CES 2.0: Technology and the Essential School

IN THIS ISSUE:

Introducing Social Networking Into Teaching and Learning
Distance Learning and the CES Common Principles
Twittering About Learning
Digital Portfolios: Documenting Student Growth
Race and Identity via Dance and Technology
The Coalition of Essential Schools: Common Principles

Demonstration of mastery

Commitment to the entire school

A tone of decency and trust

Goals apply to all students

Resources dedicated to teaching and learning

Less is more, depth over coverage

Learning to use one’s mind well

Personalization

Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach

Democracy and equity

The Coalition of Essential Schools
Imagine schools where intellectual excitement animates every student’s face, teachers work together to improve their craft, and all students thrive and excel. For more than 20 years, the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) has been at the forefront of making this vision a reality. Guided by a set of Common Principles, CES strives to create and sustain personalized, equitable, and intellectually challenging schools.

The CES network includes hundreds of schools and 26 Affiliate Centers. Diverse in size, population, and programmatic emphasis, Essential schools serve students from kindergarten through high school in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Essential schools share the Common Principles, a set of beliefs about the purpose and practice of schooling. Reflecting the wisdom of thousands of educators, the ten Common Principles inspire schools to examine their priorities and design effective structures and instructional practices.

CES was founded in 1984 by Theodore R. Sizer and is headquartered in Oakland, California. Please visit our website at www.essentialschools.org for more about CES’s programs, services, and resources.

Horace
CES publishes its journal Horace quarterly. Combining research with hands-on resources, Horace showcases Essential schools that implement the ten Common Principles in their structures, practices, and habits. Within four focus areas—school design, classroom practice, leadership, and community connections—Horace explores specific questions and challenges that face all schools in the CES network.

Subscriptions to Horace are a benefit of affiliating with CES National as a regional center, school, or network friend. We invite you to visit the CES website at www.essentialschools.org for information on affiliation and to read Horace issues from 1988 through the present.

Jill Davidson, editor of Horace, welcomes your comments, issue theme and story ideas, and other feedback via email at jdavidson@essentialschools.org.

Lewis Cohen
Executive Director

Jill Davidson
Publications Director
CES 2.0: Technology and the Essential School

02 Notes on this Issue: Horace 2.0

03 Adventures in Web 2.0: Introducing Social Networking Into My Teaching, Honor Moorman, International School of the Americas

10 Through Our Eyes, by Sara Narva, The Crefeld School

15 Learning Technology Skills Through Social Entrepreneurialism, Jean Pendleton Charleston Collegiate School

20 Technology as a Fence and a Bridge, Bryan Wehrli, Amy Biehl High School

24 Distance Learning and the CES Common Principles, Jennie Hallisey, Boston Day and Evening Academy

30 Twittering About Learning: Using Twitter in an Elementary School Classroom, Jeff Kurtz

32 Digital Portfolios: Documenting Student Growth, Matthew Cramer, Camino Nuevo High School

35 Where to Go for More: Resources for Technology Use in Essential Schools

37 Go to the Source: More about the Schools and Organizations Featured in This Issue

Notes on This Issue

I hope that you experience this issue of Horace as compelling, illuminating, and a significant force for change in and improvement of your practice as an educator. “CES 2.0: Technology and the Essential School” presents insight into and experience from seven educators across the country who have immersed themselves in the world of cutting edge technology in order to improve student achievement; create opportunities for authentic teaching, learning, and assessment; and create possibilities for their students that would not otherwise exist.

All of these articles feature students as content creators, demonstrating their learning publicly. First and second graders in Washington State use Twitter, Twitpic, and Chirbit to tell the world about their learning—and as they do, they build their literacy skills in immediately relevant, clearly meaningful ways. A high school in Los Angeles is designed from the ground up to teach students digital literacy mastery through digital portfolios. Video technology allows dance students in Philadelphia to grapple with race and identity in their creation and production of a dance piece. And, of course, there’s much more.

Undeniably, there is a genuine whiz-bang, supercool quality to the technologies described in these pages, but in each case, this issue’s writers focus on particular technologies for their ability to deepen students’ understanding and create meaningful learning experiences. They talk about their own learning curves as they immersed themselves in the digital waters. If you’re not already in the pool, we invite you to jump in: the water’s fine. And just like swimming, you can’t learning it by reading a book about it. Because of the nature of interactivity, just as the authors in these pages...
Notes on This Issue

Continued from page 31

have done, the only way to learn about the synergy of cutting-edge computer, software, and interactive technology is to use these tools and see what happens.

As the world goes, so goes Horace. You have received notice of this electronic edition of Horace via email. Perhaps you printed it out; perhaps you’re reading it online (and if you are reading it online, click on a link; they’re live!). We worked hard to create an experience that captures the flexibility of electronic communication with the practicality of ink on paper. CES has a few reasons for moving Horace to online-only publication. We want to be smart with our money, and chose not to spend additional dollars on printing and mailing costs. As well, we want Horace to have the widest possible reach, and it’s a lot easier to “pass along” by forwarding a PDF or sending a link to a URL than it is to do so with a physical magazine. That said, if you want to print and read on paper, please do. We chose to preserve the layout of Horace so that it would not lose its offline readability.

This issue presents the excitement, potential, and challenges of networked, co-created learning, terrain with which Essential school educators are deeply knowledgeable, not only in their classrooms but also as part of their school-based professional learning communities, and the widespread professional learning community that CES represents. For 25 years, Fall Forum has been a networked, “non-virtual” group learning experience, and more recently, the CES Small Schools Network has represented peer-to-peer learning that is the real-time example for interactive technologies, and Horace, written for and by CES network practitioners, represents CES’s commitment to the expertise and wisdom of CES network educators. CES’s historic identification as a network makes our transition to the 2.0 world comfortable and immediately relevant.

In addition to Horace’s new electronic persona, we’re in the process of redesigning our website, http://www.essentialschools.org. We can’t wait to welcome you to our transformed online home, which will debut in the coming months. We’re also establishing outposts on social networking sites in which you may already be active. Here’s where you can find us:

CES Fall Forum Ning
Connect with others interested in Fall Forum’s “Changing Schools, Changing Lives” theme. Join in discussions about CES principles and practices, connect with people planning to attend Fall Forum, and take advantage of an authentic and vibrant conversation among friends to deepen your understanding about Fall Forum and CES.

http://cesfallforum.ning.com/

Twitter
We’re @cesnational. Give us a tweet!

Facebook
We’re on Facebook! Search http://www.facebook.com for “Coalition of Essential Schools” or go straight to our group at http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?gid=22085646681&ref=ts

Flickr
Join the CES Flickr group to upload photos of your school, and get happy and inspired with images from other Essential schools across the country and worldwide. Go straight to our photostream at http://www.flickr.com/photos/essentialschools.

You Tube
For video clips of CES teaching and learning, search http://www.youtube.com for “cesnational” or go straight to our channel at http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=cesnational&v=view=videos. Upload your videos of teaching, learning, and interaction that exemplify personalized, equitable, and academically challenging education.

Many thanks to the authors who worked diligently to present their experiences; it’s been a pleasure to work with you! We are grateful, too, to the many thousands of Horace readers over the years, especially those of you who are taking the journey with us as we transform and, we hope, continue to improve. Let us know how we’re doing—drop an email, give us a tweet, post on our Facebook page—we’re eager to hear from you.

Best wishes for a great summer,

Jill Davidson
Editor, Horace
jdavidson@essentialschools.org
Adventures in Web 2.0: Introducing Social Networking into My Teaching

by Honor Moorman, International School of the Americas

“As new technologies shape literacies, they bring opportunities for teachers at all levels to foster reading and writing in more diverse and participatory contexts.”


Five months ago, I introduced Web 2.0 technology to my students, and already, there is a story to tell. Integrating a social networking site into my teaching has been even more challenging and will prove to be even more beneficial than I could have imagined. By sharing my story, I hope that I can provide a road map for educators who are new to Web 2.0 and challenge those well-acquainted with it to take the Web 2.0 adventure to the next level.

All students at the International School of the Americas (ISA) engage in a 120-hour career-exploration internship before graduating. The ISA Internship Program is one of the school’s hallmark real-world learning experiences, providing students with the opportunity to experience the fields they are contemplating pursuing in post-secondary life. The students in this year’s senior class are working in many diverse spheres—medicine, the arts, politics, teaching, business, community organizing, and more. As the ISA Internship Coordinator, it is my privilege and pleasure to support these students as they navigate the world of work and learn what it takes to be a professional.

When I first stepped into the shoes of the Internship Coordinator last August, I quickly realized that the very best aspect of the Internship Program is the fact that students are going to a hundred different places, working with different mentors (community business partners and other professionals who agree to supervise our students) at different times. They are each

Continued on next page
having their own completely individualized, authentic learning experience. At the same time, I discovered that the most challenging aspect of the Internship Program is this variety of workplaces, schedules, and partnerships, which makes it impossible for students to meet as a group and learn from each other in a structured time and place. That is, until now.

This year, I’ve integrated the use of the Internship Ning, a social networking site that serves as a virtual classroom where students can discuss their internships, exchange ideas, and offer feedback and support to one another. This gives them the opportunity to benefit from everyone’s insights and experiences in addition to their own. The site also has the potential to become a learning network that will link our school community with the professional community in new and dynamic ways.

Challenge #1: Gaining District Support and Launching the Ning

Ning.com (http://www.ning.com) is a free web-based platform that allows users to create their own social networking sites. The word “ning” means “peace” in Chinese, writes Gina Bianchini in “The Story Behind the Ning Name (http://blog.ning.com/2007/04/the-story_behind_the_ning_name.html). Sites created with Ning.com offer many of the same features available on Facebook or MySpace. Members create profiles, join groups, post blogs, share photos, and so on.

The first obstacle to implementing the Internship Ning was the school district’s Internet filter. In order to make the site accessible to students from school, we needed the support of the district’s Educational Technology and Computer Service departments. Since some sites created on Ning.com are inappropriate for students, we didn’t ask the district to unblock the Ning.com parent site, just the Internship Ning (http://isainternship.ning.com). Teachers of younger students should note that the Ning platform is not an option for students younger than 14 as stated by Ning.com’s Terms of Use.

In addition to the Internship Ning, we requested access to blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, and other Web 2.0 tools that would facilitate our internationally-focused, project-based curriculum and enhance our ability to engage students in meaningful communication and collaboration around global issues. Three face-to-face meetings, four months, and many emails later, we were granted permission to begin using some of the tools, including the Internship Ning.

Properly unblocking these sites was worth the patience and persistence. From an equity standpoint, I needed to be sure that all students would have access to the Internship Ning and related sites by making them available on campus. From a pedagogical stand-

Web 2.0 Tools and Definitions

Web 2.0: “Web 2.0 is an umbrella term that is used to refer to a new era of Web-enabled applications that are built around user-generated or user-manipulated content, such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, and social networking sites.” (Pew Internet and American Life Project, “Research on Web 2.0,” http://www.pewinternet.org/topics/Web-20.aspx)

Blog: “A blog—short for weblog—is a sort of online journal, a website that features regularly updated, chronologically ordered posts. . . Blogs vary widely in purpose, format, and readership.” (Rozema and Webb, Literature and the Web) For a list of blogs being used in education, see “Links to School Bloggers,” http://supportblogging.com/Links+to+School+Bloggers.

Wiki: “A wiki is a collaborative Webspace where anyone can add content and anyone can edit content that has already been published.” (Richardson, Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms) For a list of wikis being used by teachers and students, see “Examples of Educational Wikis,” http://educationalwikis.wikispaces.com/Examples+of+educational+wikis.


For short, easy-to-understand video introductions to these and other Web 2.0 tools, visit The Common Craft Show at http://www.commoncraft.com/show.

point, I needed students to be able to sign on during class so I could give them a hands-on introductory tour of the site.

Backstory: How I Discovered This Thing Called Ning

After teaching ninth and twelfth grade English at The International School of the Americas for eight years, I became a secondary literacy specialist for the North East Independent School District. This role involved sharing teaching strategies and resources with middle and high school reading and English teachers across the district. I also began teaching pre-service teachers at Trinity University and Texas State University where I was using web-based learning management systems to share resources with them and engage them in online discussions. However, the course websites
created using these systems were only available to currently enrolled students. When the students in my university classes began asking if it would be possible for them to access these websites after the semester was over, I started looking for an alternative way to continue sharing ideas and resources with former students and colleagues online.

I created a blog, “English Teacher Teacher,” http://englishteacherteacher.blogspot.com/. I had seen Karl Fisch’s “Did You Know” presentation (http://thefischbowl.blogspot.com/2006/08/did-you-know.html), which had led me to Michael Wesch’s video, “The Machine is Us/ing Us,” (http://mediatedcultures.net/mediatedculture.htm) and I had been particularly struck by Candace Lombari’s article entitled, “There’s a blog Born Every Half Second” (http://news.cnet.com/2100-1025_3-6102935.html). In my initial blog post (http://englishteacherteacher.blogspot.com/2007/12/hello-edublogosphere.html), I wrote, “I can’t even imagine how many blogs have come into existence while I’ve been writing—and rewriting, and changing, and editing—this first post, but I’m about to push the button and join the edublogosphere! Here goes . . .”

What I didn’t fully confess in that first entry was that I felt very nervous about initially publishing my blog. It wasn’t until I got comfortable with this new genre—by reading numerous educational technology blogs—that I felt ready to begin blogging myself. In retrospect, this isn’t too surprising. I believe strongly in the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing, and whenever I invite students to try writing in a new genre, I always have them begin by reading “mentor texts” from that genre.

I began reading blogs written by top educational technology innovators, zeroing in on those that were referenced multiple times or nominated for the Edublog awards <http://edublogawards.com/>. Not only was I “reading like a writer” to learn the conventions of the genre, in terms of content, length, style, and so on, but I was also learning about the tech tools and features I could incorporate into my blog—hyperlinks, embedded videos, cluster maps, tag clouds, blogrolls, widgets, and more.

