a few good ol' insecurities, "Do I understand the uses and potential of these tools well enough to actually implement them and convince others of their value?" , "Do I possess the skills and knowledge to be an effective leader in the areas of literacy and technology?" and "Will my "voice" be loud enough (in my school community) that others will "listen"?"

According to Evans and Ward, authors of "Leadership Basics for Librarians and Informational Professionals", I am considered part of "Generation X" (born between 1965 and 1979). They claim that Generation X'ers "tend to be very self confident, individualistic, and self-reliant ... they tend to focus on relationships and outcomes rather than on process and organizational structure ... their leadership style tends to be inclusive, collaborative and empowering ... they work hard for a vision to which they are committed ... they embrace change and are reasonably comfortable with uncertainty." (p. 61,62) Okay, well that's fairly optimistic and not far from the mark; but what can take from this that will help me reach my goal?

Well, first I need to move forward with confidence. Although not complete (can it ever be?) I do now have a solid foundation of Web 2.0 tools and classroom/library implications. I have access 24/7 to the expertise of fellow teachers, librarians and researchers via the world wide web. (and thanks to RSS - they are all gathered in one place. I can almost hear them calling out, "how can we help ... what do you need more information about?") I have Will Richardson's book, "Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and other Powerful Web Tools for the Classroom", and Nancy Courtney's book "library 2.0 and Beyond: Innovative Technologies and Tomorrow's User" to read and reread. (I read somewhere that reading something a second time actually doubles your comprehension ... sorry can't site it ... I don't remember where I read it ... drats!) and I have my mentors at the University of Alberta who in a real pinch, are just an email away (I promise ... not too often!)

Secondly, with this quote in mind ... "a life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing." (George Bernard Shaw) I can take comfort in knowing it's okay to move forward and make mistakes. As long as I come from a genuine place of trying my best; then others will be forgiving and nudge me forward. This course has helped me see the wisdom of Chris Dede, of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard, "Teachers who use interactive media professionally will find they rapidly develop learning styles and strengths similar to those of their students." (Thatcher, 2005)

Thirdly, collaboration. "If I have seen further than others, it by standing upon the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton) It will be by listening and talking with both colleagues and students about their needs, that I will take my lead.
INSPIRED BY THESE WORDS ABOUT LEADERSHIP

"Leadership is about forging new directions, about harnessing change. We must consistently question and seek new answers for changing environments. The great Helen Keller was once asked: "What would be worse than to be blind?" And she replied, "To be born with sight and have no vision." (Spence, "Leading with Passion and Purpose: Creating Schools that Help Teachers Teach and Students Learn", 2009)

After studying "models of adult learning" and the "ways that teachers are successful at improving their practice," in his blog titled "Professional Development: My Way, Every Day!" Mike Curtin identifies the following "core qualities" for good professional development experiences: (Connecting the Dots: Looking Out My Window at the World of Educational Technology, 2007)

• "They are sustained, occurring over weeks, months or even years."

• "They are gradual and incremental, involving a lot of short but connected steps with moments of reflection and integration in between."

• "They are collaborative, involving questions, support, and conversations with other teachers in similar situations."

• "They directly meet the teacher's needs, offering solutions to real problems in our every day experience in the classroom."

• "Over time, they change the way we see the world and therefore what we do with students each day in the classroom."

WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF MY DIGITAL NATIVES?

Evans and Ward, authors of "Leadership Basics for Librarians and Informational Professionals" refer to our students (those born after 1980) as "Generation Y" or the "Millennium Generation. They are individuals that grew up with the World Wide Web. This generation, "are more adept at multitasking - talking on their cell phones while doing something else or listening to music off the Internet while working on the computer." They go on to point out, "change, and rapid change at that, is a part of their lifestyle; if nothing else it is part of their technology-based approach to life." (p.62) In 2005, The National Educational Technology Plan argued "Today's students, of almost any age, are far ahead of their teachers in computer literacy." Equipped with my newly acquired knowledge of Web 2.0 I'm ready to give them run for their money! Have I some tools to share with them!

