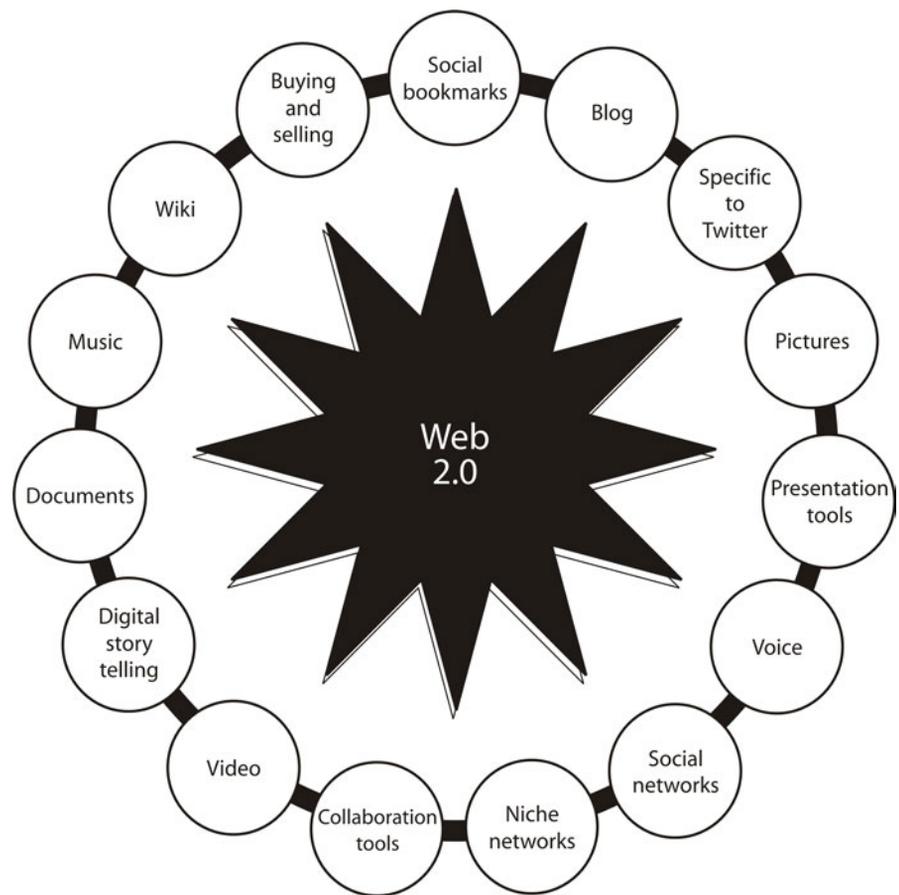


Exploring Web 2.0 Tools to Deepen Knowledge

by Kate Shields



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This graphic provides a structure for organizing and classifying the different tools that are exploding all over the world and are becoming part of the greater term *Web 2.0*. What makes tools such as YouTube (Video), Facebook (Social networks), Glogster (Presentation), and Flickr (Pictures) different from the first generation of websites is their ability to be interactive with the user. Generally, these tools will require a signup process and give you the opportunity to collaborate and share with other users. The other thing that makes these tools different from first-generation tools is that they are Web based. That means there is no downloading software to the machine being used, nor are these tools stored on a particular machine's hard drive; instead, they can be accessed through the Internet anytime anywhere.

There is no doubt that these tools are already becoming part of the daily routines for our 21st century learners. They are quickly moving from being digital natives to being digital residents. They understand how these tools can help them succeed academically, professionally, and personally.

Questions for you as an educator in the 21st century: Do you consider yourself a resident on the Internet? Do you know what it means to be a resident on the Internet? Can you identify some labels from the graphic? Are you willing to learn about Web 2.0? Are you willing to incorporate new tools into your practice to help differentiate your instruction? Are you willing to let students experiment with these tools to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of a subject?