This was my first foray into the world of Web 2.0. It was new and exciting, and as I tentatively stepped forward, I found myself following the electronic breadcrumbs left by the many other educators who had ventured into this territory ahead of me. Their blog posts and wiki pages offered me an interactive map of the emerging Web 2.0 landscape, and as I explored, I became passionate about the amazing potential these tools offer us to connect learners and make learning collaborative. The more I read, the more I realized how important it is for us as teachers to take advantage of Web 2.0 tools not only to create our own personal learning networks, but also to introduce them to our students and incorporate them into our teaching so students can develop the knowledge and skills needed to take advantage of these connective technologies that are so essential to life-long learning in the 21st century. Following in the web footprints of the edubloggers I had come to admire, I embedded my delicious tags into my blog, and linked it to my YouTube playlists. I also joined Classroom 2.0 (http://www.classroom20.com/) “the social network for those interested in Web 2.0 and collaborative technologies in education.” Participating in the Classroom 2.0 community showed me what was possible through Ning.com.

**Challenge #2: Helping Students View the Ning as a Personal Learning Network**

Once we finally had the Internship Ning fully accessible on the school computers, I was eager to introduce it to the students. Over the Thanksgiving holiday, I emailed all 112 seniors and invited them to join the Internship Ning. Only five of them did so, which was disappointing at first. But since I had

---

**Ed Tech Innovators’ Blogs**

- Will Richardson’s “Weblogg-ed” http://weblogg-ed.com/
- Karl Fisch’s “The Fischbowl” http://thefischbowl.blogspot.com/
- Scott McLeod’s “Dangerously Irrelevant” http://www.dangerouslyirrelevant.org/
- Ewan McIntosh’s “edu.blogs.com” http://edu.blogs.com/edublogs/
- Steve Hargadon’s “K-12 Educational Technology” http://www.stevehargadon.com/
- Jeff Utecht’s “Thinking Stick” http://www.thethinkingstick.com/
- David Warlick’s “2cents Worth” http://davidwarlick.com/2cents/index.php
- Wesley Fryer’s “Moving at the Speed of Creativity” http://www.speedofcreativity.org/
- Vicki Davis’ The Cool Cat Teacher Blog http://coolcatteacher.blogspot.com/
- Lisa Neilsen’s The Innovative Educator http://theinnovativeeducator.blogspot.com/

Continued on next page
National Educational Technology Standards for Students (NETS-S) from the International Society for Technology in Education

- Creativity and innovation
- Communication and collaboration
- Research and information fluency
- Critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making
- Digital citizenship
- Technology operations and concepts

http://www.iste.org/Content/NavigationMenu/NETS/ForStudents/NETS_for_Students.htm


Learning and Innovation Skills
- Creativity and innovation
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Communication and collaboration

Information, Media, and Technology Skills
- Information literacy
- Media literacy
- ICT (information, communications and technology) literacy

Life and Career Skills
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Initiative and self-direction
- Social and cross-cultural skills
- Leadership and responsibility

http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=254&Itemid=120

National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers (NETS-T)

Facilitate and Inspire Student Learning and Creativity Design and Develop Digital-Age Learning Experiences and Assessment Model Digital-Age Work and Learning Promote and Model Digital Citizenship and Responsibility Engage in Professional Growth and Leadership

from The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)

http://www.iste.org/Content/NavigationMenu/NETS/ForTeachers/NETS_for_Teachers.htm

set up the Internship Ning as a members-only, password-protected site, there was no way for students to preview it, and I realized they may not have been inclined to join without knowing more about it. The next week, I went into their classes, showed them the site, and invited them to sign up on the spot. Since it’s a transition year, this year’s seniors weren’t required to participate in the Internship Ning, but most of them wanted to join the site once they saw it in action.

One of the core assignments of the Internship Program is the written reflection. Students are asked to regularly document their internships in order to articulate and analyze their experiences and become more aware of their own learning. I urged students to begin blogging and participating in discussion groups rather than writing their reflections the “old-fashioned” way. The students enjoyed customizing their profile pages, “friending” each other, and joining groups. But as students began to use the Internship Ning for non-academic purposes, I realized that if I wanted them to really engage in this site as a serious space for learning, and not just as an ISA Facebook, I needed to share more of my thinking about why I had created this “virtual classroom” and the ways I hoped and expected they would use it.

Teaching Story: Letting Students in on the Big Idea

My main purposes for implementing the Internship Ning into the ISA Internship Program were two-fold. First, since students are engaged in their internships outside of school hours, I was trying to create a virtual classroom—an online community where students could converse and collaborate, and where I could support and enrich their learning. Second, I was hoping to enhance the Internship curriculum in a way that would help prepare students for the literacy demands of the 21st century. On both accounts, the Internship Ning has already surpassed my original vision, and we have just begun to glimpse its ultimate potential.

As a virtual classroom, the Internship Ning is in many ways a much more flexible and dynamic space than a physical classroom. Students can interact with any member about any topic or question at any time. And rather than being limited to a classroom where only 20 to 30 students are able to collaborate with one another, the virtual space enables students to interact with all 100 plus of their classmates, as well as alumni who continue to participate on the site. Once we have mentors participating too, there will be the potential for all students to learn from that mentor, not just the student who is physically interning with him or her.

In terms of 21st century skills, the Internship Ning provides an online environment where students can gain the knowledge and skills needed to “to learn effectively and live productively in an increasingly digital world” (International Society for Technology in Education, 2007) and develop “the skills, knowledge and expertise students should master to succeed in work and life in the 21st century” (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). It is a space that encourages students to practice digital citizenship; the Internship
Acceptable Use Policy for the ISA Internship Ning

The purpose of this site is for students to communicate with one another, and with their teachers and mentors, about questions and ideas related to their internship experiences and/or career interests. We, the members of the ISA Internship Ning community, agree to hold ourselves and each other accountable to the following terms of use:

- We will use the site in a safe, legal, and responsible manner.
- We will demonstrate digital citizenship through high standards of personal responsibility and ethical behavior.
- We will use this site in an academically and professionally appropriate way.

Based on input from the ISA class of 2009, appropriate use has been defined as follows:

In General:
- Keep it professional; save the rest for MySpace, etc.
- Use your own good judgment; when in doubt, don’t do it.

Language:
- No profanity, no sexually explicit language, no bashing.
- Should adhere to proper English conventions; no slang.
- Should be understandable to all members of the site.

Images:
- No sexual, violent, or otherwise offensive images.
- Should be used in accordance with copyright laws.

Profile Pages:
- Include your full name and/or photo of yourself only with parental/guardian permission.
- Customize the appearance of your profile page using the Ning menu only; no uploaded backgrounds.
- If you’re not using a personal photo, other options include: an avatar or animated version of your own image, a Wordle (http://www.wordle.com) creation (using appropriate language, of course), a symbol or image related to your internship or career interests, or an image that represents you in a positive manner.

Groups:
- If you create a group, keep it open to all, not restricted.
- Don’t ban anyone from your group.
- Groups should be internship related or deal with other topics relevant to the purpose of this space.

Blogs and Discussions:
- Blogs should be posted to everyone.
- Blogs should be related to internship or career interests.
- Posts can include school-related questions, but keep it constructive.

Important Notes:
- All hyperlinked sites, images, and uploaded files should adhere to the guidelines listed above.
- No third-party widgets or rss feeds per district guidelines.
- Guidelines will be updated as needed; members’ input is welcome.

Accountability:
- Help remind one another to use the site in a positive and productive way so we can continue to have this privilege.
- Report any misuse of the site to Ms. Moorman immediately.

Ning creates the conditions for students to be self-directed and responsive to the community’s needs. In addition, the Internship Ning is a teaching context in which I can be the kind of educator I believe 21st century students need—a facilitator, collaborator, and co-learner.

Two weeks after launching the Internship Ning, I engaged students in a couple of lessons to help them understand my rationale and goals for implementing this social networking site. I wanted them to realize how, as Will Richardson writes, “the read/write web changes everything” (http://willrichardson.wikispaces.com/page/diff/home/74757129), so that they would understand why we were doing this and the ways their participation on the Internship Ning fits into the bigger picture of what’s happening on the Web. We discussed the Did You Know? 2.0 video and touched on some of the big concepts—exponential change, technological innovation, globalization, and mass collaboration (see Resources for Further Reading). I had students read selected articles from T.H.E. Journal (http://www.thejournal.com/) and Edutopia (http://www.edutopia.org/) that addressed the benefits and challenges of students blogging. We also engaged in a debate around the question of about whether or not “social networking technologies will bring large [positive] changes to educational methods, in and out of the classroom” using the debate at Economist.com (http://www.economist.com/debate/overview/123) as a model. We examined the 21st century standards, especially accountability, social responsibility, and digital citizenship, and discussed how the Internship Ning would be a place to practice those skills. Finally, we co-constructed an Acceptable Use Policy for our site.

Giving students ownership in the process of defining the expectations for the Internship Ning was a critical step in helping them grow as digital citizens. Similar to the process of creating norms for classroom behavior, I trusted that the wisdom of the group would generate a sensible policy. And, even if I’d wanted to, I couldn’t have presented the students with a comprehensive list of do’s and don’ts before allowing them to use the Internship Ning. Until everyone started using the site, I didn’t exactly know what kinds of questions or issues would arise. And since many students are more adept with these tools than I am, they discovered features and functions I hadn’t been aware of before. Together, we were able to address the questions of what it would mean for a social networking site to be academic and professional rather than purely social.

Challenge #3: Creating Momentum While Keeping it Authentic and Student-Centered

Over the next ten weeks, there was very little activity on the Internship Ning. Those weeks included winter...
break, first semester final exams, and a class trip to Washington, D.C. Nevertheless, I was worried that students somehow weren’t buying into the idea that blogging was a worthwhile, much less a “cool” thing to do. In response, I presented a mini-lesson on the role of blogging in our global society and in our individual lives.

We started with “Blogs in Plain English,” (http://www.commoncraft.com/blogs) a video introduction to blogs, “how they work and why they matter.” Then we talked about the role of blogging in our lives and in the lives of people we know. We also discussed the phenomenon of citizen journalism and the role it played in the recent presidential election process. Trying to emphasize how ubiquitous blogging has become, I pointed out how it is integrated into many of the tools students use every day, such as Microsoft Word and Google. I even reminded them that Time magazine had declared “You” as Person of the Year in 2006. Whether or not it was a result of my lesson, students generated 25 blog posts for February, 13 for March, and 38 for April. One of the most prolific bloggers since the beginning has been Mario—he’s written 19 blog posts, started five discussions, and contributed to six others. When I asked Mario why he liked writing on the Internship Ning so much, he said, “Writing an essay just feels like something you’re doing for a grade, but writing a blog post feels like a normal conversation . . . it’s almost like Facebook or MySpace, but it’s school-oriented.”

Mario’s comment highlights a key strength of the using social networking for education—the connection between in-school and out-of-school literacies. One of my reasons for implementing the Internship Ning was based on the fact that so many students are using Facebook. According to the National School Boards Association’s “Creating and Connecting: Research and Guidelines on Online Social—and Educational—Networking,” 71 percent of students with online access use social networking tools on a weekly basis, and informal polling of the ISA senior class indicated about the same proportion. I wanted to build on this out-of-school literacy and create an opportunity for students to engage in professional web-based writing using a site that would seem familiar to them and one which they could learn to use more or less intuitively.

According to the National Council of Teachers of English’s “Writing in the 21st Century,” teachers need to recognize “that out-of-school literacy practices are as critical to students’ development as what occurs in the classroom and take advantage of this to better connect classroom work to real-world situations that students will encounter across a lifetime.” I wholeheartedly agree, and my vision for the Internship Ning was that it would be one such space that would help bridge the gulf between students’ out-of-school and in-school literacies.

However, the similarities between the features and functions of Facebook and the Internship Ning have proven to be both an advantage and an added complication. One tension between the two sites came as a surprise to me. When I asked Mario why he thought some of the other students weren’t participating on the Internship Ning as much as he was, he said, “It takes dedication to get on the Internship Ning rather than Facebook or MySpace.” He pointed out that when students sit down at the computer, they are tempted to just spend their time on the Internet socializing, and he said that it was his passion and dedication to his internship that made him want to blog about it so frequently. I had been thinking so much about taking advantage of students’ familiarity with Facebook, that I hadn’t even considered the idea that my Internship site would somehow be competing with Facebook for their attention. But of course this makes sense given the “attention economy” we now live in.

Another layer of complexity was the fact that many students needed help making a distinction between the kinds of writing typically done on Facebook and the kind of writing that was appropriate on the Internship Ning. Nick, a student who participates in a number of online communities committed to serious intellectual discussions, commented “A lot of people’s online experiences have been Facebook, so they see the Internet as a social tool to mess around on and not much else . . . they don’t see the actual potential of the Internet . . . [but] the whole point of the Internet is interconnectivity.” Nick also said, “So many people condemn social networking sites as not being productive that they don’t see that they can be a stepping stone into something more productive . . . that [social networking sites] have become part of the professional sphere . . . [and that] these tool sets and skill sets are important.”

Future Story: Where Do We Go From Here?

We’re 20 weeks into the Internship Ning experiment, and it’s already time to introduce the site to the juniors who will begin their career-explorations this summer. From now on, all students will be expected to blog and make additional contributions to the site regularly. And my hope is that with full participation, the student-to-student interactions will become even richer and more meaningful. The Internship Ning is a platform that not only creates a student-centered environment where students are engaged in meaning-making and writing about self-selected topics that are relevant and interesting to them. It also provides an authentic audience for students, and Faith said as a result, blogging on the Internship Ning has improved her writing. She
explained, “it helped me practice better writing—writing that I would want a lot of people to read, because I’m proofreading more carefully and using language that I don’t use every day.”

Next year, students’ mentors will be invited to become members of the Internship Ning. This will enable the site to truly become a virtual representation of the professional network we participate in through the Internship Program. The students seem to think having mentors participate on the site is a pretty good idea as well. Jordan said she thought “having the mentors on the Ning with us would force people to really look at their internships and think about what they’re learning from them . . . and getting comments from other people would make it more constructive.”