The following is a video on YouTube written and produced by B. Nesbitt. This video resonates with me every time I watch it. If I believe that my job is to "provide my students with an excellent education" then how can I not "engage them".
A VISION OF K-12 STUDENTS TODAY

What about new literacies? Although being able to read and write are still central to learning, "they are no longer enough to endure understanding." (Richardson, 2006) With the "explosion of information and online technologies " a new, more complex definition is needed. Richardson suggests this definition of new literacy include: "to be editors as well as readers"; "active consumers of information instead of just passively accepting it as legitimate"; "literate in the ways of publishing"; "ability to work closely with others in virtual environments"; collect, store, and retrieve relevant information". (Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms 2006)

"We teach in a time of rapid change, when, for the first time in history, we cannot clearly describe the future for which we are preparing our children. This is one reason why learning has become a critical part of what it is to teach." (David Warlick, Dec. 2008)

HOW WILL I SUPPORT THE DIGITAL IMMIGRANTS ON STAFF?

At my school, technology has been stagnant for a very long time. About eight years ago we had a tech savvy teacher that kept us moving forward; we even applied and received a grant that gave us money to learn how to create web pages. It was great. But then that teacher transferred to a different school, the school district changed how the web pages would be managed (erasing them all) and nothing much has happened. It wasn’t that we as a staff haven’t wanted one ... but without someone to lead the way, nothing changed, and we simply talked of the “remember when...” days. Two years ago, I approached my administrator offering to create a school web page (something I really wanted to implement); but at that time our .043 (about an hour a week) technology position belonged to a different staff member and he felt that it was a conflict of interest for anyone else to do it. But that was then ... this is now. The position is no longer assigned to someone else. When leaving the school in June, my staff embraced the idea of me taking this course and bringing back what I have learned. (Let's hope they haven't forgotten this!) One final encouraging thought ... Upon returning in September, our computer lab will have been updated with all new (well new to us ... they were purchased through a special program) Pentium 4 computers. Yippee!

I believe philosophically that it is important to understand the "why" before knowing the "how". Before sharing the various tools and their uses, I think it is important to share "why" we should or need to embrace Web 2.0. With the World Wide Web here to stay; what are the big shifts in learning that my teachers need to be aware of?

Richardson identifies ten ...

1. Open Content. No longer are our students limited to the content provided by teachers, textbooks and the library. Internet access provides today's students with "staggering" amounts of content. Our classrooms are moving towards "open-source-type classrooms in which everyone contributes to the curriculum."
2. Many, Many Teachers, and 24/7 Learning. Web 2.0 (the Read/Write Web) gives us access to all kinds of professionals as well as "the ability to interact with content when it's most convenient to do so meaning that learning can take place anytime we're ready for it."

3. The Social, Collaborative Construction of Meaningful Knowledge. Traditionally, students have produced work independently and for a very narrow audience. Web 2.0 enables students (and teachers) to work collaboratively and produce work for a large audience. It changes the outcome from "finished" to "something to be added to and redefined by those outside the classroom who may interact with it."

4. Teaching is Conversation, Not Lecture. By publishing on the World Wide Web students are "learning that their voices matter" and "their ideas count". "By inviting students to become active participants in the design of their own learning, we teach them how to be active participants in their lives and future careers."

5. Know "Where" Learning. Gone are the days of having to memorize all the facts and statistics. With the Internet so accessible, those numbers are easily retrieved. What is important is "knowing where to find it ... and "being able to identify which of the sources are worthy of our attention."

6. Readers are No Longer Just Readers. When reading what is published on the web, we can not assume that it has been "reviewed by someone else with an eye toward truth and accuracy." Readers must now "discern good information from bad" and be able to "engage those sources as writers, in debate and discussion as one way of assessing their worth."

7. The Web as Notebook. In lieu of pencil and paper, ideas can now be captured digitally. "Many educators see the Web as the perfect home for electronic learner portfolios."

8. Writing is No Longer Limited to Text. "We are moving towards "a totally new definition" of writing. "It is hard to deny that more and more we have become a multimedia society." We are now "telling" our stories with text, images, video and audio.

9. Mastery is the Product, Not the Test. It isn't just about a test score. Students can "display mastery in countless ways that involve the creation of digital content for large audiences".

10. Contribution, Not Completion, as the Ultimate Goal. Students and teachers can now contribute to a world wide conversation "potentially used to teach others."

How will we as teachers need to respond to these shifts? Richards advocates that teachers need to:

• "See themselves as connectors, not only of content, but of people ... it will be imperative for educators to model strategies to not only find worthwhile and relevant content ... and be willing and able to find and use these sources effectively."

• "Become content creators. To teach these technologies effectively ... they must learn to use them effectively."
"Become true collaborators. And not just with each other, but with their students as well ... to see themselves as learners along side their students as well ... we can't be effective if we don't tap into the work of others who are willing to contribute their ideas and content as well."