When will I find the time to learn all of this? How can my students learn from me?

Ideas for Becoming a Resident on the Internet

The most successful residents on the Internet create a personalized digital dashboard to help them organize their favorite tools. There are hundreds of on-the-dashboard tools, but some of the most popular are iGoogle, Netvibes, My Yahoo, and Symbaloo. These personalized digital dashboards allow you to customize your access to your favorite tools. From this one location you can access your favorite blogs to follow, your Twitter feeds, Facebook, email, and so much more. Again, like the other Web 2.0 tools, these dashboards are Web based with no software required to be downloaded; they can be accessed from anywhere with Internet connections.

Once you start becoming more familiar with these tools, you will start to notice symbols on other websites to help you connect to the tools. For example, one is the “like” button from Facebook: once you press it, a link appears as a post on your Facebook wall. There are other sharing buttons, twitting buttons, RSS feed buttons, and more buttons to come. The idea is to be aware of the power of these buttons and not to be an expert on every single one.

You will know you have really made it when you start to understand the embed code options on many of these sites. The most common example is under YouTube videos, where you will find the word *embed*. By pressing this button you get to copy the html code, or website language, for that section so that you can incorporate it onto your own Web tool and continue to share it across the social networks.

Why Use Web 2.0 Tools?

These tools are designed to emphasize collaboration — an essential skill for our 21st century learners. They have the ability to cross any geographical boundary; being completely Web based, they can be accessed anywhere over the Internet. Learners will find themselves often networking and collaborating in these types of tools through their professional and personal lives. As educators we should prepare them for their future learning. These tools can be used to expand their knowledge prior to, during, and after reading. They provide a unique way for students to ask questions while reading, bringing a certain level of excitement and encouragement to help struggling readers stay motivated.

Examples of Web 2.0 tools used to deepen knowledge after reading a novel

Tool	Example
Glogster http://edu.glogster.com	Create a digital poster. <i>Example:</i> Ask the students to create a digital poster that advertises the movie version of the book that includes video, images, and hyperlinks.

Prezi http://www.prezi.com	Create a slide show, incorporating video and hyperlinks. <i>Example:</i> Ask the students to create a timeline of events from their novel. It should include video, images, and hyperlinks to more information.
Kerpoof http://www.kerpoof.com	This tool gives some basic themes and characters to help generate story ideas. <i>Example:</i> After students read their novel, have them create a short story with the same plot and themes as the novel.
Voicethreads http://www.voicethreads.com	This tool allows you to post an image or video in the centre and then have multiple people comment around the image either by typing a comment or by recording their voice. <i>Example:</i> Ask students to create a digital story with their own images and read it out loud with expression. Ask the viewers to leave a comment.
Blabberize http://www.blabberize.com	Record voice over an image. <i>Example:</i> Students choose a character from their novel and record how their character answers interview questions.
Tagxedo http://www.tagxedo.com	This tool is similar to the popular Wordle tool, but it lets users determine the shapes in which their words appear. <i>Example:</i> Ask the students to make a list of words from the novel they are reading and incorporate them into an appropriate shape.
Wallwisher http://www.wallwisher.com	Use virtual sticky notes. <i>Example:</i> While reading a novel students can post digital “I wonder” questions on the wall.
StoryJumper http://www.storyjumper.com	Create a digital storybook. <i>Example:</i> Have the students design and create a novel of their own. Consider getting the books printed professionally and adding them to your own library collection.

Taking the Next Step

The best way is to jump in and try something. Just one thing. Don't set out to be an expert on all the tools all at once because the tools are always changing, new ones are being developed, and some areas have not even been thought of. Try to focus on the bigger picture of offering your students more options to present

their work and allowing choice in demonstrating their knowledge. Embrace the idea that the teacher does not have to be the expert — the teacher is the facilitator.