I’ll be very interested to see what happens when we have mentors participating on the Internship Ning. My hunch is that it will help students become more keenly aware of the site as a public, professional space rather than a private, personal one. Faith seems to agree, saying, “the fact that professionals can read our work [will help differentiate it from a Facebook-type environment] . . . that’s definitely not how it is in my world of Facebook, I mean, teachers are on Facebook, but they don’t comment professionally on our writing.” Although we can’t open the site to the World Wide Web at large for safety and security reasons, having more invited members on the site—both peers and adult professionals—will increase the learning opportunities students gain by participating on the Internship Ning. Students will have a broader audience reading and responding to their posts, which will maximize the dynamic, generative potential of the network. As Nick articulated in our conversation about online communities, “when it gets really interesting is when you talk with people who[m] you’ve never met and who have ideas you’ve never thought about before.”

In “Writing in the 21st Century,” Kathleen Blake Yancey argues that “With digital technology and, especially Web 2.0, it seems, writers are everywhere” and that “In much of this new composing, we are writing to share, yes; to encourage dialogue, perhaps; but mostly, I think, to participate.” She goes on to explain that “our impulse to write is now digitized and expanded—or put differently, newly technologicalized, socialized, and networked.” The Internship Ning is already a thriving example of writing in the 21st century where students are writing for an audience that is networked and participatory and where, as Will Richardson describes, “publication is not the end of the process any longer . . . it’s the conversation that occurs after we publish those things where the real networking and continued learning occurs.” And our site is quickly becoming more than just student-centered, it is becoming learner-centered, with all of us—students, teachers, and mentors alike—as co-learners in a virtual community.

As Nick so eloquently said, “the only way you can really teach someone something is to get them to experience it,” and through the Internship Ning, all students at The International School of the Americas are experiencing the power of writing in the 21st century, the power of networking, the power of participating.

Honor Moorman graduated from the R. L. Paschal Essential School in Fort Worth, Texas, one of the first twelve CES schools in the country. She is a National Board Certified Teacher, a teacher consultant with the San Antonio Writing Project, a reviewer for ReadWriteThink.org, and the associate editor for the National Council of Teachers of English’s Voices from the Middle. Her previous publications have been featured in English Journal, English in Texas, and The ALAN Review. Moorman wishes to thank her students Mario, Faith, Jordan, and Nick for their thoughtful contributions to this article as well as her colleagues Julia de la Torre for her illuminating feedback on the first draft and Pamela Valentine for her skillful use of the camera. Moorman can be reached at hmoorm@neisd.net.

References


Continued on page 19
I am a dancer. A teacher. An improviser. My pedagogy is centered on the concept of embodied education, a model that invites students to bring their whole bodies to the learning experience. I invite students to learn with their minds, bodies, spirits, and emotions all present, intertwined, and interrelating. I pay attention to the energy in the room, the relationships between people, the body language in response to information, the interpersonal and intrapersonal, the kinesthetic. Needless to say, computers have not had a big place in my classroom.

Another important thing to know about me as a teacher is that my toolbox is well honed. I have a set of core activities that I use to teach different units of dance and theater and I can adjust them, expand them, scaffold them, and implement them flexibly on the spot depending on how students are responding. I am often skeptical about other people’s methodologies; many of the lesson plans I find online or read about do not meet my standards of interesting, engaging, complex, embodied learning. I like to be good at what I do, and I am good at teaching with the tools in my toolbox. I am (embarrassed to say) sometimes hesitant to try new things. It overpowers me, throws me off my course, and causes change in my comfortable, effective teaching practice. But, in the fall of 2008, I did just that. I overwhelmed myself by learning new things. Two new computer programs, in fact. This did throw me off my course, make me uncomfortable, and challenge me more than I had been challenged in a long time. However, taking on the technology opened doors, offered me a chance to figure out new ways to interact with my students, and provided entirely new modes for my creative process. Working with technology also raised a new set of questions about time, power, collaboration, and ownership. The technology provided many opportunities for me to feel overwhelmed, frustrated, and inept... and then with help and practice, I was able to feel successful, accomplished, and proud.

Through Our Eyes was a multimedia performance created in collaboration with my five modern dance students. Through video, sound, and dance, the piece shows some ways race has affected their lives. I did not set out at the beginning of the semester to make this project in my dance class. It was born out of a hard conversation, good listening, and a lot of faith. A big part of my role as an educator, whether I am teaching dance, theater, social justice, or sex education (all of which I teach at Crefeld), is to help young people find their voices, their opinions, and their ideas. It is also vital to me that I figure out ways to support my students not only to know what they think, but also to help them find ways to express themselves. When I have choreographed dances for my modern dance class in the past, I used a theme to inspire movement. The pieces contained images and energetic qualities related to that theme. The focus was on performance skills, ensemble building, and movement execution. This time, however, we decided to make a dance that was really about something.

One particular day, instead of asking my students to change their clothes and get out to the floor to warm up, I joined the conversation they were having as they entered the theater. They were engaged in an animated dialogue about the issue of whether or not our school should have a Christmas tree in the lobby. There was a lot of debate going around school at that time, and
they were trying to figure out where they stood on the matter. I had taught all these students before in one capacity or another, and we have good relationships. In the spirit of teacher as generalist, I turned the moment into a learning opportunity. I asked questions, gave perspectives that were not being heard, and shared my personal opinion on the matter. As we wrapped up the debate, I appreciated them for their willingness to have hard conversations. I told them how much I liked having such interactions with them.

Suddenly, I had an idea: “What do you think about making a dance about something this semester, rather than my just teaching you some choreography?” They all loved the idea, but asked, “What would it be about?” I didn’t know. I had not thought about it before that moment. I suggested, “We are all women, maybe it could be about being female.” No response. “What about racism?” I proposed. This wasn’t entirely out of left field. We had had conversations in this class before about race. In the past, students would often unintentionally (but subconsciously?) line up for exercises according to their races. I would occasionally point it out, and they would laugh and comment on how strange it was that they had done that. The girls’ response to my suggestion of a dance about race was an excited yes, followed by an outpouring of ideas about ways they could show how racism is stupid and hurtful. I checked that they really wanted to do it. They all agreed, and we were off.

We started with the personal and the embodied. That is where I am most comfortable, and that is where I knew to start the creative process. I asked the students to write a list of things from the prompt, “I am white/black/mixed and that means...” (those were all the racial identities represented in our class). Each made a list and shared it with the group. Then I had them create movement that connected with one of the sentences they wrote. That became one of our movement sections. I also had them write about their earliest memory of knowing they were their skin color. I guided them through another dance-making structure based on the images, feelings, and characters of those stories. Sections of those dances became the bulk of the main movement part of the piece. [video]

It was clear to me that our dance project was going to need more concrete information in addition to the metaphor of movement and physical expression. I was curious to hear more about how race affects the students’ lives now, and what their opinions were about racism. So I set up some class time for interviews, which needed to be recorded. Enter the video camera. I had to watch and edit this video. Enter iMovie.

The project inspired the use of technology, not the other way around. I had a creative vision about my students sharing their experiences. The technology passively presented itself as a creative tool—if it hadn’t been in my possession to use, I would not have thought to find it. The technology became central to the project, but it was not the inspiration in any way. I needed a replacement computer two years earlier and had requested a laptop so that I could project movies and other presentations in my theater space. While I am not here to advertise for Apple, iMovie and Garageband really welcomed me into the “do-it-yourself” world of creative projects. I requested a Mac, knowing that my choreographer and other performance-related friends were all using technology in their work. Even though I didn’t expect to be doing so myself, it seemed wise to have the capabilities, in case any student wanted to make a cool movie or mixed media project. In fact, the truth is that just having the capability allowed me to conceive of a project that might use such technology. Having it so easy and accessible was the key to my battling to try. That, and a great human being keeping me company as I learned the ropes. I needed her guidance and encouragement to get me past my judging, impatient voice of “I don’t know how.”

As I was watching the interviews, I had the vision that our dance project should have a video interlude or overlay. I wanted to edit what we had recorded into a short documentary. Sara Blattner, Crefeld’s incredibly supportive tech person, sat with me and taught me how to use the program. It was remarkably easy, especially because Sarah modeled asking for help. Any time she couldn’t remember or figure something out, she would ask the help menu in the program. Together we taught me all the basics of editing, and I got going. I stayed for hours after school. I used my free time to watch and edit our footage. I was engrossed, enthralled, and really impressed with myself. Pardon
the crassness, but it felt really bad-ass to be making a movie.

It was during this editing process that I had my first moment of reflection about media consumption, and my first glimpse at the challenges of being a director of a complex creative process intended to portray multiple perspectives. I was spending hours editing the video after school and during my free periods, while in class, we collectively spent our time working on the dance section of the piece. I was sculpting the video into what I thought our piece should say. I was choosing which lines and stories to take and which to cut. The most striking aspect of the editing process was how much power I had to represent—or misrepresent—someone's ideas. In one clip, one of the white young women was talking honestly about privilege and her whiteness. If I clipped her segment in one spot, she could easily be misinterpreted as a rude, even racist, white person. If I clipped her section just a few words or a sentence later, her words had context and she appeared thoughtful and insightful. I was shocked and disturbed by the power I realized I held in that moment. And yet, I still wasn’t able to see how much of the power I was holding on to.

I shared my insight about editing with the class. They listened, and we had a short conversation about editing in the media that they consume—reality TV shows, news shows, advertisements. It was a fruitful conversation that never would have come up in my class without this project. Or if it had come up, it would have been abstract and theoretical, not personal. In this case, however, it was not theoretical. They were exposing their personal ideas and they had a stake in these concepts because it wasn’t just a critical analysis discussion; they were expressing their voices, and their real, vulnerable stories and ideas.

We were about halfway into the creation of the piece. I was so excited about “my project.” I was talking to friends, family, and colleagues about it. I was so impressed with the interesting stories and insights of my students. I was equally impressed with my own ability to make a new kind of creative expression, and to use this piece of technology that I had previously assumed was out of my reach. My story in my head was that making movies was either too cool, too complicated, or just not what I did. But here I was, successfully figuring out how to make a movie. I discovered tricks and tools that Sarah hadn’t shown me, having a deep and authentic learning experience of exploration, trial and error, and remaining completely interested in both the content and form of my learning.

And my students were getting apathetic. I could not for the life of me understand why the girls were so lazy and uninspired. It was like pulling teeth to get them to work on the dance in class. How were they not inspired by their own work? How did they not realize how revolutionary our piece was? And then it occurred to me: I had taken their project away from them and made it mine, all mine!

I realized quickly that my own excitement about using iMovie and my role as the director to move the piece forward had gotten out of balance with the ultimate goal: for the students to share their experiences and thoughts on racism. While the students’ voices were the heart of the project, they were not in charge of the project. Though I was facilitating a progressive—perhaps radical—project, I had lost track of the equally progressive and radical value of keeping the students in charge of their own learning. Their artistic voices had to be part of the design of the project, not only their stories as the content. The students had to be workers, guides. I prompted them by asking, “What do you want this project to say?” When they were in charge, the students were actually rather resistant and shy about creating a piece that would challenge their audience. I wanted the piece to rile people up, make them think, make them uncomfortable. The girls wanted to raise awareness, but they were not interested in making big waves. Despite their powerful and sometimes painful stories, when asked what they wanted to say they would reply, “Race isn’t that big of a deal.” I had to step aside a bit and let them decide what the piece should say.

Garageband was the tool that allowed the students to have more agency in the design of the project. We all agreed that we needed more voice in the soundtrack and that was easy to record on the spot with this audio recording program instead of all the steps and editing necessary with the video recording. After we recorded more of their thoughts, I did the grunt work of going through all the material and edited out the content that was clearly unnecessary (the repetitive talking, the umms, and the giggles). Then, we took class time to sit with the computer and listen to the useable clips. The students chose which parts to use and what order to put them in. Also, we realized we needed to create sections that didn’t exist that would feature voices that we wanted to be present in the piece but had not come up naturally. At this point, the girls encouraged each other to say the harder stuff, to speak up with loud, strong voices, to say what they meant. When the students were more in charge and when they were leading each other, the project was at its most vibrant. They gave me permission to do the final editing and use my judgment. In fact they desperately wanted me to stay in charge of the big picture, perhaps because I had accidentally set it up that way and they were scared to have more control and agency. I ran the final product by them several times for comments, feedback, and tweaking. Finally, we settled on the soundtrack and set out to rehearse...
sound and movement together.

In the performance of *Through Our Eyes*, technology allowed the students’ voices to be heard in a way that they would not have otherwise been comfortable sharing. They were able to speak openly, honestly, and deeply in the context of our group. They showed and shared parts of themselves that they had not been comfortable sharing in public. They delved into discussions and critical thinking that were not otherwise part of their social lives. Being able to record these intimate conversations allowed them (or me, really, with their permission) to have their voices heard on a larger scale. The students gave me permission to facilitate a question and answer section after the show. In the moment, however, the students were very shy and reluctant to discuss their experiences of race and racism. They were proud of the dance piece, and of their ideas, but in some real way, they needed the technology to do the talking for them.

This experience challenged me on so many levels. Learning to use the new technology feels like a huge success. I feel proud and impressed with myself, and thrilled to have mastered these new tools. I continued to use iMovie to edit the recording of our winter show, allowing students to have copies of the performance, something we’ve never done before. I am using Garageband again in my current dance class, as the students work on a project that answers the question, “What is it like to be your age?” This time I simply offered it as an option in their creative processes and I only recorded when and what they suggested and organized. I only edited with them by my side. I continued to struggle with how much of my opinions and direction made sense to put into the process, but I think that is a lifelong learning process for any educator-director.

The questions and challenges posed by the technology within my performance classes were interesting, provocative, and helpful for my growth as an educator. I don’t think, however, that those challenges were unique to the use of technology. I think they were a product of being awake to the experiences of my students while co-creating a performance piece. This attentiveness was heightened because I was trying new things, using new tools, causing my teaching to be fresher and perhaps messier. In addition to providing the stumbling blocks that woke me up, the technology also offered my students a medium to express themselves in a way that they were not otherwise comfortable doing. Whether because of their familiarity with media, or the distance and safety it gave them to share their ideas, the technology allowed my students to push themselves and to challenge our community about racism, an issue we all need to be more awake to.