"Think of themselves more as coaches who model the skills that students need to be successful and motivate them to strive for excellence."

"Need to be change agents ... moving away from the more traditional paradigms of instruction on their own terms in their own ways and recruit others to follow suit."

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN SHARING WEB 2.0 TOOLS WITH STAFF

Although he doesn't answer the question - he poses a very important question ... Is it better to introduce each tool in isolation in relation to one another? Mike Curtain (inspired by David Warlick's post, "Tying it Together") suggests that "Maybe the 'focus on one tool at at time' approach is robbing teachers of the context they need to understand how these technologies support and reinforce one another and, taken as a group, represent a whole new communication paradigm." Is it possible that the answer be both?! Perhaps by introducing one a tool at a time, I can demonstrate how one or two of the other Web 2.0 tools further support the use of the first tool. For example, if introducing blogs, then showing them the power of social bookmarking and RSS to collect relevant blogs would make sense.

After studying "models of adult learning" and the "ways that teachers are successful at improving their practice," In his blog titled "Professional Development: My Way, Every Day!" Mike Curtin identifies the following "core qualities" for good professional development experiences: (Connecting the Dots: Looking Out My Window at the World of Educational Technology, 2007)

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"Over time, they change the way we see the world and therefore what we do with students each day in the classroom."

In a nutshell ... change takes time, practice and support!

Judy O'Connell "Hey Jude" graciously shares her fantastic slide share that would be amazing to share with a staff.
WHAT "FIRST STEPS" WILL I TAKE?

A school web page! I am currently investigating my district’s policies if must use a specific program or tool. In a recent email to my administrator I have asked him to acquire this information for me. I articulated what was most important to me was being able to upload information at my convenience (not send it to someone else and have them upload it for me). I believe that a school page HAS to be updated and current in order for it to be useful. I also mentioned that I felt confident I could use a web based application like a blog or a wiki; but wanted his input first. Unfortuantely, he hasn't responded to the email yet.

Second, a library page. I am REALLY hopeful that the district will not block the use of a blog for a "Library Happenings" page. Having used a blog through the entirety of this course, it is that one tool that feels like an old friend. I am very excited that one of the paths our discussion question took this week was finding examples of how other teachers and librarians are utilizing blogging programs in their schools. Here are just a few I will turn to for inspiration:

- Grandview Elementary Library
- Mad River Elementary Library
- Mrs. Cassidy's Classroom Blog
- Mrs. Cassidy's Class Webpage
- Mrs. Lictenwald's Blog
- Miss Dewhurst's Classroom Blog

and for inspiration of how wikis, podcasts, pictures, slideshows and widgets can be used with young children:

- Primary Web 2.0
  (again created by the amazing Mrs. Cassidy)

and for older children:

- Elementaryweb2

Thirdly, I am excited to expand on the use of my "Podbean" page. I will use this page as a 'parking lot' for all the podcasts we create as a school. Here older students will be able to record favourite stories for
younger ones to listen to. Younger students will be able to practice developing the fluency of their reading and then record it. Educational assistants and teachers will be able to use it to record novels or text books aloud for our students that struggle with reading.

Fourth, Social bookmarking and RSS … a must share with staff.

Fifth, "playing" with Animoto. I have just received my "free" membership that allows full access and the ability to set up student accounts.

Sixth, (and I know that is sounds like a lot) but I'm so inspired by the way I am seeing teachers use wikis in the websites listed above. This is something I will try with just one class to really get my feet wet.

FINAL THOUGHTS …

"A man walking along the beach notices a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean. He approaches the boy and asks, "What are you doing?" The boy replies: "Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die." The man looks at the boy and says: "Don't you realize that there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't possibly make a difference." After listening politely, the boy bends down and picks up another starfish, and throws it back into the surf. Then smiling at the man, he says, "I made a difference for that one." ~ Author Unknown (retrieved from "Leading with Passion and Purpose: Creating Schools That Help Teachers Teach and Students Learn, 2009)

Post # 14

Reflections

When I realized that a continuing Teacher-Librarian position was coming available in my school, I was elated. Without hesitation I knew the job was meant for me. I have always loved books and literacy, both professionally and personally … and as anyone of my students can attest to: my three favourite things are “my kids” (both at home and at school) “books” and … well of course “chocolate!” I have been in the classroom for twenty years and have loved every minute of it … but I also had an itch for change. Ahhh … the library, my new place to call home. [happy sigh]

