

*Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*, (2nd ed.) by W. Richardson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2009, 151 pp.)

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Integrating the teaching and learning tools available via the World Wide Web into our teaching may seem daunting to many of us, but in this very practical guide to web tools, Will Richardson makes it all seem quite "doable" for both classroom and continuing education instructors. The author's experience as a classroom teacher is evident as the reader is encouraged to try each web tool, thus experiencing the benefits for him or herself. Richardson further assists the reader in this endeavor by providing clear instructions on how to employ blogs, wikis, RSS, Twitter, Flickr, podcasts and live streaming for teaching and learning. Moreover, he contextualizes these instructions with discussions of the history of the web, the pedagogical notion of collaboration, and the present shifts to new literacies. Thus, the book provides both "how-to" guidance as well as "here's why" rationale.

The book is written for educators and, while the examples are taken from projects in K-12 classrooms, the content is also applicable to university and continuing education instructors. The author clearly states, however, "read this book for yourself first, your classroom second." This point is re-iterated in each chapter as readers are advised to experiment with web tools for the purpose of gaining hands-on experience. It is this experience that will build confidence, enthusiasm, and the on-line networking skills necessary for utilizing the web tools.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to a variety of web tools and offers a brief history lesson of the World Wide Web and the context for current practice with these tools. Here we learn that, while the web was at first a read-only medium that enabled learners to be consumers of information, it is now a read-write tool that enables learners to be both consumers and producers of information. The potential for learners to be contributors and collaborators in knowledge production via the web is the underpinning theme of this book and is what inspires Richardson's work. He concludes this first chapter with the theme of "keeping students safe," which applies primarily to the students in K-12. The message of "safety," however, is extrapolated to education in general as the author elaborates on the important role of teaching students ethical and critical assessment

of content. Teaching students to be effective and ethical in their knowledge searches and collaborative studies is an important part of the instructor's role.

One of seven web tools is featured in each subsequent chapter, beginning with the most simple, the blog, and ending with the more complex, the podcast and live streaming. Right from the start, Richardson writes as both coach and cheerleader, encouraging the reader to try the tool and get a feel for it. He explains each web tool as it is used in everyday networking and then provides examples of how it is used in teaching and learning situations. These examples demonstrate the tool's potential for collaborative learning among students, teachers, and subject experts. Each chapter provides details on how to set up the web tool and directs the reader to examples currently on the web, potential software options (free resources are often recommended) and sample pages of what will appear on the computer screen when the tools are being set up.

As a novice web tool user, both as a person and as an instructor, I find Richardson's book to be inspiring and useful. What inspired me are the frequent examples of new forms of networking and collaboration. For example, Richardson presents a class blog on the novel, *The secret life of bees*. While I anticipated learning through the students' blogging, I was inspired when the author of the novel, Sue Monk Kidd, was invited to respond to students' questions and make comments on their reflections. This additional level of connection demonstrates how the blog can increase access to an expert/author. These types of examples inspire the reader to think about many new possibilities as well as ground the reader with solid information about the utility of the tools. Of special interest to me as a researcher was the practicality of the RSS (Real Simple Syndication) tool. I tried this tool, following Richardson's instructions step by step. It was a straightforward process and I am slowly increasing my list of subscriptions to resource feeds of interest to me. The cautionary note is that, like any other form of information gathering, learning the keywords and accessing the right sources is sometimes a matter of trial and error. The next challenge will be to share this new learning tool with my students.

The final chapter, "What it all means" looks to the future as present-day students become professionals and as education moves out of the classroom and into networks for learning. Richardson addresses the new literacies of the read/write web and proposes ten big shifts in teaching and learning, including the following: open content, open access to many teachers and experts 24/7, collaborative construction of knowledge, teaching as conversation rather than lecture, and so forth. The prophetic nature of these propositions may seem extreme to some, but, given the rate of change in information technologies and social networking so

common among younger student cohorts, these proposals are more current than futuristic. What they require is that educators who use web tools will be called on to be connectors of content and people; content creators via effective use of web tools; collaborators with students and networks; coaches who model learning; and change agents who promote non-traditional learning.

I propose that educators in distance education are already attuned to non-traditional learning and are actively seeking the types of pedagogical tools presented in this book to enhance learning. For the educator who does not know their wiki from their podcast or their Twitter from their Flickr, this is a good book for learning about the world of web tools. Richardson provides clear explanations of these tools and directions for how to use them. He accomplishes this with an infectious enthusiasm that makes the reader want to take his advice and try it.

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