Sara Narva has been teaching at The Crefeld School for four years. Using the model of embodied education, Narva invites participants to bring their physical, emotional, personal and intellectual selves into the learning space. She has worked as an artist and educator with elementary, middle, and high school students, as well as undergraduates in the United States and Israel. Narva earned her Masters of Education in Dance from Temple University in 2004.
Changing Schools, Changing Lives for 25 Years

New Orleans, Louisiana
November 5-7, 2009

“This kind of innovative school...is an example of how all our schools should be.”

Fall Forum 2009 celebrates CES’s 25th anniversary with powerful exchanges of innovative practices and democratic policies that increase equitable student achievement.

What: Fall Forum is CES’s most important networking and professional development event, bringing together several thousand educators, students, family members, and leading thinkers in education from around the world to exchange ideas, ask questions, and share insights about effective school and educational system practices and designs.

Who: You! The wisdom, experience, questions, challenges, and successes of educators, students, and their supporters create Fall Forum. In addition to hundreds of sessions from practitioners, Fall Forum features speakers who will add fire and inspiration to your efforts to create the best conditions for teaching and learning, including Gloria Ladson Billings, Grant Wiggins, Deborah Meier, and more.

When: Visit CES’s website for specific schedule information, and don’t miss our preconference sessions and school visits scheduled for Thursday, November 5!

Where: New Orleans, at the fabulously located Sheraton New Orleans. Thursday, November 5, will offer opportunities to join in the learning life of the city with a service-learning collaboration with the Crescent City Art Project’s Paint the Change Program, designed to transform school landscapes from mundane environments to colorful, artistic places of learning. Or spend a day learning at a New Orleans school as part of a uniquely designed day-long Fall Forum school visit.

How: There are two ways to get involved now. Visit our website and create a CES Interactive account so that we can send you bulletins with updates and information on this and other CES events. And join the CES Fall Forum Online Ning, which creates opportunities for you to connect with others interested in Fall Forum’s “Changing Schools, Changing Lives” theme. Join in discussions about CES principles and practices, connect with people planning to attend Fall Forum, and take advantage of an authentic and vibrant conversation among friends to deepen your understanding about Fall Forum and CES.

For more details about conference logistics or general Fall Forum information, contact Amy Rodriguez Lee at arlee@essentialschools.org or 510-433-1925.

Fall Forum info @ CES:
http://www.essentialschools.org/fallforum.html
Fall Forum Online @ Ning:
http://cesfallforum.ning.com

CES organizes the inspiration and know-how of an accomplished and innovative network to guide schools through the complex process of transformation. Get the tools, knowledge, contacts, and vision to create and sustain personalized, equitable, academically challenging schools that prepare all students for successful lives—“how all our schools should be.”
The only complaint I heard at the ninth grade Applied Technology final exhibition was, “Only $3,000? But I want to make a donation to every organization!” I had to agree. It was a dilemma, and a frustrating one, at that. Do you give your money to HALE (Hispanic Americans Learning English), the organization which teaches young Spanish-speaking children on John’s Island to speak English or to Hoops for the ‘Hood, the nonprofit which takes kids off the streets and teaches them teamwork, goal-setting, and a healthy lifestyle by giving them a chance to play basketball? Should you donate to Power for Life which builds wind farms and installs solar panels across the United States or to A Better Life for Abused Women and Children which provides shelter, loans, and a new start to victims of domestic abuse around the world? And what about the other nine worthy causes represented at the exhibition?

The final exhibition was a nonprofit fair, although none of the organizations were real; each had been created over the semester by a ninth grader. Visitors to the exhibition—students, parents, and faculty—were given three $1,000 “donations” to make to the three causes of their choice. It was up to the visitors to decide where their money would go; it was up to the exhibitors to persuade visitors that their cause was the most worthy. The visitors and the organizations’ founders quickly learned that whether you’re on the giving or the receiving end, you have to work within people’s economic realities; very few people have as much money as they would like to donate to nonprofit organizations. It was just one of many “real life” issues the Applied Technology students learned this past semester.

Technology With (and Without) Context

When I first arrived at Charleston Collegiate School, I was handed a college-level Microsoft business applications textbook and told I’d be teaching a one-semester ninth grade technology course. Since the course had never been taught before, I was given little more direction than: “Teach them Office and anything else you think they need to know about computers for the Upper School.” I looked at the beast of the 944-page textbook and sighed; I had been teaching technology since 1991, but always in the context of the students’ core subject classes. My previous students had learned spreadsheets in math, word processing in English, and multimedia presentations in history—or sometimes, spreadsheets in history, multimedia presentations in English, and word processing in math. Suddenly, in this new environment, I was context-less.

The textbook was full of exercises based on scenarios involving a shopping mall, a business intern, and a travel agency. The students learned the technical skills, but they didn’t find the assignments interesting (when was the last time you went to a travel agency?). And I was troubled by the approach: the students sat at computers, and I gave them a task. They were not learning when and how technology could solve problems; they were being given problems pre-designed to
be solved by technology. The exercises seemed unnatural, random, and irrelevant.

After a year of this, I decided I needed to change things significantly. Scheduling issues and limited resources made teaching the technology skills in the context of subject areas difficult; I needed to come up with my own context which would help students recognize the many practical applications for technology, as well as those situations where a pencil sketch, a 3-D model, or a face-to-face encounter might be a better approach.

My first instinct was to have the students create small businesses. I looked for curricular materials and found a few textbooks and programs I could use. As I browsed through these, a couple of things hit me. First, I am a nonprofit person. Both of my parents spent their entire lives working for nonprofit organizations, and except for a short stint in the corporate world, I have always worked for nonprofits. As I looked at the chapters on the production/distribution chain, return on investment, and supply and demand in the small business curricula, I began to feel uncomfortable. I couldn’t relate to what I was reading, and while I knew I could learn it all, I thought why not teach what I already know so well? Second, and more important, I realized that this could be a wonderful opportunity to teach a lesson much larger than spreadsheets and marketing or even how a small organization runs. If, instead of creating commercial businesses, the students created nonprofit organizations, they could get some insight into why people choose to work for a cause rather than a profit. At a time in their lives when they naturally put themselves at the center of their worlds, maybe I could help my students to begin to look outside themselves.

**Building a Nonprofit Curriculum**

When I couldn’t find any curricula for creating nonprofit organizations, I went about building my own. I looked at several books on starting your own nonprofit and decided (much to my own dismay because I hate the title) that *The Nonprofit Kit for Dummies* was the best book for my purposes. My course objectives were that the students would:

- Learn to utilize technology—including Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Internet, Google Earth, RSS, blogs—productively in Upper School and beyond
- Be introduced to all aspects of designing and running a nonprofit organization
- Apply critical thinking skills to all projects
- Demonstrate independent learning and problem-solving

My essential questions for the course were:

- When is a computer the best tool for the job?
- What makes a cause worth supporting?

I started the course with a unit on Wikipedia and validating Internet information. This was my way of letting the students (whom I had not taught previously) know my expectations and teaching style. I wanted to establish a foundation of trust in the classroom so that students felt secure in exchanging ideas freely and discussing issues of importance to them. I knew this would be important when we began talking about the causes that our nonprofit organizations would be addressing. Since there are many opinions on how (or how not) to use Wikipedia, I thought discussing and writing about this would be a great way to let students know I valued all viewpoints. Our discussions were rich and the viewpoints varied; at the end of the unit, each student proposed a policy on the use of Wikipedia for CCS students, secure in the knowledge that, as far as I was concerned, there was no “right” answer.

When we moved into the nonprofit curriculum, I started with the question: “What is a nonprofit organization?” “It’s a company that doesn’t make any money,” was the unanimous answer. I shouldn’t have been surprised at their initial lack of understanding; most of the parents of my students work for local companies or are in business for themselves as real estate agents, landscapers, house cleaners, and other small business owners. I realized I had a lot of groundwork to cover.

So we started out by comparing nonprofit and for-profit entities. I created a website of links to dozens of organizations and quickly learned that the ones that were of most interest to the students were those created by children as well as those in the Charleston area. International groups with far-reaching missions like Greenpeace and World Wildlife Fund proved to be overwhelming at this point. We analyzed mission statements and the types of services offered, and we looked at how different groups raised money. We talked about why people start or choose to work for nonprofits and watched videos of nonprofit founders telling their own stories. At the end of this unit, I asked the class to brainstorm a list of adjectives that they felt described nonprofit employees. Expecting descriptors like “selfless,” “compassionate,” and “dedicated,” I couldn’t keep myself from laughing when the very first contribution to the list was: “tired.” That was when I knew they were beginning to get it.

After all this exploration, the students began designing their nonprofit organizations. For most, identi-
fying a cause was easy since they had been thinking about it for a few weeks. Others, however, found this step challenging: they didn’t know a lot about the problems in the world, they had never volunteered anywhere, or perhaps their parents had not made such issues a priority. I asked these students to focus on what they cared about or were interested in, or to reflect back on a difficult personal experience that might have been made easier had a supportive organization been available (such an experience served as the inspiration for the creation of the aforementioned HALE).

Creating an Identity and a Budget
With causes identified, each student created a mission statement, name for the organization, logo, slogan, a title for him or herself, and a business card. They used Word, Publisher, Paint, and GIMP to accomplish these tasks. They signed up for new Gmail accounts with appropriately chosen email addresses. They searched online classified ads to identify an actual piece of property they could rent or buy for their organization, and then looked up that location on Google Earth. The student with the animal shelter chose a house with several acres of land while the student whose organization was providing basketball opportunities found a warehouse in Chicago that he planned to convert into courts. This step gave them a real address for their literature as well as realistic rent/mortgage payments for budgeting purposes. Finally, they found an appropriate, available domain name on a site such as godaddy.com.

Using Microsoft Word’s Résumé Wizard, the students then created résumés, which were based on reality except that they included their nonprofit position as their most current employment (some did not have any real employment yet in their young lives, so this was good practice). Not only would these résumés become part of their final exhibition, but this assignment also gave the students an opportunity to take stock of their experiences and accomplishments to date with an eye toward enhancing those in the coming years for college application purposes.

Budgeting came next, and students learned about expenses and income, particularly earned income and contributed income. They created Excel spreadsheets which included the rents/mortgages they had found earlier and estimated expenses according to the services they were offering. They decided how they were going to staff their organizations: whom did they need to pay and what could they use volunteers for? They learned about benefits, insurance, utilities, and all of the expenses involved in running a business. They had to decide on a salary for themselves; in a society that relentlessly sends the message that making a lot of money is the ultimate definition of success, they had to weigh their own needs and desires against the needs of the organization. Every day in the news they were hearing about the multimillion dollar salaries of auto industry executives and the astronomical bonuses of bank employees, yet no one gave themselves more than $50,000/year.

The Cause Becomes Central
By now we were about eight weeks into our study of nonprofits and many things were becoming second nature to the students. They understood the financial constraints that nonprofits were under, and they did everything with that in mind. When they designed publications, for example, they kept the colors to a minimum and the designs simple. More and more, I saw their cause become their primary concern. “I need to hire two teachers that I can rely on to be there every day, so that’s two salaries with benefits. Do you think I could make some money if I sold teddy bears and t-shirts with our logo on it? Maybe I should start an adult ESL program and charge a small amount for it.” “What if I had the homeless people work in the kitchen and around the shelter? It would help teach them responsibility and give them some job skills, while saving us from having to hire someone else.” “If I got a big name like Michael Jordan to be on my board, then maybe it would be easier to expand to other cities so we can help more kids.”

The classes began to run themselves. I would introduce the “problem” and the students would use the knowledge they had accumulated—and the technology—to help solve it. You need to communicate with the public . . . “We’ll create a newsletter!” You need to raise some money . . . “We’ll make a PowerPoint! But we won’t make a student PowerPoint with lots of bells and whistles and images zooming around. We’ll make one that’s appropriate for the business world, for people or companies who might be able to support us.” I watched with pride as they became more and more independent, tackling increasingly complex problems with very little guidance.

CES Principles in Action
This curriculum was intentionally built upon the “student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach” principle; it was designed, as the Common Principle states, “to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.” Each day, students added a building block to the structure of their organization, and each student designed each block individually. Each decision they made was based on the decisions they had made previously; their fundraising efforts reflected their budgets, for instance, and their organizational “look” was based on the color and design of the logo they had created early in the semester. Not
Learning Technology Skills Through Social Entrepreneurialism

Nonprofit Organizations Created by CCS Ninth Graders

The nonprofit organizations created by the ninth graders broke down along gender lines, with the girls creating organizations that helped children and animals and the boys creating organizations involved with sports or alternative energy. Having recently heard Michael Thompson speak on how schools can unwittingly be hostile environments for boys since they often squelch some of their natural instincts and interests, I was thrilled to be able to give both boys and girls a chance to pursue something that was personally meaningful. Their organizations included:

- HALE (Hispanic Americans Learning English) – Providing ESL services for young children
- Hoops for the Hood – Giving low-income youth an opportunity to play basketball
- Thoughtful Threads – Improving self-confidence through giving students nicer clothing
- A Chance for Childhood – Providing opportunities for homeless children to participate in athletics
- A Better Life for Abused Women and Children – An international organization providing shelter and loans for women who need a new start
- Backwoods for Kids – Providing hunting experiences to underprivileged youth
- Make a Goal Foundation – Bringing soccer equipment, coaches, and training to the children of Africa
- Race 2 a Change – Giving retired race horses a chance to live out their natural lives peacefully
- Power for Life – Providing alternative energy solutions to towns and businesses
- The Nuclear Environment Center – Lobbying for a reduction in the use of nuclear power
- Organizations sheltering abused and abandoned animals:
  - Peace 4 Pets
  - NEFFA (No Excuse for Animal Abuse)
  - HASC (Helping Animals in South Carolina)

A Demonstration of Mastery—With Some Technology Backup

The final exhibition, ironically, didn’t include any technology at all. It was exclusively face-to-face. The students displayed the products from the semester: business cards, résumés, budgets, graphs, newsletters, mission statements, etc. Some students brought in props and incentives to lure visitors to their area. Hoops for the ‘Hood had a small basketball hoop where visitors could make a basket and win a Hershey’s Kiss. It was brilliant marketing, especially when a lot of the audience was younger than 15 (although the adults enjoyed showing off their basketball prowess too!). In two 45-minute blocks, H4H’s founder received more than $50,000 in “donations.”