So off to the University of Alberta (highly recommended by two trusted colleagues) to acquire the knowledge and skills to become a great librarian. But wait a course about Web 2. what? A librarian computer course? Really? This truly is how naive I was. Onward I forged. Even familiarizing myself with e-class seemed like a daunting and overwhelming task. It was all so new to me. I recall that first night … I had posted my introduction (twice … the first one lost due to being timed out) and went about getting ready for bed. Something was nagging me … “I think I have missed something?” Better go back and check the computer one more time … Due: “introduce yourself to conference” and “post introductory blog post” … “Could these be two different things?” I wondered. A little more exploring … and then I found them - everyone’s first blog posts! It was 10:00 at night and I didn’t realize it at that time; but what I had almost missed, was the most integral tool of the course.
Pleading for my concerned family to just walk away, I ventured into the world of creating my very first blog. 4:00 am later that morning ... posted! Relief! I had officially jumped into what is known as the World of Web 2.0. But as I reflected in my first post, I was still that little girl in the class, cautiously raising her hand and asking, “What are we doing?” Those feelings of insecurity and confusion, although not a state I relished being in, deepened my appreciation of what so many of our students feel and go through.

It took a while to shake the insecurities. After all not only was I struggling to figure out the “recipe” for a writing successful blog, my attempts were publically posted for all my classmates, and potentially the world, to read. Yikes! But did it impact the motivation and effort I put in to each and every blog? Absolutely! After all, my writing, my “voice”, represents who I am and what I believe. Many respected educators agree. Will Richardson suggests that blogging with our students, “offers students a chance to a) reflect on what they are writing and thinking as they write and think it, b) carry on writing about a topic over a sustained period of time, maybe a lifetime, and c) engage readers and audience in a sustained conversation that then leads to further writing and thinking.”

Well those humble beginnings were just the first step of many I was about to climb. It’s hard to truly conceptualize and articulate just how significant this transformation of learning has been. Not only in acquiring the skills and implications of Web 2.0 tools; but in developing and seeing myself as a academic learner. Was the course work intense? Yes! Was it a LOT of work? Yes! Was it one of the most stimulating and enriching professional experiences of my career? Absolutely! I have always been a self initiated learner and enjoyed staying current with the latest publications and research ... but not since getting my bachelor’s degree, have I done it in a formal learning arena. My personal learning community has generally been a few people on staff; not a group of similar minded committed colleagues from across the country! Reading, analyzing, discussing, questioning and sharing with these people, has without a doubt, deepened and broadened my learning.

Taking this course opened my eyes to a world, that quite honestly, I had never considered. As a member of the Web 1.0 community, I humbly admit I thought I was fairly tech savvy ... LOL! I wasn’t even aware of Web 2.0 and the disconnect I had with the needs of my 21st Century learners. David Warlick shares, “Little as we know about the future for which we are preparing our students, it is clear that it will be a place that is governed by information. Accessing, processing, building with, and communicating that information is how we will all make our livings. Being literate in this future will certainly involve the ability to read, write, and do basic math. However, the concept of literacy in the 21st century will be far richer and more comprehensive than the 3 Rs of the one room school house, a legacy that still strongly influences today’s education environment.”

And convinced I am! My eyes have been opened and I’m professionally forever changed. Thanks to this course work, I am looking to new horizons to become an effective, current and relevant teacher and fellow colleague. David Warlick’s words inspire me to hold onto this vision, “There is a major shift that is critical to our classrooms, not only in WHAT we teach our students, but also HOW we teach our students.” I am ready to embrace my new role as Teacher Librarian with new found confidence and understanding.
What are the key factors that have helped me along on this journey? Well were many; but I think most importantly 1) Finding role models ... with so many “voices” on the Internet, it became clear early on, the importance of finding the “voices” of the experts. Through our discussions and blogs we turned to many ... Valenza, Abram, Richardson, Davis, Warlick ... to help guide the way. 2) Read ( and then read some more). In order to identify what’s most essential and the implications about any topic; one must first pull from many resources and then go through the process of putting all to pieces together to create personal meaning and value. 3) Collaborate ... the opportunity to engage in conversation, build upon the ideas of one another, go back and further investigate, and then engage in conversation again ... a professional learning treasure! 4) Thinking critically about how these tools will actually fit into the real world of day to day teaching with real students and staff. Having my school community in mind; grounded my decisions and guided my implications. 5) Persevere ... anything worthwhile is worth working hard for. 6) A little risk taking! Just JUMP in!

