
Reviews of Books

Will Richardson. *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Tools for Classrooms*. 3rd Edition. NY: Corwin/SAGE, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4129-7747-0.

On July 5, 2011, *The Telegraph* published the results from new research completed by Cambridge University, UK, which indicated that a third of the people surveyed felt overwhelmed by digital technology. The research did not specify how many teachers, if any, were in this category; however, there are numerous other testimonies that today's students are far ahead of their teachers in computer literacy (*National Educational Technology Plan*, 2005).

The book under review is yet another useful manual to help educators cross the technological gap and become as fearless about, if not as adapted to, living in the digital world as our students are. Will Richardson's *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Tools for Classrooms* has seen its third edition not only because the World Wide Web 2.0 is constantly developing, but also because in the four years that has passed since its first publication, the web has significantly changed and expanded. The need for a new, revised edition is also grounded in the fact that despite the increasing number of teachers and students who have begun using Web 2.0 tools, "the vast majority of educators still have little or no context for these shifts" (Richardson, p.6). Richardson, internationally known as an "evangelist" for the use of Weblogs, RSS, and related Internet technologies in classrooms and schools, makes yet another effort with his current book to expose the vast potential of the Web 2.0 to educators and to endear it to them.

The leitmotiv of the book is a perception of the Internet as the Read/Write Web, the ultimate fulfillment of Web-creator Berners-Lee's vision of the Net as "a collaborative medium, a place where we [could] all meet and read and write" (as cited in Carvin, 2005). Therefore, of the innumerable applications that Web 2.0 can now provide, the author of the book focuses on those tools, which facilitate reading and writing on the Net. Considering the way in which technologies affect our lives, Richardson is adamant that, irrespective of attitudes and inhibitions, every teacher and student – essentially every person with access – is creating a "society of authorship." To young people, making their lives come alive online is a part of the way they live, so in order to keep pace with them, teachers need to master the "toolbox" of the Read/Write Web. This toolbox, according to Richardson, contains the following items: weblogs, wikis, *Really Simple Syndication* (RSS), aggregators, social bookmarking, online photo galleries, audio/video casting, *Twitter* and social networking sites. The book then focuses on the ways these technologies can help educators take full advantage of the potential of the new Web and bring these technologies to their students to enhance their learning and better prepare them for their post-education worlds.

Readers may expect the structure of the book to be organized according to the list of Web tools above. It is, but only to a certain extent, which shows where the preferences of the author lie. Weblogs are obviously his favorite, as there are two chapters out of eight on tools (the first, introductory, and the concluding chapters not counted), which are dedicated to weblogs – their pedagogic advantages, software, applications and how-to instructions. The remaining six chapters on various Web applications are not as laboriously detailed, but they also provide advice on possible utilization of these tools in education and guidance for

teachers on how to start using them in their classroom practice.

The first chapter, "The Read/Write Web," outlines the author's position on the role of technology in education as was described above. The next two chapters are dedicated to weblogs, while chapter 4 deals with Wikipedia, "the most important site on the Web these days," and the use of Wikis as a tool for easy collaboration at school. We, as teachers, generally hold an ambiguous attitude towards the use of Wikipedia for student writing. Some even forbid any reference to the site in their students' essays, believing that its information cannot be trusted. But, in fact, as Richardson points out, on Wikipedia "there are vastly more editors who want to make it right than those who want to make it wrong," and he quotes *Apple's* Steve Jobs, who called Wikipedia one of the most accurate encyclopedias in the world. The author urges teachers, whose students have carried out interesting and valuable research, to consider contributing it to this amazing collection. Another alternative is to create one's own small wiki for collecting and sharing information, which seems like a manageable undertaking using Wikispaces.com.

Chapter 5 explains in detail *RSS*, or *Really Simple Syndication*, "the new killer application for educators," which, according to the author, "one should start using today, right this minute, and, tomorrow, teach one's students how to use it." Essentially, it is an "aggregator," to which, like *Google Reader*, one subscribes to collect into one site all information one is interested in from many other sites. Richardson is insistent that of all the tools in his book this is the one that must not be ignored.

Chapter 6 is about the Social Web and it focuses on Twitterverse, or the Universe of *Twitter* and twitterers. Chapter 7 is about creating, publishing and using images online, while Chapter 8 is about multimedia publishing, such as podcasting, showing video and screencasting, and their applications in education. As the guru of educational technologies, Richardson enthusiastically outlines the rich potential of each tool, suggests the best available, mostly-free, software and provides clear instructions for beginners on how to start using these tools.

Chapter 9 deals with various social networks, and, once again, the message from the author is very passionate: if we are working with young people, it is our responsibility not only to understand what *Facebook*, *Ning* and other social networks are all about, but further and even better, to participate in them ourselves. It is about connection and connectivity, collaboration and sharing, where peers become teachers and learners in the same space. The potential power of *Facebook* or *Ning* for educators is that they provide an opportunity to teach students many important lessons about digital citizenship, safety, information literacy, and more.

In the concluding chapter "What It All Means," Richardson points out two unstoppable trends in the use of the Web technologies. The first one is that more and more content will come online, especially with *Google* currently attempting to digitalize more than 50 million books from the world's five largest libraries. The second is that the creation of this content will be more and more collaborative as every major software package currently has collaborative tools built in. The disconnect between the post-educational lives of our students, affected by these trends, and their current educational experience of working individually on one paper for a very narrow audience becomes painfully clear. Thus, Richardson demands that teaching should change to cater better for the future, post-educational needs of the students and better teaching requires ten important shifts to be made. They are: open content; round-the-clock learning with many, many teachers; collaborative construction of meaningful knowledge; teaching as conversation, not as lecture; and contribution rather than completion as the ultimate goal. Overall, it is impossible to disagree with his statement that we are just at the beginning of a radically different relationship with the Internet. To set this relationship on the correct track right from the start, it is highly desirable that all educators in all fields open Richardson's "toolbox."

References

- Carvin, A. (2005, February 1). Tim Berners-Lee: Weaving a semantic web. Retrieved September 20, 2011, from <http://www.digitaldivide.net/articles/view.php?ArticleID=20>.
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