The most common question I got from visitors to the exhibition was, “Are these organizations real?” It was the ultimate confirmation of the Coalition’s sixth principle: “demonstration of mastery.” By the end of the semester, the students had constructed their organizations so solidly and had internalized their messages so completely that visitors to the exhibition found it difficult to differentiate between our real and invented worlds. The nonprofit founders could speak with confidence about specific people or animals that their organizations had served. They could outline the biggest challenges that they were facing. They could hypothesize about what the future held and what the attendant financial implications might be. They could formulate an answer to any question, and they did it with great composure. They believed in what they were doing, and they got potential “donors” to believe in it too.

And everything they talked about was supported, resolved, or illustrated by technology. Graphs and charts showed their current and projected financial status. Newsletters told the stories of those who benefited from their services and announced upcoming events. Business cards gave contact information should someone want to make a future donation. Résumés answered questions about the backgrounds of the founders. The curriculum redesign had succeeded; the students learned the technology skills, all within a much larger context, one that was rooted in real life and positive global citizenship.
Learning Technology Skills Through Social Entrepreneurialism

New Students, New Ideas
As I begin the second semester with a new group of ninth graders, I am excited to introduce them to nonprofit organizations and explore their ideas for making the world a better place. One boy has decided that his organization is going to be affiliated with HALE and will offer free translation services to adults who need them when visiting doctors, legal offices, and other offices and agencies. Another student is trying to figure out a way to rescue the abandoned female Chinese babies they’ve been reading about in English class.

I hope that this social conscience stays with them through their school years and into adulthood. For now, I can say that they’ve already been successful in turning around one life: mine. I was a teacher trapped in a dissatisfying curriculum who now feels renewed and reinvigorated by the engagement with learning, innovation, and genuine empathy I see in the classroom every day.

Jean Pendleton is the Director of School Renewal at Charleston Collegiate School in John’s Island, SC. She is responsible for overseeing the school’s curriculum, professional development, community service program, and all things environmental – in other words, as she says, “anything that involves change.” She has worked in schools for nearly 20 years, eight of which were spent at Brimmer and May School in Chestnut Hill, MA, one of the early independent school members of the Coalition.

Charleston Collegiate School is a preschool-grade 12 independent day school with an enrollment of 275 students. Located just outside Charleston, SC, the school is one of the most progressive in the area. CCS’s mission is to have a positive impact on its students, so that they may positively impact the world around them. The school prepares students to face life’s challenges with confidence, strong problem-solving skills, and a solid ethical foundation. CCS is a community of cultural and economic diversity which fosters compassion, social awareness, and respect for community and environment.

Adventures in Web 2.0
Continued from page 9


Donate Now to Celebrate 25 Years of CES

CES has launched an Individual Giving Campaign to raise $25,000 to honor and celebrate the 25 years that CES has given collective voice to educators working for personalized, equitable, and academically challenging schools. Your contribution will allow CES to expand our charge of developing innovative teaching and learning strategies and tools that bring the Common Principles to life, continue to publish Horace to tell your stories, and sponsor the gatherings that help you grow as an educator, such as Fall Forum and Summer Institute.

CES needs your help, in whatever amount you can afford, to spark the next 25 years of innovative, student-centered, teacher-powered education. Please visit the CES website to click on the Donate Now button at the top of every page, and encourage your colleagues and others who care about creating and sustaining great schools everywhere for everyone to do the same.

Visit www.essentialschools.org to Donate Now. Thank you.
Technology as a Fence and a Bridge

by Bryan Wehrli,
Amy Biehl High School

Note from the author:
Over the past few years I’ve become increasingly curious about the role of technology in the classroom. I’m interested in teacher attitudes toward new technologies and whether technologies can help us think differently about teaching and learning. This article is adapted from a paper I wrote for a doctoral course on technology, society, and education at the University of New Mexico. Reading and research helped me understand what I experienced in my classroom and school.

At a recent meeting of humanities teachers, my Amy Biehl High School (ABHS) colleagues shared their frustration with our students’ use of laptops. “They sit down, open up the screen, and it feels like a fence.” I shared their discomfort. I get tired of asking students to close their laptops and attend to the lesson, the discussion, the reading, the white board, the screen, and most important, me. I want my students’ eyes fixed on me and everything I present in the classroom. My feelings are hurt when it appears that my students would rather be doing anything besides engage in my scintillating lesson. “I say we take them away,” a colleague suggested. “Let’s use the mobile labs and have students check out laptops as needed.” Although our agenda didn’t permit further discussion, I know we’ll think about this more deeply and set aside our perception of laptops (and the new technologies that will appear in our classrooms tomorrow) as a threat to classroom order, teacher authority, and our traditional position (figuratively and literally) at the front of the classroom. As Nicholas Burbles and Thomas Callister remind us, changes that accompany technology are neither good nor bad, they are both good and bad. The laptop is both a fence and a bridge.

Cell phones, laptops, the Internet and social networking sites make us anxious and magnify the gap between teacher and student. The influx of devices creates a clamor, but little clarity for schools. We’re not sure what to do. At ABHS, headphone use was restricted on the premise that listening was antisocial and eroded community. But my observation revealed that students were splitting headphones and talking to each other about music. The only sense in which their behavior could be deemed antisocial is that students were not socializing with adults. A safety concern was also cited as a reason to ban headphones in hallways, despite the fact no one could cite an example of an injury. Instead of asking, “What are you listening to?” it was, “Hand me your headphones.” This knee-jerk response is ominously similar to the policies of traditional high schools nearby. We’re essentially telling our students, “What matters most to you—music, pop culture, your phone, social networking—doesn’t belong in school.” In banning the devices, we ban the conduit for the culture that matters to students. We may as well stick our heads in the sand. Cathleen Norris and Elliot Soloway put it bluntly, writing, “Change is coming; the impending mobile disruption will without question impact K-12. Educators can continue to be enforcers, battling with students over their mobile devices, wasting a unique opportunity in time . . . schools have a choice—build (and patch and patch) a Maginot Line against impending mobile disruption, or use the energy inherent in the disruption to revitalize education.”

When I began investigating the issue, I discovered a heated debate and a spectrum of views. On one end is
a professor who confiscated a phone, then “produced a hammer and proceeded to smash the offending device,” describes Samuel Freedman. On the other end is a professor who “prefers to teach in classrooms with two screens—one to project his slides, and another to project a Twitter stream of notes from students.” Although many teachers would consider this a recipe for disaster, the professor found that it enhanced his classroom. These two teachers represent opposite ends of the continuum of educators’ responses nationwide.

Most schools have policies that limit or ban student use of devices and/or the Internet. Why are we so apprehensive? While administrators and teachers cite safety concerns and the distractions devices bring, another answer is that teachers “often see new technologies as threatening their scholarly authority, precisely because these technologies require a re-thinking of roles,” writes Henk Huijser. When knowledge is no longer scarce, what is a teacher’s role? Will students need us? If students can easily access information at home, why come to school? In a trenchant analysis, Michael Wesch writes that “in some ways these technologies act as magnifiers . . . by allowing students to tune out more easily.” What problems are being magnified? Wesch’s answer is that we’re facing a crisis of significance, “the fact that many students are now struggling to find meaning and significance in their education.” I disagree with Wesch only slightly. It’s not so much a problem of students finding meaning in education. They want to learn. It is a problem of finding meaning or significance in our schools and in my classroom. No wonder my students’ laptops make me uncomfortable.

Then a colleague sent me Clayton Christensen’s Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns. The term “disruptive” immediately resonated because I believe our teaching, classrooms, and schools desperately need disruption. In terms of where, when, and how learning takes place, too little has changed in the past 100 years. Most teaching and learning, even in charter schools, is based on an antiquated pedagogy. A Harvard Business School professor, Christensen coined the term disruptive innovation and developed a theory explaining the failure of once-prominent businesses in the computer and automobile industries, among others. As so frequently happens, educators became interested in this theory and its application to education reform. Perhaps technological disruption could disrupt a torpid public school system, as Christensen explains, “The most promising reforms hold the potential to move us away from the current monolithic education system to one centered on individual student needs. Efforts that have made noise in this challenging time focus on “disrupting class”—changing our fundamental assumptions about how learning occurs, when it occurs, and where it occurs. They are challenging and improving upon the long-established learning interaction between student and teacher in the traditional classroom setting, which has remained strikingly unchanged for generations.”

Although theories originating in the corporate world can be problematic in terms of their applicability for schools, parts of this theory make sense. A helpful element—frequently missing from ed-tech debates—is the need for a valid, if basic, pedagogical framework. Christensen understands that students learn differently and that a central problem is the way school is arranged “in a monolithic batch mode system where all students are taught the same things on the same day in the same way.” Unfortunately, Christensen neglects the social and emotional aspects of a teacher’s work, for example, suggesting that new educational technologies, a new structure of the school day and a new role for the teacher will enable schools to “increase the number of students per live teacher.” This is Christensen’s cost-efficiency thinking, but the ways a teacher could personalize learning for larger numbers of students remains a question.

Christensen does not address race, class, gender, and language, and this is problematic: assuming that disruption will be driven by teachers, parents and students, Christensen neglects to consider whether everyone will have equal access to the necessary tools. Consideration of culture is similarly lacking, which is important to note as no tool is culturally neutral. Disrupting Class captures perpetual enthusiasm for technology’s potential to transform education. Given the myriad problems facing our schools, frustrations with reform efforts, and the phenominally rapid development of new educational technologies, it is not
surprising that the notion of disruption generates such fervor, and this is not the first time reformers have invested their hopes in technology. Seymour Papert clearly had a transformation in mind when he wrote, “computers serve best when they allow everything to change.” Exactly what does a transformation of teaching and learning look like? Françoise Blin and Morag Munro put it this way: “When the introduction of a new object or of a new tool, such as a VLE [virtual learning environment] results in a serious alteration of the internal structure of the teaching activity system, we can infer that the activity system has been disrupted. If the disruption manifests itself through construction and adoption of new curricula, assessment procedures, teaching methodologies, resources and tasks, we can infer . . . that this disruption is expansive.” In other words, technology has been constructively and sufficiently disruptive when teaching, learning, and schools look very different and when we have new answers to questions of when, where, and how learning takes place.

Although we need to balance our enthusiasm with skepticism, any potential for meaningful change warrants consideration. A set of recent developments increases the possibility of a real disruption: 1) the technology-immersed character of “digital natives,” known as the NetGen, 2) a bottom-up push for technology’s place in schools, 3) the interactive and participatory possibilities of Web 2.0, and 4) an increasing acceptance of the notion of social knowledge construction (as embodied in wikis). Primary among these factors is the centrality of technology in the lives of NetGen. Our students, so-called digital natives, are already discovering educational uses for emergent technologies. They are not waiting for permission. In the past, technology was introduced by adults, but now students carry the devices into our classrooms. The push is bottom-up. Another critical factor is the interactive and participatory nature of Web 2.0, which encourages participation, creation, collaboration, and distribution. Indeed, a “new ethos” of knowledge and knowledge construction, seems to be emerging,” write Michele Knobel and Dana Wilber. Once viewed as the exclusive domain of academe, knowledge is increasingly accessible and decentralized. Together, these trends may help fulfill the promise of technology to shift teaching and learning toward the 21st century. However, if employed without a valid learning theory, educational technologies will not disrupt. Transformative disruption is much more likely to occur in Essential schools and other schools that nurture learning communities. The response of teachers to new technologies, whether they reach out with a hammer or a curious mind, can be influenced by schools culture and professional community. When a school is conceived as a community of learners in which curiosity is nurtured and where teachers are encouraged to collaborate, take risks, and experiment, technology will more likely disrupt positively. A teacher’s view of a laptop as a fence or a bridge can be influenced by colleagues and the culture of the school in which they teach. Where the student perspective is front and center, technological innovation can flourish and contribute to a transformation of teaching, learning, and schools themselves. CES schools are well situated to harness technology for the transformation of teaching and learning because the CES Common Principles incorporate a valid, student-centered pedagogy, a teacher-as-coach model, personalization, and respect for students. Our schools are collaborative and reward risk-taking.

But we have to understand that emergent technologies are not just tools. These tools are changing us, our culture, and our schools. As Michael Wesch states. “This is a social revolution, not a technological one, and its most revolutionary aspect may be the ways in which it empowers us to rethink education.” We should embrace educational technologies as another tool to transform our teaching, learning, and schools. Let’s enthusiastically accept what matters to our students and figure out how to harness their interests. Let’s not view technology just as a new tool for an old task, but as a new tool that can help us think differently about teaching and help our students think differently about learning.

One morning, I decided to take a few minutes to share with students what I’ve been learning about educational technology and more importantly, what I’ve been feeling about the laptops. I have the luxury of working at a school with a deliberately built culture of respect. My students listened. I still have to ask them to close their computers, but only once. Now my colleagues and I need to open ours.
Bryan Wehrli is a service-learning supervisor and teacher of Humanities and Economics. He has been teaching at ABHS almost since its inception nine years ago. His doctoral studies are in teacher education.

References


Papert, S. (n.d.) “Technology in the schools: To support the system or render it obsolete.” Available online at http://www.mff.org/edtech/article.taf?_function=detail&Content_uid1=106


Sometimes our classroom is quiet. You might hear the tapping of the computer keys and an occasional chuckle or a sigh. Two or three students sit at separate tables; one is focused on the laptop screen diligently writing her second draft of her science report. In the other room, a student meets with Mr. D. about his math project. Sometimes it’s crazy! Music comes from a computer. Students discuss their video. An alum sits at the table helping another student with her digital project. A teacher works with a student who is there with her newborn, discussing her work plan for home and the other teacher talks with a few students about political philosophies. Meanwhile, some students wait their turn to confer with the teachers, and others are packing to leave after a few hours of work. This is our classroom at any given time, on any given day.