What skills am I taking away from this course? Well again, many! But most importantly: knowledge, leadership and a voice. I am ready to not only embrace Web 2.0 tools and apply them to my teaching; I am ready to lead and support my staff. Equipped with a new found confidence, I know I am returning this September with a strong foundation and the skills to start implementing change. Do I believe I will introduce and use all of the tools introduced in this course? ... YES. Not all at one time, but over time, yes. There are so many Web 2.0 tools available. I believe the areas we explored, were purposefully selected because of their value and usefulness in the education system. Will even more Web 2.0 tools come my way? I can count on it ... but the difference is I’ll be watching for them this time. To make sure I don’t lose sight of my vision, I have printed Joyce Valenza’s Manifesto for a 21st Century School Librarian. It begins with, “You know you are a 21st Century Librarian if ...” It is very satisfying to know that I can confidently "check off" so many now.

In terms of staff development, my intent is to spend some time first “playing” and “experimenting” with the students I work with. Coming to staff with some experience and successes to share, will ignite interest, and I believe will develop the validity of what I’m sharing. I plan to tap into the plethora of resources we have gathered during this course work and I am committed to continuing my own professional development. Staying attuned to my RSS feeds, continuing course work at the U of A, and following up on what we have started, will serve me well. My first order of business ... a school web page with a “library happenings” blog linked to it. Secondly, exploring the many potentials of a wiki. As Richardson recommends, I foresee using our school digital cameras and video camera to demonstrate how easy it is to use web based applications to create visually powerful messages. And of course RSS ... this one won’t take much convincing. Anything to make an already busy teacher’s life easier!

Personal Web 2.0 Highlights? There have been so many...

Learning how to backup photos on line; joining the YouTube community and actually posting my own video; creating my own podcast and developing a “parking lot” for future podcasts (having heard the frustrations of my classmates, I felt fortunate to have such success); exploring and creating a wiki (this one really shines as a must use right away!); learning the value of social bookmarking (diigo still my preference) and bringing it all together with GoogleReader. Having my RSS feeds visible on iGoogle
really does make it easy to peruse the latest posts on a daily basis. Truth be told, I am still more of an observer than contributor in the social networking world for now... but I’m okay with that. Participating in the on line conversation with Mack Male ... his insight – invaluable! And the crème de la crème of Web 2.0 tools ... blogging. My chosen tool to engage my students, parents and colleagues, in the Web 2.0 journey my elementary school is about to embark on. As I step into the role of Teacher Librarian for the first time, I now see my role embracing technology to engage and challenge the students I teach. Alan November suggests four skills necessary to be a lifelong learner: “critical thinking, global voice, managing massive amounts of information and building community.” That defines Web 2.0 - don’t you agree?

Final thoughts...

A sincere and genuine thank you to Joanne and my classmates for walking along side me on this journey. Through our discussion questions each week I feel that we really got to know one another and developed relationships. I’m not certain if our paths will cross again ... but I wish you all the very best and sincerely believe that your students are very lucky indeed! I leave you with this beautiful and inspirational Librarian Manifesto created by Laura Cohen.

Post 15

The Blogging Librarian

Fellow librarians ... are you considering using a blog as a means for communicating and engaging your community? Check out this terrific list outlining the essential features to consider when developing a blog. Credit goes to Donna Scott, writer for the "Online College" site. She begins her blog with these words ...

"As you prepare for a career as a librarian, you’re probably experimenting with all of the different ways you can reach out to your patrons and offer them cutting edge research assistance. Blogging is a valuable tool for cataloging library news, sharing research tips and book lists, and marketing your own library while highlighting special exhibits, new technology and special guests. If you want to start your own library blog, check out this list of 100 tips and tools."

Post 16

100 Terrific Tips and Tools for Blogging Librarians

Inquiry with Wonder Wheel

Looking to help your students search more effectively using Google? Google now offers a brilliant graphic search option called "Wonder Wheel". This tool will not only help students find the answers to their questions; it will trigger potential questions they hadn't considered. Start on Google's home page. Type in your topic (i.e. cats) and hit enter. Look up to the top left corner and you will see Web + "Show Options". Click on "show options". Down the left hand side you will see the words "Wonder Wheel". Click on it. A graphic organizer (web) will present itself. Click on any one of the "arms" of the web (i.e cat
behaviour) and a new, less expansive web will be displayed. If desired, click on one of the "arms" of the second web (i.e. cat scratching behaviour) an even narrower web will be created. Links matching your topic are displayed along the right hand side of the screen. This is certain to be considered a "gem" with my staff.