Level 1	Take one of the ideas suggested and just try it.
Level 2	Check out these websites for more ideas and adapt to make your own: http://elemliteracy.wikispaces.com/Web+2.0+Tools http://www.web2teachingtools.com/index.html http://50ways.wikispaces.com/Tools+A+to+Z
Level 3	Find ideas from websites recommended by using a social networking tool such as Twitter or Delicious.
Level 4	Create, contribute, and share new ideas across social networks to other educators. Encourage your students to find a tool they haven't used before and to expand their own learning.

Engaging Students in a Media-Saturated Environment

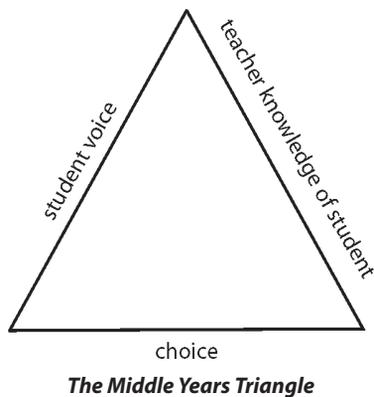
by Jon Lewis

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As educators, we are required to provide experiences that engage, challenge, and meet the needs of our students, and still get through the curriculum expectations. There is a growing sense that students are more difficult to capture, as the standard for entertainment is forever being raised due to the often numbing effects of overstimulation, accessibility, and consumption. How, then, do we engage students in a media-saturated environment?

One thing is certain: the entertainment value of an awkward, 30-something teacher, who gets fired up about embedding Web tools into blog posts (no matter how amazing the blog post) cannot compete with Black Ops, Katy Perry, or, for that matter, Jersey Shore. Nonetheless, the voice of the teacher in the middle-school classroom is still vitally important; it is, however, better suited as the “implied” voice that is heard through the overt voices of the students. As one considers the above realities, it appears that in order to effectively reach our audience, a new triangle for deconstruction needs to be constructed . . .

The foundation for engaging the intermediate audience is *choice*. Students who choose their outcomes will inevitably be more engaged than those who are told what to do. However, the foundation of the triangle both supports and is supported by student voice and teacher knowledge of students. Without the understanding of who the students are and what they care about, it will be difficult to hear their voices in the classroom or provide an appropriate environment for self-selected outcomes.



Encouraging Student Voice Online: Voicethread

Voicethread is an online collaborative tool built to encourage student voice. The simplicity of the design and its ability to receive and display almost any file format makes learning the tool effortless to our media savvy audience.

The most important feature of Voicethread is the way in which students can interact with their work and the work of their peers. It has really helped to bridge the gap between trying to guess a student's thought process on a particular task and really knowing what thoughts shaped the outcome. Students can underline directly on the work posted as they type or record their thoughts about the specifics. They can interact with documents, photos, artwork, and video directly through Voicethread.

Voicethread has proven especially useful as we challenge students to be mindful of strategies they use as they read or interpret texts. Students can underline specific references within Voicethread and record their thoughts relating to those references. Comments can be moderated — public access prohibited — or made available to be shared so that others can hear and see strategies their peers are using. It has become common practice in my classroom to begin our learning with the voices of my students modelling metacognition.

Voicethread is especially adept at handling highly visual content. Picture books, videos, and advertisements have been shared and thoroughly analyzed through the tool's interactive nature. Likewise, student-generated artwork, public service announcements, clay animations, advertisements, audio recordings, and graphic novels have all made it onto our Voicethread network for feedback in order to deepen effectiveness.

By using Voicethread, my students have become incredible resource “gatherers” for the class. When deconstructing effective advertisements, students were challenged to find powerful examples and post them to Voicethread to be shared and discussed by others. The richness of content chosen by the class was inspiring. It is fascinating how much ownership students take in engaging with the content when they become its source. It also serves as a looking-glass into the interests and values of the specific students in the class.