Like every classroom, we have students with varied learning styles, interests, and backgrounds. However, our students, who very much want to be in school, have constraints on their schedules that make it challenging for them to be present during the typical daytime school hours. We have young moms with and without daycare. We have students who need to work to help their families pay the rent or simply to survive on their own. We have students who have health conditions that flare up, causing them to be in and out of school and disrupting their academic progress. We have students who simply are “too old” to sit in a regular classroom with other students. They all have a mission: to finish school and receive their high school diplomas.

Our History: What Worked, What Didn’t
In 2001, Boston Day and Evening Academy (BDEA) started its Distance Learning Program (DL) to serve students who could not come to school on a regular basis. Because we are by design a competency-based school, the opportunity to have a program where students truly demonstrated the required skill set rather than just attending specific courses met the school’s mission. Initially, the DL program was designed for a specified group of students who met the criteria of being able to demonstrate independent study skills and had issues that kept them from attending school regularly. BDEA aimed to lease school-owned laptops to them so they could complete a competency-based program from home. In the DL program’s first year, I was its coordinator and only teacher. I was going to be the students’ advisor as well as their program manager, assigning “tests” and practice programs that students “tested into” from the Plato Learning program. Then reality set in.

At that time, the installed version of Plato was not compatible with the Apple iBooks laptops. As an immediate remedy, we switched to Plato’s web-based version. Inner-city networking was in its early stages, and there were many Internet glitches that occurred during our time in school. Our access to technical support was limited; because we were an evening program, when we had problems at 6:00 PM, the Office of Information Technology was closed.

As well, computers at home were not as accessible to students as they are now. The idea of leasing laptops was well-intended, but sending students home with brand new computers was not wise. First, though
students had computer bags, they became walking targets for theft within their neighborhoods and on the bus. Second, wireless connections were not widely available. The best way for students to get on the Internet was through a dial-up connection, which proved to be a nightmare for students without a landline. Even those that had active landlines faced challenges because of the poor quality of the phone connections in their living spaces that often had not benefitted from telecommunications upgrades for some time, if ever.

In addition to acclimating ourselves to Plato and troubleshooting our technology challenges, I still had to help students who were trying to do school in a “flexible” manner. They needed work to do and to feel that they were making progress. In that first year, with 12 students, I created “homework packets” that not only provided skills practice, but also opportunities to demonstrate competence. Our school-wide competency-based program was “product-based,” meaning that students could demonstrate competencies through designated assignments. I created what I could and borrowed the rest from the math department. (I am not a math teacher.) This survival mode helped the students, but I wanted more quality within the program.

Moving from year one to year two, I had two major worries: math (did I mention that I am not, by training, a math teacher?) and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Massachusetts was coming down hard on trying to implement the mandatory, standardized MCAS tests English-language arts and math. Students also needed more schedule options for check in and instruction. To alleviate my worries, my own hours were expanded and the program was able to hire a part-time math instructor.

We continued to use Plato because we were under contract, but its value and practicality diminished for us. It wasn’t that the program wasn’t good, but it didn’t fit our needs. We came to understand that even though our students could not and did not always come to school, for some, school was the one thing in their lives that they could count on; it’s always there. Sending them home with a program and assigning a web activity to teach them equations isolated them even more. Our students needed and wanted human contact; and I committed to providing that contact as an advisor and teacher. From year two on, BDEA realized the full value of the program. Students who once thought they were not going to finish because they couldn’t come to school were now making progress on their own time and schedules, and they were graduating. In 2003, when BDEA physically moved across the city to its present location, the program was given a chance to grow. We not only got a permanent math instructor, Ray Dimagiba, but we grew in numbers; first to 30 students, and then to our present 50.

The DL Program Today
We are available for students to come in to work or check in for nine and a half hours a day, Monday through Thursday, with five hours on Friday. Students are not assigned a schedule. Instead, their “required” time varies, case-by-case, student-by-student. We do ask that students come in and/or check in via email or by phone at least once a week. Certain students have particular situations in which they truly are unable to come in, so we establish an alternate schedule and means of communication. Ultimately, we rely on trust: even though we don’t see them frequently, we know they are doing their work, and their proof is in the work itself that they bring when they do come in.

BDEA students have had interruptions in their high school careers; generally speaking, our students have had a rough road of it. Because of the independent nature of the DL program, we prefer that students are at least 18 years old, have had some time in high school,
have passed at least one if not two of the required Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests, and have a significant reason for not being able to attend school regularly. If students are currently enrolled at BDEA, their teachers and advisors will recommend them to the DL program if they have demonstrated they are capable of working independently and have had legitimate lapses in attendance. As well as, the admissions office will note particular new students who are older than the age of 18, have been in school at least two years, and have not had success in their attempts to finish high school.

When students enter the DL program, the program instructors design an academic plan based on what the students’ transcripts and progress reflect. The program is not a “one-size fits all” curriculum. Each student has his or her own academic plan and schedule, based on the school-wide, competency-based Individualized Learning Plan frameworks. If there is a “little noted history,” a plan may take more time to develop. Competency development and assessment includes “testing” the student’s skill level through introductory projects or assignments in the required competency areas as well as observation of the students’ commitment to the program in their efforts to attend school and maintain communication. The example of a student who enters the program with a transcript filled with “F’s” for two years, but who has passed MCAS tells us that the student has the basic state required skill set, but there might have been issues that kept the student from coming to school. We establish a schedule for this particular student, while providing him/her with basic projects that include writing and research skills. In math, Ray might give the student a department-created diagnostic corresponding to the student’s last successful math course as well discuss a specific math problem in order to assess the student’s level of understanding and ability to explain the concepts.

Once we establish our students’ status in terms of demonstrated competencies, we can establish a “prescription for completion.” BDEA students must complete three major requirements in order to graduate; competency demonstration, MCAS passage, and Capstone Project completion. In the regular programs, the students take module-like courses that allow them to demonstrate competency. For example, the math competency course options are broken down into number sense, algebra I, algebra II, and geometry. Depending on a student’s diagnostic test results, the student will take the mapped courses to meet all of the math competencies. DL students demonstrate competency through one-on-one teacher-student conversation sessions, integrated projects, individual assignments, and group discussions. As necessary, we incorporate MCAS prep into the student’s academic plan. Through each of these competency opportunities, technology is used as a support and a tool. Students use the Internet to research, and enhance their research and presentations using PowerPoint, iMovie, and GarageBand. Students use Google tools to email and collect their work, and participate in a social network, the Ning. Over the years the program has experimented with other online sites such as Nicenet (free) Knowledge Forum (not free) and Blogmeister (free). Nicenet and Knowledge Forum were great for posting assignments and holding discussions, but lacked the luster to hold high school students’ attention. Blogmeister was an excellent teaching tool to introduce students to the skills of blogging, webpage management, and commenting on each other’s work online. However, the Ning has been the most successful with DL students because it offers the “glitz” of posting photographs and music, similar to MySpace and Facebook. The Ning is both a creative opportunity for students and suitable for the classroom purposes of discussion, blogging, and sending messages. As well, the Ning is private; all of the students’ work is password protected and accessible by “invitation only.”

The final school-wide requirement, the Capstone Project, is a larger project with research, writing, experiential, and digital components that focuses on a student-generated essential question. We encourage students to create a question around a career, creative or social interest. BDEA students begin the Capstone Project after completing competency demonstrations. In the DL program, the Capstone Project is the center of students’ academic plans. Once we get a handle on “where the student is” in terms of competency levels and the particular skills s/he has demonstrated, we initiate conversations about the Capstone Project. The Capstone project is designed to be scaffolded: for example, a more novice student may be months away from completing the Capstone Narrative Essay, in which the students connect themselves to their selected questions, but she/he can do a more basic narrative retelling of a life experience so that s/he can learn and practice the writing process. In the Ning, students write blogs about their real-life experiences connected to their essential questions, and read, comment on, and learn from their classmates’ blogs.

Pulling all students into the Capstone experience helps condense the academic plan by combining the remaining skills with the topics students want to focus on—this beckons students into finishing school as they become more invested in what they are doing. Shaniqua, an 18 year-old mother and soon to be graduate, enjoyed her Capstone experience. She says, “The Capstone is good because you get to make up your own questions and study things you want to learn about.”
The CES Common Principles Enacted in BDEA’s Distance Learning Program
What happens every day in the DL space is differentiated and structured, calm and crazy, creative and consistent. These qualities make us a unique program that reflects what the Common Principles intended.

Learning to Use One’s Mind Well
Our academic mission is to have students think for themselves using the information that is around them and become life-long learners. The DL program’s instructors honor the principle “learning to use one’s mind well” by talking to students about their work and consistently encouraging them to think deeply about what they study. Even on the Ning, students can respond to and question their classmates, encouraging one another to dig a little more into their own ideas.

Less Is More, Depth over Coverage
Because our students have various obstacles that keep them from coming to school on a regular schedule, we understand their time is valuable. They have real grown up things to take care of—school is another thing on the list. But they still have their eyes on the prize: the diploma. For every one of them, earning that high school diploma has been a struggle. Our format of a flex schedule combined with a curriculum that is based on the demonstration of competency and embedded interdisciplinary projects demonstrates that less is more. Students can get more done in less time. Their education is not about a number of hours in the seat but about the quality of work that students can do on their own schedules. The less is more concept also applies when students take their personal interests and the issues they care about and use that content to fulfill their academic requirements. Math instructor Dimagiba comments, “Acquiring the ability to focus on one thing is important not only for the information but also, and more importantly, for the experience in being able to focus so much of yourself in that one thing. Less is more; it’s about process. The journey is the destination, the experience of getting there, not the actual graduation.”

Goals Apply to All Students
It is the goal of every high school student to earn the coveted diploma. In DL, it is understood that the means by which each student reaches the same goal will differ from student to student. According to Dimagiba, “There is something amazing about each and every student. We’re simply setting up the proper stage for it.”

Personalization
Because students in the DL program have different situations that keep them from coming to school on a regular basis, their highly individualized schedules are examples of personalization. Nearly every component of the program is personalized from individualized learning plans to the content of the Capstone Project. DL students understands that their experiences will be distinct as they proceed toward graduation.

Student-as-Worker, Teacher-as-Coach
Much of the success of DL students is based on their individual drive and commitment to finishing high school. The teachers are there to teach when and what is needed, and to support students as they work through their academic plans. As soon as students enter the program, we tell them “It’s on you! We are here to support you where you need it, to direct you and guide you through your academic coursework. But when it comes down to it, your success depends on you.” Accountability, self-direction, and independence are attributes of a successful DL student. Sometimes guidance is more important than content. Marie, a 19-year-old mother, came to DL at BDEA after trying to return to a regular high school to finish her senior year after having her baby. Feeling like she couldn’t focus all day in a regular classroom, she took the advice of her cousin who just graduated from the DL program. Her impressive record and demonstrated learning from her previous school meant that she could complete the Capstone Project. “What works for me is the flexibility,” commented Marie, “Rather than worry about all my classes all day, every day, I can focus on one project on my time. It’s on me to keep in touch and know what I need to do. But whenever I need help, I know where I can find it.” Marie now is applying to colleges and is ready to graduate in June.

Demonstration of Mastery
The whole point of a competency-based education comes down to the ways students demonstrate mastery. The majority of the ways students move through the curriculum plan is by talking about their work and demonstrating what they have completed to get to the final point of competency. As a means of doing a final assessment at the end of a trimester, students in the Distance Learning Program participate in the Habits of Mind summit, in which they are given a small reading, topic, or question to discuss from a number of perspectives. They are required to apply their work and experiences to the theme. This summit experience allows students to demonstrate competency and to identify the BDEA Habits of Mind and understand what skills they need to master in order to graduate. The Capstone Project is also a culminating experience that focuses on students’ ability to research, write, and communicate ideas regarding a topic about which they are passionate. “The project

Continued on next page
is the umbrella that holds all the competencies,” says Karen Cowan, acting Co-Head of School at BDEA. “When they open the umbrella, they can look up and see the spokes that flow from their topic and see how they can all can connect.”

**Tone of Decency and Trust**

When others hear a DL student talk about the program, they often become alarmed. One of the many comments students frequently offer about their success is that we don’t push them, nag them, or get on their cases if they have a “momentary lapse.” It’s not that we don’t care. We care a lot. But our philosophy is that we support and we always emphasize students’ personal responsibility. We respect their choices knowing that if they choose to be consistent, they will succeed. Many of our students often have no choice but to set school aside for some time, but they trust us to allow them to pick up where they left off. We trust them to keep us in the loop as to what is happening with them and know that when they can, they will be back. It is this sense of trust that allows the students to find success in more than just their assignments. Curricular flexibility combined with teacher availability gives students confidence in school and sets the “tone of decency and trust.” Students understand and trust that when they do come in they are not “punished” or reprimanded for what time they have missed, but instead are welcomed because they returned. Karen Cowan states, “The program is not the perceptive notion of what distance learning is; ‘distance’ is the time they spend away from the classroom, because they still come in to connect.”

Jesse, a 20-year old senior who struggled to focus in the classroom, because they still come in to connect.

**Commitment to the Entire School**

Though one of the DL program teachers specializes in math and the other in humanities, our all-encompassing advisory is what truly makes this program work. We talk to the students about their work and their progress. Most important, we find time during every student visit to talk to all students about themselves. It is all about them. And for us, it’s not just about teaching, but it’s also about listening, supporting, and offering options to help them be successful. Ray and I have our academic specialties, but we are generalists in our approach with each student. We can’t work effectively with students until we know and understand them and why they aren’t able to attend school in a regular program. Our academics are embedded in the advisory model and we know that “life” is a reality that should be embraced in their education and at school.

Kristin, an 18-year old senior, appreciates that her Capstone Project on personal health not only helped her finish her science requirement, but also provided an opportunity for her personal growth. “The project wasn’t just about one subject or another. It was about learning more about me.” She adds, “The program was more than just school. My schedule works around getting things done. It’s a great prep for college because it teaches you how to manage your time.”

