Extreme Makeover: Updating Class Activities for the 21st Century

Ever find yourself wishing Ty Pennington and his design team would roll their bus up to your classroom to help you renovate your old activities? Well, with a little imagination and some remarkable Web-based applications, you can re-design your old activities using free online tools.

The current generation of Web-based applications are social in nature, enabling users to collaborate and publish a wide variety of their creations. Teachers who see the value of social networking tools can use free applications that many of their students are already using outside of school. The features of Web-based applications make them appealing because they allow teachers to design rich, authentic, and engaging activities and assessments that catch and keep students' attention. This article will highlight collaborative writing tools, blogs, social bookmarks, photo sharing, and wikis.

Collaborative Writing Tools

The simple task of writing a class newsletter can often prove to be impossible. How do you get 20 students to work on the same document? What do you do when a day's worth of writing disappears after someone pushes the wrong button? These issues disappear when free, Web-based applications such as Zoho Writer are used. Not only does Zoho maintain a restorable archive of all the changes and revisions of the document, it locks when it is being edited by another individual. The final product can be published to a Web site or posted directly to a blog. Google Docs and Spreadsheets

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Collaborative Writing Tools

Activity	Renovation Tool	Resources
Group Projects	Collaborative Writing Tools Productivity Tools Wikis	Zoho (http://www.zoho.com) Google Docs and Spreadsheet (http://docs.google.com) Writeboard (http://www.writeboard.com) Gliffy (http://www.gliffy.com) Letterpop (http://www.letterpop.com)

Blogs

Activity	Renovation Tool	Resources
Reflective Journals Student Portfolios Integrated Units Newsletters	Blog	WordPress (http://www.wordpress.com) 21publish (http://www.21publish.com) Blogger (http://www.blogger.com) Edublogs (http://www.edublogs.org) Gaggle (http://www.gaggle.net) Think (http://www.think.com)

Social Bookmarking

Activity	Renovation Tool	Resources
List of Content Resources	Social Bookmarks	Del.icio.us (http://del.icio.us) Diigo (http://www.diigo.com) Ma.gnolia (http://ma.gnolia.com) Backflip (http://www.backflip.com) BlinkList (http://www.blinklist.com)

Photosharing

Activity	Renovation Tool	Resources
Picture Files Story Starters	Flickr Tools	Flicktion (http://www.flickr.com/photos/tags/flicktion/) Creative Commons Licensing (http://www.flickr.com/creativecommons/) Third-party Flickr tools (http://www.quickonlinetips.com/archives/2005/03/great-flickr-tools-collection/)

Building Reference Resources

Activity	Renovation Tool	Resources
List of Content Resources Collaborative Lesson Plans	Wiki	PBWiki (http://www.pbwiki.com) WikiSpaces (http://www.wikispaces.com) WetPaint (http://www.wetpaint.com)

Multidisciplinary

and Writeboard provide similar functions. In addition, Google Docs and Zoho offer suites of tools: spreadsheets, presentations, databases, calendars, and more—all of which are accessible to multiple users.

Districts that struggle to provide licenses for concept mapping programs can use Gliffy, which works like other concept mapping programs, also allowing students to collaborate on the same concept map. LetterPop provides newsletter templates and publishes the finished product to the Web.

Blogs

Blogs have frequently been described as personal journals. However, educational blogs provide a forum for students to write for authentic audiences—those other than their teachers and peers. This encourages them to be more conscious of their work and take greater care in their writing. Most important, blog administrators are able to determine the visibility of and access to the blog.

Social Bookmarking

Saving bookmarks is never a problem—trying to remember which machine you saved them to can create the problem! Social bookmarks allow you to store all of your bookmarks online and tag them with keywords and categories. Access and sharing are easy with any computer with an Internet connection.

Photosharing

Digital cameras make taking and sharing photos simple. Students can post photos, use them in reports, presentations, blogs, or wikis. Photos can be used to write Flicktion—a story inspired by a photo. Creative Commons enables members of photosharing sites such as Flickr to give legal permission for others to use their photos.

Building Reference Resources

Most people are familiar with Wikipedia—an online collaborative encyclopedia. Wikis are powerful collaboration tools. Users can upload their content and edit the content posted by other users. Glossaries, bibliographies, and other collaborative writing tasks are perfect projects for a wiki.

Conclusion

There is a dark side to Web-based applications; the potential for misuse is always possible. However, this possibility provides us with an opportunity to teach the responsible and ethical use of these collaborative tools as we promote 21st-century literacies. We must design activities for students to use these tools for constructive purposes, and teach them to be responsible, knowledgeable consumers and producers of information. By taking advantage of these free Web-based applications, we can renovate our old activities and provide new and technologically enhanced activities and assessments for our students. For more information, visit the Ed Tech Immersion Plus Web site at http://coe.ilstu.edu/etip.

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