Providing a Framework for Choice

There is no perfect tool or method for deepening engagement; however, with tools such as Prezi, Aviary, Glogster, Comic Life, or the Google suite of apps, the menu of choices is often limitless. As students work their way towards the intention of the task, the challenge becomes about providing a framework of reference as they chart their course through a sea of tools. Students need to remain focused on their destination in order to arrive at the end with an outcome based on the assigned criteria, not just a product that is a really well-designed advertisement for the chosen tool.

Whether designing their culminating task for Visual Arts, working on group advertisements in Media, choosing the method of recording their thoughts as they read, or brainstorming their research topic for a social justice unit, students must be able to provide a rationale for their choice. As they begin to grapple with making choices, it is critical for us to build structures in our classrooms for dialogue and feedback to help facilitate choice.

In my classroom, the framework that often helps to facilitate choice is similar to the creative process, as outlined in *The Arts*, a 2009 curriculum document from the Ontario Ministry of Education:

Inspiration —→ Planning —→ Exploration —→ Producing and Revising

Begin with inspiration

The intermediate students I have had the privilege of teaching are often inspired by content that is relevant to them as learners and that introduces them to larger communities of learning so they can see the importance of being part of the learning.

I have found that middle students are captured by material that raises awareness of how the world around them functions and how they can be instrumental in influencing its function. It also seems they are more drawn to content that has high visual appeal or somehow incorporates aspects of their own pop culture.

Considering this, we decided to use Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone* as a source of awareness into issues of injustice. We wanted students to be able to relate the large disparities between Global South and Global North to their world, and consider what it looks like for some to grow up in areas where the realities of this disparity are much more evident. Through this investigation, we have been able to confront issues of violence, specifically in the media, with a much less narrow perspective. Before launching into the book, students were challenged to consider their own values relating to violence: they examined the effects of violence within the media they consume. We were able to expose the harsh realities of violence, and how it is often glorified in our experiences in North America.

Our goal through this investigation was to somehow help students to be confronted with the realities of a world often removed from their experience. In order for this to happen, we realized that stories alone would not be sufficient — we had to bring faces, names, and people to the experience.

Through a contact my grade partner had in Uganda, we began writing letters to students whose realities were more similar to those of Ishmael Beah in Sierra Leone. We received letters back and thought it only appropriate to create a more meaningful connection between these two worlds. We wanted our faces to be seen, and our voices heard, so that our friends in Uganda could understand who we were and what our experiences were. Due to the lack of resources in Uganda, we were unable to connect via the Web, so we decided to have each of our students sit in front of a camera and record what freedom meant to them. Their short videos were compiled and sent on a disc to be hand-delivered to our contact school in Uganda.

At time of writing, we had not heard back from our friends in Uganda. As a result of the clear disparity, specifically in access to technology, our students began writing letters to companies, challenging them to support our efforts and provide technology that could be delivered to Uganda. The students jumped at the opportunity to write to these companies. Most important, they began to feel as if their voices could be heard.

Plan for success

As students are inspired and challenged, the next step of the process is for them to plan their outcome. Planning needs to include what content will be used, how it will be communicated, and what tool will help in the process.

Planning, this year, has come in many forms. In some cases, it was as simple as a written proposal or completion of a graphic organizer. Other times it developed into using group blogs to dialogue and brainstorm ideas related to themes or post rationales on blog homepages for cross-class discussions.

Regardless of the form, the main goal of planning is to build accountability into the process. Students need to be able to articulate why they are making the

choices they are at the beginning of the task, so that at the task's end, they can identify the specific elements that worked or needed to be changed. Without time to dialogue, share, or rework ideas, I have found the depth of learning limited.

Explore guilt-free

The process of exploration becomes more important, especially in light of the vast array of tools to be used. It is a refreshing activity to participate in learning that has no other purpose than to explore. Often, the most difficult challenge in exploration is convincing the students that it is not about getting a mark, something that can prove to be difficult since many middle students judge the worthiness of a task by its impact on the report card. However, to have time for students to explore what tools are available with feedback that has a collaborative, rather than an evaluative, focus builds an environment for pushing learning to new depths.