**Resources dedicated to teaching and learning**

The DL program exemplifies “resources dedicated to teaching and learning.” With 50 students, two full time teachers, and two post-grad advisors housed in two connected classrooms, our “department” resources are mostly spent on technology equipment and maintenance in the service of learning and student progress. Other materials include art supplies, random books for reading, and snacks. We like to keep snacks on hand for our students, who appreciate this token of TLC.

**Democracy and Equity**

The DL program truly works for students who run into obstacles that have kept them from finishing high school. While the program works best for students who work independently, have a strong skill base and are very committed to their education, not every student in the program has these qualities. If a student wants to finish school and is committed to this goal, we will do our best to serve that student. We believe that everyone needs something different to be successful. Some students may need more skill-building but their life circumstances keep them from going to school. We try never to turn kids away; they all deserve a chance. If there is room on the roster, if they are close to the age of 18, and they have the
potential to work independently, we do everything we can to give them a shot. Individualization plays a huge role in this: each student’s program may differ and it may take some longer to complete their plan, but all students get a chance.

Conclusion
As any classroom teacher can understand, it is difficult to meet each and every student’s individual academic needs on a daily basis, let alone be flexible when it comes to dealing with personal issues. The CES Common Principles encourage all of us to reach beyond the daily classroom structure to do our best to put the students first as a group and as individuals. Life is not fair for many of our youth. And for some, it seems no matter how hard they try, challenges constantly plague their intentions to do better. As instructors and advisors in the DL program, we are committed to meeting the goal of “when there’s a will, there’s a way.” If we can get a student to commit and work hard, we will develop a plan that will get them to where they want to go. It’s an unconventional, but with the right combination of personal attention and technological support, it works.

Jennie Hallisey has been a faculty member with Boston Day and Evening Academy since its inception as the Downtown Evening Academy in 1994. She has taught in high schools in California and Massachusetts. As coordinator of the BDEA Distance Learning program, Hallisey emphasizes to all of her students the importance of passion in reaching their academic potential, as well as continuing to use their strengths and passions to grow and learn after graduation. Hallisey holds a B.A. in Speech Communication from Purdue University, an M.A. in Guidance Counseling from Bridgewater State University, and has a certification in Speech Communication, ELA, and Guidance Counseling.

Principles and Practices for School Improvement

To improve instructional practices, turn around a failing school, or revamp an entire district, the Coalition of Essential Schools can help.

Leading the way in educational innovation for 25 years, CES principles and practices have been successfully implemented in hundreds of schools and have changed the lives of thousands of students, paving the way for successful transitions to college and careers.

Drawing from a national network of coaches who use a proven, research-based framework for coaching for equity, CES has developed a wealth of information and strategies to help districts and schools improve instruction and meet AYP targets. By building the capacity of district and site leaders and increasing effective instructional practices at your schools, we can help you dramatically improve outcomes for English language learners, students from low-income backgrounds, and students performing in the lowest quartiles.

Creating 21st Century Schools
CES can support individual schools or whole districts to raise academic expectations, shift the culture of failing schools, and increase student achievement across all groups. We work with schools to develop improvement plans that include the following strategies:

- Developing standards-based, 21st century curricula
- Implementing proven instructional and assessment practices
- Growing a professional learning community
- Utilizing data-based inquiry to inform decisions
- Creating a student-centered school culture

Building District Capacity for Change
CES supports districts to establish the vision, leadership, and know-how to create a high performing system that closes the achievement gap. Using a framework for district-wide learning and data-based decision making, we’ll guide you through exercises to:

- Assess your readiness for equity-focused work
- Create a strategic plan for raising student achievement
- Build a cadre of transformational leaders to implement the plan

In addition, we’ll partner with you to establish a comprehensive coaching program that invests in the human capital of your district to support continuous improvement in your schools. We’ll help you to identify, train, and position your staff to:

- Align curriculum to standards and skills
- Implement peer-to-peer professional development focused on effective teaching
- Create job-embedded professional learning opportunities
- Benchmark organizational and instructional practices
- Establish equitable school cultures
- Facilitate meetings, institutes, and trainings
- Lead classroom observations and school quality reviews

For information: Contact CES Program Associate Kyle Meador at kmeador@essentialschools.org or 510-433-5970

On the web: http://www.essentialschools.org
Many years ago, when I first started teaching, a colleague showed me a great technique for communicating with families: At the end of the day, she used a 24- by 16-inch chart tablet to produce daily news in shared writing with her students. She, and then I, chose one student each day to take the tablet home. That student illustrated the news from that day. The student’s family read the news, along with all of the previous news reports. The students took turns, so families saw it about once a month. I just loved the idea because it encompassed so many qualities that are present in good writing instruction: it taught kids to write using authentic, meaningful topics; it was written for a real audience; there was a clear purpose; it was accessible to, and useful for, the entire range of abilities in my classroom. Even the kids who didn’t get to take the tablet home that day were participating in the shared writing, which means they were reviewing that day’s learning and were more likely to have something specific to answer at home when someone asked “What did you do in school today?” Students loved the writing, illustrating and sharing their work, and they were highly motivated to do well because they knew many people would be viewing their efforts.

Over the years, I’ve gotten away from that tablet technique, but I’ve never stopped looking for ways to get kids to write about real things with a real audience in mind. I’ve never stopped thinking of ways to keep families in the loop about what we’re doing in school. I’ve continually tried to make it a regular part of our day to review what we’re doing. I’ve continued to use modeled and shared writing, and integrated and guided writing, as powerful teaching tools.

One year I ended each day by writing a blog with my class. We discussed the events of the day, chose one to focus on, and brainstormed details. We wrote and published on the spot. It was a great way to work on writing for a real reason, and the kids loved sharing their work with families. For a couple of years I also tried using our class web site. These approaches had advantages, but both were very time-consuming for me, and neither offered easy ways for families to participate.

This year, I decided to try using Twitter, and the more we use it, the more power I have found in it. Our class Twitter site now has more than 350 entries (called tweets), and we manage to add four or five each day.

About Our School and Access to Technology

I teach at an elementary school in Washington State with a wide range of family income levels. We are keeping the school anonymous for the purposes of this article to preserve students’ privacy. We’re a small school of around 300 students. Our technology access is limited: most classrooms have document cameras, but few are connected to computers. We have no computer lab, and my classroom has the only teacher-dedicated computer. and I make CDs of students’ Twitter writing to allow families without Internet access to read students’ work. Using a public site such as Twitter allows families to access us on public computers at libraries and community centers.
Almost every entry was composed by my first and second grade students. Along with text, there are photos taken by the students and posted on Twitpic, and audio of kids reading which we post on Chirbit. Now that the class has had almost a year of experience using Twitter, they know the routine, and composing is pretty easy for most of them.

We began the year with me posting a few tweets just to get started and try it out. I wasn’t sure if it would work, or if the time spent would be worthwhile, since time devoted to one thing means less time for something else. Next, I modeled posting on Twitter in front of the class throughout the day, usually right before a transition while we met to share and review whatever lesson we were working on at the time. It didn’t take long for them to catch on, and we were soon composing shared pieces. Students watched the projected image from my computer as I typed, watching the Twitter character counter descend from 140 to zero, and then into negative numbers as our expressions passed the character limit.

Once we typed the message, it was then time to edit and revise so that the tweet would fall into the range of 140 or fewer characters. I love that character limit feature for teaching; it provides a real and powerful way, and need, to teach word choice, ideas, and punctuation. Twitter also creates an authentic requirement to consider the needs and background of our audience in a way that most of the students didn’t have to confront in writer’s workshop, or math, or science, or other writing we did. I find first and second graders are still so egocentric that considering others is a fairly novel concept. Editing and revising the messages often takes longer than composing, as the class debates which items are essential, which are implied, which can be assumed that our followers (mostly family members) know, and which we can hint at, with the assumption that family members can ask for more information if they want it.

After about 50 messages written as a class, I had the kids start composing the tweets themselves. I have a simple chart that shows whose turn it is. That student writes the tweet into a spiral notebook. Some students do it alone; some have a classmate help. I expect the students to write/revise/edit before bringing the book to me. They do so without complaint because they are eager to get their entries posted and they have been taught that revising and editing are part of the process. I have found this to be more effective than my efforts to get them to revise and edit in Writer’s Workshop, where the length of the stories can be overwhelming, and where there is often no real reason for them to revise and edit beyond “...because I said so.” The notebook entries clearly show me what each student understands about revising and editing, and give me ideas for next steps in instruction.

Sometimes I just type the tweet as written; sometimes I type it in the company of the student, who can then advise me on details to add or change. Often I type the message into Twitter in front of the class, as the author reads aloud. If the tweet falls short of 140 characters, the author can take suggestions from the class on what to add. If it’s too long, the author can get help from the class on what to delete or change to get down to the limit. Whether with the student or in front of the class, I’m continually and quickly explaining what I’m changing and why, and I’m asking the students to do the same. Using Twitter this way embeds writing instruction all day long. I’m teaching as we go, in the moment, and the instruction is intrinsically meaningful and relevant. Rather than saying, “Today we’ll talk about ‘describing’ words,” at a random time in the year, we talk about what we need, when and as we need it. This negates the question, “When are we gonna use this?” As a matter of respect to the author of that tweet, I generally get their approval before making changes, so there is always the feeling of ownership and the message that each voice is valued.

My class is becoming quite adept at adapting the original message to fit within the Twitter parameters. They discuss, debate, listen, and work together, often with great passion, as they explain and defend points of view. Of course, with a class of 28 first and second graders, we rarely have 100 percent of their attention 100 percent of the time, but since each entry is so short, it usually doesn’t take long to figure it out and move on, so most of them can stay with us most of the time. I’ve also noticed that the more we do it, the more most of the students understand what’s going on, making it more likely they’ll participate.

Tweeting throughout the day means that writing has become an integral part of whatever we do, rather than a separate subject that is given some attention and then put away to be forgotten until the next day. It has also taught the students to see their lives and activities as worth sharing. And it is extremely rare that anyone tells me they don’t know what to write about.

The messages we post to Twitter can be read right away, or once a day, or whenever the reader wants. Parents who want frequent updates on class activities have them. Those who want to check in periodically can do so. Relatives near and far can stay in touch in meaningful ways. I have wondered whether it is crushingly boring to read about the mundane activities of our classroom, but parents and family members don’t see the tweets from Room 302 as boring. They seem to enjoy the windows into their children’s days. And the brief nature of the tweet makes it easy to read and move on.

Continued on page 36
Digital Portfolios: Documenting Student Growth

by Matthew Cramer,
Camino Nuevo High School

The digital portfolio process at Camino Nuevo High School (CNHS) offers an essential 21st century skill to our students. All students are trained in basic web design to build and maintain their digital portfolios. These skills equip them with tools they will likely use in their future endeavors in college and the professional world. We believe using the Internet as a tool to communicate and present ideas is a basic requirement of students heading into a future with a greater reliance on technology for a range of different careers. We also believe that the digital portfolios give the students the skills necessary to be independent and use their own knowledge to present themselves. We are also addressing the digital divide that exists between prosperous communities and less affluent, minority, or immigrant communities. We feel the digital portfolio process provides the students with two sets of skills: self-presentation and technology know-how. As Scott Weatherford, CNHS’s principal and founder says, “Digital portfolios seemed a natural fit for our new school. We knew that students would be using portfolios as part of our ongoing assessment of their progress as learners, and integrating the technological piece created an authentic and public way for students to display their work while demonstrating a mastery of some basic new media skills.”

Through creating and maintaining digital portfolios, CNHS students are engaged in a process of synthesizing and presenting their academic work and growth in an increasingly professional manner. These skills associated with web design competence are an important way we give the students the technological and professional resources that they will draw upon throughout their lives.

In use since 2004, Camino Nuevo’s digital portfolios have been both an educational tool and a unifying aspect of the school culture and community. All students are required to build and maintain a website reflecting their academic work and growth. These portfolios are used across the curriculum of the school for these purposes. At the end of tenth grade, the students are required to present their digital portfolio to a panel of teachers, students, parents, and members of the surrounding community. Tenth grade humanities teacher Phalana Tiller notes, “Preparing for the presentation of the digital portfolio helps students to reflect on their work and, in many cases, review and relearn material that they didn’t master when it was originally taught. Last year one student added images to an essay so the audience would have a visual focus while she discussed the work. DP presentation time is when we’ve seen students really step up and do some excellent work.” These presentations are a right of passage into the eleventh and twelfth grade “Graduate Academy.” The students are required to present these digital portfolios again at the end of their senior year as a culminating graduation requirement.

The Camino Nuevo digital portfolio is rooted in the traditional art education model of portfolio development. Approaches to portfolio development differ, depending upon its purpose: student portfolios are different from the professional portfolios the students will likely create as they move out of high school and into the professional world. Largely intended to be
a reflection of personal and academic growth over time, the digital portfolios at our school are designed to reflect the process of learning students engage in during their formative high school years. Portfolios contain sections that correspond to each school year and contain work demonstrating the skills and concepts developed during that year. As the students progress this accumulation of work is a valuable record of the their abilities and improvement. For each assignment on their digital portfolio, students also must include a reflection about the content and skills they were supposed to master as well as the quality of their effort and product. We have really focused on lifting up the quality of these reflections. Students claim to hate them (like broccoli), so it must be good for them.

In the classes that I teach at CNHS—graphic design, journalism, and senior seminar—I have linked the digital portfolio closely with classroom expectations for posting work for critique, grading, and presentation, making the portfolio an integral part of the class routine. Using the “DP,” as the digital portfolio is often referred to, in this way gives the students practice updating and improving their skills in presenting work online. Much of the work the students complete in class is posted on the digital portfolio for grading. The students are engaged with their classmates’ digital portfolios on a regular basis. For example, the students will look up another student’s digital portfolio to grade projects and assignments. The students will also look at each other’s work online to offer critiques and reflections. This peer assessment is a regular classroom practice that creates dialogue between students regarding their work. If a student’s work does not appear or if necessary links do not work, they are encouraged to act as coaches, helping each other post and making suggestions for presenting the work online. This provides a forum for the students to share their understanding and help check each other. “Our digital portfolio is a showcase for our students’ schoolwork as well as for webpage design skills. Most students personalize their pages and take a lot of pride in the work. The intense work of creating all of the links is, in itself, a feat of concentration and persistence,” observes Jeanmarie DeQuiroz, Camino Nuevo’s tenth grade biology teacher.

