Collaboration | Q&A

4 Web 2.0 Technologies To Inspire Students

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Instructional Technologist Marta Masterson is used to some skepticism when students see her syllabus. A lot of them have never heard of Web 2.0 technologies like Diigo, Glogster, Prezi, and PBworks. For some, the thought of using any technology they can't access from their phone breaks them out in a cold sweat. For others, there's a very real concern that investing hours into Web 2.0 projects could result in waking up one morning to discover the cloud ate their homework.

Masterson said she has faith that the four technologies she finds most useful in the classroom aren't going anywhere. She's willing to back that faith up with examples of real world success in using Diigo, Glogster, Prezi, and PBworks as teaching tools.

Realistically, Masterson said, there's a risk these technologies might disappear, but she said she believes teaching students how to use Web 2.0 technologies is almost as important as the course material. "Students are going to be using a computer every day at their job, even if they're not in an IT field," she said. "There aren't a lot of jobs out there anymore where you're not sitting in front of a computer every day. The more you know about computers the more job opportunities you're going to have. Plus, not having to wait for the help desk makes you more efficient. If you're on a deadline and you know how to solve your own problem, that makes you a real asset."

By the end of her classes, Masterson said, she's converted most of her skeptics.

Campus Technology recently had an opportunity to talk to Masterson about how she uses Web 2.0 technologies in both the graduate library science course she teaches at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and in her position as Instructional Technologist at Carthage College in Kenosha, WI.

Chris-Rachael Oseland: You say there are four big Web 2.0 technologies you advocate in the classroom. Let's take a close look at each of them. Tell me how you use PBworks.

Marta Masterson: PBworks is a wiki. I specifically use it because it has a free option for educators. The education license allows more privacy rights than the public option. I can set up the wiki so only the students and I can view it. That's one of the main concerns I have with a lot of Web 2.0. I want to make sure my students have a level of privacy where if they don't want their name attached to something, it doesn't follow them for life.

PBworks is a great way to have students work online in small groups. I also use it to summarize course content. I divide up sections of readings and have them work in groups. There are a lot of ways to put videos into the wiki. I send students out to find real world examples of how their subject is being implemented, then they can share that information with everyone in the class.
Because it's a wiki, they get the opportunity to link to things. It's not static. They can show other students Web site that are relevant to what we're discussing in class.

An added benefit of the small groups is that they all can edit, take turns, go in there, and change things around. They don't have to all be there at the same time. It shows a history of edits so I can go to the page and see what work a specific student did at the a specific time. It lets me keep track of individual progress, group progress, and see how they're working together in the class.

**Oseland: How do students react to using PBworks?**

**Masterson:** Overall students have liked it. In fact I'm always surprised how little they e-mail me and ask me for help with it. It has a great set of tutorials and videos and I make sure in all the assignments I write I link to those.

The things they don't like about it are all aesthetic. Sometimes it's difficult to get text to wrap around images or maybe the whole page is not as beautiful as they'd like to be, but it's an easy tool to learn. That means there's some give and take. You have a lot of freedom.

In general, you can either have a technology with a very high learning curve that ends up really beautiful, or you can have something that a student can learn today with no trouble at all, but it isn't as nice to look at.

**Oseland: You said you use a different technology to help students get to know one another better. Tell me about Glogster.**

**Masterson:** I would call it an electronic poster. It's online, so it's not on a piece of paper. Students can add text, images, and videos to it. If they don't have their own pictures, it comes with images they can use. Embedding the YouTube videos is super easy. You can also add audio to it.

For one assignment, I had students critique and compare two academic journal articles. One student had audio of her talking about the two articles instead of writing it out. Instead of this thing totally full of text, she talked to people, made it more interactive.

I like to have students make a poster about themselves when we start class so they can get to know one another better. I've had a student put up a video of them with their kids. Another had some audio and photos. It's more geared towards K-12, so it's not really the best tool for academic writing. I like having them use it for socialization, though. That's part of class, too.

That brings me back to best practices. Glogster didn't work out the way I wanted it for the very first assignment, but after talking to my students, I was able to find a whole new use that was a lot more relevant. Now they really like it.

**Oseland: Is this another free technology?**

**Masterson:** Oh, yes. It also has an education component. A teacher can sign up for private
classroom accounts. The basic non-education version is free, too. These Web 2.0 tools are mostly free, and a lot of them have great educational uses.

**Oseland:** Like it or not, everyone is familiar with PowerPoint. You have an alternative.

**Masterson:** I like Prezi. It's kind of like the mind map version of PowerPoint. You have this huge canvas and you can plop what you want to say down anywhere on it. You can write out your text anywhere you want and create a path around it so when you click the forward arrow it knows to go to the next slide, but you can also zoom out and see the whole presentation. It's not so linear.

It's hard to describe. This is the technology students both love and hate the most.