We make it common practice to introduce at least one new tool for every unit of investigation. Below is a brief list of some of the tools and the tasks we explored this year. "Purpose of Exploration" was the introduction to the tool. As the year progressed, students could use any of the tools specific to their planned outcomes.

Term	Tool	Focus	Purpose of Exploration
Term 1	Voicethread	Reading, creating online portfolios, beginning an online identity	To share our use of reading strategies for common texts while exploring what it means to find the deeper meaning To share current books we were reading and create online profiles about ourselves as learners
	Prezi	Communicating meaning from text	To share deeper meanings from our independent texts in a range of ways
	Bitstrips, Comic Life	Narrative writing, graphic novels	To use the graphic novel format as a means of communicating narrative writing
	iMovie, Garageband	Visual art and media production	To create claymation and live-action, stop-motion animation, including use of photos, while exploring how to create soundtracks for movies

Term	Tool	Focus	Purpose of Exploration
Term 2	Aviary	Communicating “voice”	To create “audio walks” to communicate the voices of the citizens of Africville through narrative storytelling
	Today'sMeet	Reading and media deconstruction	To share thoughts relating to the elements of literature used by authors and media creators as we viewed videos or did class read-alouds
	Google Apps	Researching, discussing, and sharing issues of social justice	To learn what social justice is and share links to research specific to group themes; to investigate the use of Google Apps for collaboration between two Grade 8 classes

Produce and revise to share

The culture of sharing is alive and well in the intermediate classroom. Students are much more networked as a result of technology, and most come into middle-school classrooms with some experience in sharing information about themselves. While true that some students are more critical about what they share than others, the process of making information “public” is still a learning process for many students. Since most scour hundreds of images in order to find the perfect online identity, they understand the concept of critical sharing; however, some still lack critical thought when it comes to “sharing” work. They may be used to completing their work, only to hand it in to the teacher for feedback, to be sent back to them with a “grade” — this linear process does not encourage critical thought. Once students begin sharing their work with peers, and sometimes, multiple peers, they learn to view their work more critically before presenting it.

Our journey into sharing began early in the year with Voicethread. Many students were familiar with the tool before. However, we really wanted to push students towards collaboration. We began “sharing” our reading experiences by creating a common thread in which students could edit by adding images of book covers they had read. They were challenged to provide a brief synopsis and then explain why (or why not) someone should read their book. This simple activity of sharing what we were reading exposed many of the students to books they had never read and encouraged many to pick up the recommended reading.

The real power of sharing emerged much more strongly in the writing process. We feel that sharing should be about harnessing students’ knowledge to promote peer learning. As students worked through their drafts, sharing became a vital step in turning exploration into production. We dove back into Web tools for assistance once again.

After generating the criteria for the writing task, students can easily edit each others' work using collaborative online tools. The two we found most effective were Google Docs and, of course, Voicethread. There are many positives to both tools; however, the downside to Google Docs, and why it is not on the chart above, is that an email account is required, which brings a host of considerations before use. Voicethread users can register a non-active email; however, they cannot directly type on the document online. Instead, they can download the file or use the pen tool to circle and record their voice as they edit. The enormous benefit for both tools is the online record of how students are editing each others' work, which can be used to inform assessment and practice.

Finally, when students "re-share" their work for teacher feedback, work is much more refined due to the critical process that has been involved. In my class, this critical process has had an impact not only on students' writing, but on many facets of my program, including media production. This process requires deep student engagement so cannot be completed the night before assigned due dates. When students are proud of their work, they are inspired to share it. No matter the mechanism of sharing, their final display often encourages future learning. Web tools have made the process of sharing easier and more critical; however, the old school bulletin-board display of a job well done still brings joy . . . even to intermediate students.