I have used my own interactive teacher website as a tool to teach Graphic Design. It is a place to experiment with posting daily assignments, linking to examples, and providing resources. A page called “Today’s Assignments” is a daily log of classroom agendas, inquiry, and direction for the students. It is an important part of the classroom routine. Student use the site to get directions for class, view examples, and link to other resources within the context of projects. I have also developed the site as a resource for technology skills, links to outside resources, as well as posting assignments, projects, grading rubrics, and other information about the requirements in class. My own teaching website is a continuous work in progress, with which I experiment with new ideas to engage students and offer resources. I use the site to provide links to examples of work we are doing in class. It is also a good way to post examples of student’s work that is a model for current projects and assignments.

At the very beginning of the ninth grade, or as soon as they enter the school, students are given a basic series of lessons to create a folder structure and web pages aligned with their classes. Each school year that follows begins with the creation of that year’s portfolio, which is linked to ones from the past. At the beginning, we scaffold this portfolio creation process very closely and incrementally each year, we expect the students to exercise more independence. By the time students reach their senior year, creating and updating this portfolio are seen as expected norms of the school experience and an important way of demonstrating mastery of the school’s expectations.

Camino Nuevo High School (CNHS) is located in the greater MacArthur Park area just west of downtown Los Angeles. Our students are a microcosm of the area’s population. 92 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The population is 92 percent Hispanic, one percent African American, five percent Asian, and two percent mixed origin/other ethnic groups. Our students and their families face substantial economic challenges and the social realities that accompany poverty and marginalization. The greater MacArthur Park census tracts have the highest percentage of severe overcrowding in the city, the greatest concentration of single-parent households (50 to 88 percent, more than twice the city average), highest non-fluency in English (40 to 66 percent speak English “not well” or “not at all”), and the lowest availability of automobiles (housing units with no vehicle available ranges from 46 to 90 percent, more than three times the city average). Sixty-one percent of residents are foreign-born, compared with 11 percent in the U.S. Annual income within this district is the lowest in Los Angeles: the median income is $11,475. The poverty rate in the area is 35 percent, compared with a citywide rate of 18 percent. Eighty-two percent of housing units in the neighborhood are rentals versus 34 percent nationally. CNHS is a community-based school, and, as such, our mission is driven largely by the needs and population of the surrounding community. CNHS’s results are dramatic. CNHS ranks 16th among all schools within LAUSD, both charter and traditional. When compared to similar schools, CNHS scores a 10 out of 10 ranking from the State of California.
Our goal is to help our students become literate, critical thinkers, and independent problem solvers who are agents of social justice with sensitivity toward the world around them.

There are many challenges making the digital portfolio process work on a school-wide scale. Uniformity, consistent standards, the quality of work, and a wide range of web design skills by both staff and students are some of the ongoing challenges that we deal with. Creating and maintaining the digital portfolios is often confusing and difficult. As a staff we have developed an in-house teacher training as part of our professional development. This professional development consists of training program in basic web design as well as an ongoing conversation about the uses of technology in the classroom. As a staff, we have worked hard and continue to develop consistent approaches and standards for these digital portfolios and the presentation of them. We frequently meet in committees to develop rubrics and other scaffolding tools to guide the students through a complicated process. Teacher checks and student-to-student checks are a continuous process in classes to help fix broken links, spelling and grammar issues, and develop a clear professional design. In terms of design, the students are exposed to websites that are models for presenting work in a professional manner, combating what we call the “MySpace aesthetic,” which is often the model students are familiar with coming into the school.

A digital portfolio handbook, located on the digital portfolio website page, is a comprehensive guide that is used in addition to classroom guidance and practice. This handbook gives technical guidance and contains rubrics used for classroom checks for functions, design, and content. It also includes guidelines for presenting at the end of tenth grade.

The tools we have been using are Dreamweaver and Adobe CS3 graphic software. Dreamweaver is an intuitive visual program that requires little understanding of HTML code to create pages and add content. We use Dreamweaver to teach the basics of web design, and to create the structure of students’ sites. Students have accounts that provide access to two different drives to store class work. Students use the H drive for storage. The W drive is the online server that contains the student’s website. The W drive is intentionally limited to teach students ways to create websites that are streamlined, using images and files that are optimized for easy access. We emphasize presenting work in the most accessible manner for all Internet users by using photos that are reduced to proper sizes and saving files in Internet-compatible formats, like PDF and HTML versions of papers written in Word or presentations created in PowerPoint.

The digital portfolios have had a positive impact on student achievement across the curriculum. The public, high stakes of the digital portfolios is a powerful motivator. Parents, as well as members of the community are able to access students’ work and students are able to share their work with possible employers or internship providers. The public, real world applications of creating and maintaining DPs as a long term process has also proved to be a powerful tool for the student to reflect on their growth through high school academically and personally.

Social Networking in Education

We also use technology in the classroom by tapping into various social networking forums. The three most successful so far are:

The CLIC Network, http://www.theclic.net, is a college focused social network.

Good Reads, http://www.goodreads.com, is a social network centered on books and reading.

Threadless, http://www.threadless.com, is a t-shirt printing company with a community for critique and scoring t-shirt designs.

I have used threadless.com in my classroom as both a platform to exhibit student work and as a forum to develop critical thinking skills. Threadless.com is a t-shirt printing company that encourages artists to post their own designs and, potentially, get them printed through a scoring system from an online community of other designers.

Related Links

Camino Nuevo High School website:
http://highschool.caminonuevo.org

Digital Portfolio Handbook:
http://highschool.caminonuevo.org/digitalportfolios.htm

Matthew Cramer teacher website:
http://highschool.caminonuevo.org/staff_website/mcramer/index.htm
Where to Go for More

Technology that Enhances Powerful Teaching and Meaningful Learning

Honor Moorman, whose article “Adventures in Web 2.0: Introducing Social Networking into My Teaching” is featured on page 3 of this issue, suggested many of these resources for incorporating technologies that increase interaction into the classroom.

Classroom 2.0
Classroom 2.0 is a social network devoted to the use and impact of collaborative technologies in education. More than 24,000 members, led by several savvy hosts, ask, answer and co-create information and insight on the Ning platform. Whether you need to get a grip on what this “2.0” deal is, want to research a specific tool, and—especially—if you’re seeking other educators working with collaborative technology in their classrooms, Classroom 2.0 is a vibrant, happening online resource.

http://www.classroom20.com/

Did You Know? 2.0
“Did You Know? 2.0” is an eight minute video presentation that elegantly and powerfully describes the world for which we are educating young people now. It invites educators and parents to make their own decisions about what 21st century skills should be, and is a dynamic way to start conversations in your school community. In addition to the video, available on YouTube, creators Karl Fisch and Scott McLeod have collaborated on the “Shift Happens” wiki, which provides additional background for using and understanding “Did You Know? 2.0.”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMcfrLYDm2U
http://shifthappens.wikispaces.com/

The Machine Is Us/ing Us
Cultural anthropologist Michael Wesch created “The Machine Is Us/ing Us,” a four and a half-minute video presentation that is an extraordinarily clear description of what Web 2.0 is, and what it really means for communication, interactivity, and collaborative information creation. The entire Mediated Cultures site on which the video resides is a fascinating tour through cutting edge interactive technology and its impact on education, society, and our lives today. Do not miss the World Simulation Project, an amazing example of authentic assessment that provides groups of students with the opportunity to demonstrate their answers to the question “If you controlled the world, what would you do?”

http://mediatedcultures.net/mediatedculture.htm, second video on the list.

T.H.E. Journal
T.H.E. Journal is an online destination and a print publication dedicated to the intersection of education and technology. The website has a distinctly “Web 1.0” feel with few interactive features, but its information is nonetheless quite useful, particularly for those looking for descriptions and reviews of products and particular technologies. There is not much content on the impact of technology on the quality of education, and there is extensive reporting on classrooms, schools, and districts that have implemented specific technologies. If you’re wondering how Bluetooth-enabled interactive whiteboards work, or which states are considering open source textbooks, T.H.E. Journal is the place to go.

http://www.thejournal.com/

Edutopia’s Digital Generation Project
Edutopia’s Digital General Project looks at technology and education with a particular perspective: young people are “digital natives” from whom educators and parents have much to learn. The Digital Generation Project’s aim is for adults to understand the ways that collaborative technologies inform learning, allowing powerful opportunities to harness students’ orientation to technologically mediated learning. The site provides profiles of young content creators and overviews of the tools and technology that can transform teaching, learning, and collaboration.

http://www.edutopia.org/digital-generation

Honor Moorman also suggests several books (pages and ink: also technology!) that serve as guides to the economic, social, and technological terrain into which students and educators are heading:

The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century by Thomas Friedman
http://www.thomaslfriedman.com/bookshelf/the-world-is-flat

A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future by Daniel Pink
http://www.danpink.com/wnm.html

Here Comes Everybody: A book about organizing without organizations by Clay Shirky
http://www.herecomeseverybody.org/

http://www.randomhouse.com/features/wisdomofcrowds/

Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything by Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams
The experience has been amazing for the students: enjoyable, beneficial, and motivating. They are proud to see their initials at the end of a tweet, and they’re willing to do the writing work needed to make it happen. They’re reading and rereading over and over again, working on things like fluency, phrasing, rate, intonation, to get good enough to be recorded on a digital audio recorder, which helps them to be better readers. They’re excited about learning to use the digital camera so they can add a picture to their topic, and they’re looking at each event in class through the filter of “What can I tweet about this?” and “Is there a picture I can take and tweet about?” Some of the students and families have now created their own Twitter accounts, and the students are able to communicate with one another. This means they are voluntarily reading and writing away from school, which shows me they consider themselves to be readers and writers, and that they value reading and writing. They’re learning the real purpose and power of literacy: communication. If they’re using language and technology in this way in first and second grade, there is no telling what they’ll be doing in years to come.

Those who care about the students find value in our Twitter site, too. Simply by following our class, or by taking the time now and then to read through the site with their child, they support the idea that the students have important things to say; they convey the idea that writing is worthwhile, as are the students’ efforts to write, revise, and edit. They are able to have meaningful discussions about what is happening all day in the children’s lives, and they can avoid asking “What did you do in school today?” The text, along with the pictures and audio, make our work public, making it easy for families and friends to stay in touch.

I remain aware that this a very public and far reaching forum, and I try to maintain privacy for the students. We’re careful on our site not to use last names of students; we include no names attached to photos; and we try to be careful to not post information that might be too personal. Twitter allows me to block any followers I don’t know, and I do. I could stop people from accessing the site anonymously by using the “Protect my updates” setting, but I decided not to because that would not allow me to use the automatic update feature on my school web site. The reality is that in this day and age, kids need to be aware of how to navigate these issues, and it only makes sense to me to embed the learning as we create the product. I remind families to help with this by supervising the students while they use Twitter at home.

I regularly print tweets for any family that would like a hard copy and at the end of the year make CDs for each child with the entire record of our Twitter writing. This makes it easier for families without Internet to access the tweets, and ensures that the writing will be preserved. Imagine being able to go back and read what you did in first or second grade, as told by you and your classmates? I think many of...
Twittering About Learning

Continued from previous page

them will find it to be an interesting artifact.

When I began using Twitter with my class, I wondered if it would be worthwhile. As this year ends, I believe it was. I’m convinced that literacy is the foundation to everything else we do in school, and having literacy embedded in our days has helped to implant literacy in who the students are. They have both the knowledge of how to use literacy to enhance their lives, and they have the disposition to do so. An additional benefit of this endeavor is that my incoming students and families will be able to get a sense of what the new year will be like, which may help ease some anxiety and increase eagerness for school to start again. I’ve come a long way from when I started using that 24- by 16-inch tablet with my class, but I feel with Twitter I’ve managed to maintain and amplify all the best parts of it. I think my colleague from all those years ago would be impressed.

Jeff Kurtz teaches a combined first and second grade class at an elementary school in Washington State. Kurtz has been teaching for 20 years and is always looking for ways to meet individual student needs.

Affiliate with CES National

If CES stands for what you believe in—personalized, equitable, intellectually vibrant schools—we invite you to affiliate with CES National. Affiliating with the CES network as a school, organization, or individual gives you a number of benefits, including subscriptions to *Horace* and our newsletter *In Common*, discounted fees and waivers to our annual Fall Forum, and eligibility to apply for research and professional development grants, and more. For more information about CES National Affiliation, visit www.essentialschools.org
This Year in Horace

25.1: CES 2.0: Technology and the Essential School
Horace looks at infusing social networking into pedagogy, learning technology skills through service-learning, distance learning and the CES Common Principles, using social networking for literacy development, implementing digital portfolios, and other topics that explore the relationship between emerging technologies, meaningful teaching and learning with an equity focus, and student achievement.

25.2: Voices of Educators of Color
Horace features voices of CES educators of color in “open forum” to discuss their racial, cultural, and class identities in relation to their roles as teachers and school leaders.

25.3 and 25.4 (double issue): Changing Schools, Changing Lives
Horace looks at CES’s past, present, and future in commemoration of CES’s 25th anniversary and CES’s road ahead. This issue brings together voices of CES founders, new educators, students, Essential school alumni, and other stakeholders in CES as a movement to transform schools and systems of education.

Cover image: International School of the Americas seniors Jordan Birnbaum, Faith Rathman, and Nicholas (Nick) Coltharp blogging about their internship experiences.
Photo credit: Pamela Valentine, ISA global art teacher and technology coordinator

The national office of the Coalition of Essential Schools gratefully acknowledges support from the following:
The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the San Francisco Foundation, our individual donors, and our many schools, organizations, and individual affiliates