**Oseland:** I'd love to use a good alternative to PowerPoint. What do they hate?

**Masterson:** They hate how different it is from PowerPoint. Prezi has a high learning curve. Instead of the control panel in PowerPoint, it has a thing called a zebra. It really isn't like anything you normally use.

PBworks is set up so when you're editing a wiki page, it almost looks like a Word document. It's really easy. You don't have to think about it at all. Prezi doesn't look like PowerPoint at all. You have to learn all the editing tools. On top of that, you not only go up and down and back and forth, you also go in and out. Sometimes students have a difficult time with that. It has more steps in order to make it look nice, but—if you put in the time—you can make something really cool-looking.

Students were very divided on it. If they got it, they'd make these amazing detailed Prezis. Others spent so much time learning how to use the technology they didn't have much time left to add actual content.

I like it because it's not linear. It creates much more interesting presentations than power point. You have to decide the pattern and the flow of information that's in your presentation. You're not just plunking down text on a slide.

**Oseland:** Do you think PowerPoint might be fading from the classroom?

**Masterson:** No. A lot of people still really like it. It has its place. It's easy to use. I think maybe the problem right now is that people need to be better educated about how to use it well. A lot of the hate towards PowerPoint has to do with the user and not the technology. People use it to stand there and read from a slide.

**Oseland:** Honestly, I've never been to a meeting where I thought, "Wow, this PowerPoint Presentation really added a lot."

**Masterson:** That's because people are using it wrong. I like it a lot when faculty provide the PowerPoint presentations to students in advance. They're a nice resource to have. Students can look at the slides ahead of time. If they have it all written out, they know what the teacher things is important. Instead of scrawling notes as fast as they can, they can concentrate on what the teacher is saying.

**Oseland:** You also have your students use a social bookmarking site.
Masterson: Yes, I have my students create their own link libraries in Diigo. It's a lot like Del.icio.us. You can put sticky notes on Web sites. If you go back to the site when you have Diigo open, you can see your sticky again.

It also allows you to highlight content on a Webpage.

One of the features I like is it lets you create groups on topics. For example, there are some educational technology groups people belong to with these amazing lists of all these Web sites and blogs you can look through.

I use Diigo groups for my students. Everyone in the class has to join and then I have them find links on certain topics and they have to go in there, find something they like, describe what it is and why they chose it. I have them all comment on one another's so they're actually going in and looking at them.

If you want students to use things like technology, you have to give them some sort of grade on things so they have a reason to go in there and use it. I do this towards the end of the semester because by then they've been with the topic we're talking about. They've pretty much completed their project, and the project forces them to go out on the Internet. It's a way to make a class library of the resources they've used.

One of the things that was a nice surprise to me when I used it for the first time was how much it opened the students' eyes up to how much free stuff there is out there. Once you're out of university and don't have access to a periodical database all the time, there are still places you can go to find information. It's amazing how many people are willing to share their lesson plans, assignments, and things people will need for business resources, too.

Oseland: We've talked about the software you use. Do you picture any big hardware changes in the near future?

Masterson: I don't think desktops are going to be around much longer, especially in computer labs for students. As it becomes easier and cheaper to do things with wireless, I think computer labs are going to turn into places where students bring their own computers, hang out, and get help, as opposed to being a place where they go to sit and type on a strange computer.

Oseland: Do you see schools dropping netbooks and laptops in favor of tablets?

Masterson: No. Tablets aren't at the level yet where you can do the kind of things you need to do to be a student.

Oseland: Do you think textbooks will be replaced by way of tablets?

Masterson: I hope so. I never liked buying them. Of course, buying a book on an Kindle or iPad isn't cheaper at the moment, but hopefully textbooks will be cheaper. I think the way students use textbooks is made for those kind[s] of devices. A lot of it is skimming. If it was easier to carry around, I may be naive, but I like to think if they didn't have to lug around 50 pounds of books, maybe while students were sitting at the bus stop they might read a few pages for class.

Oseland: Where do you see classroom technology heading? Give me a Jetson's moment
Masterson: I think there will be a lot more courses are set up online that allow the students to learn from each other so the instructor really is more of a facilitator. I like the hybrid idea because there's value in meeting your classmates and having real time face-to-face discussions. Those passionate, in-the-moment discussions you end up having about a topic or a reading you did, I haven't found a way yet where I feel like you get that online.

It'd be nice to have part of classes be online. Faculty can put up lectures and readings for students to do with questions students should be discussing. You do that kind of work outside the classroom. That way, when students come to class, they can have discussions about what they learned outside class and do more of the sciences, hands-on work or lab work during classroom hours, the things that make more sense to do in a classroom setting.

I don't really think it's that far-fetched. People could do it now if they wanted to.

About the Author

Chris-Rachael Oseland is a writer, consultant, and speaker soon to be based in Austin, TX.