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Blogs, wikis, podcasts, and other powerful web tools for classrooms Will Richardson, Corwin, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2010, 171pp.

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Book Review

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Introduction

It has become common to note the impact of modern information technology on the way we teach and learn and on the very structure and role of the Academy itself. Popular books such as Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat* (2005) and Tapscott and Williams' *Wikinomics* (2006) state that the world-wide cultural shift enabled by information technology, in Friedman's words, "will be seen in time as one of those fundamental shifts or inflection points, like Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, the rise of the nation-state, or the Industrial Revolution" (p. 49). Education is included in this fundamental shift. As early as 1997, significantly before the current explosion of social networking and Web 2.0 technologies, Michael Hooker noted that "higher education is on the brink of a revolution … [and] … the opportunities and challenges technology presents are far greater than at any previous time in higher education's 750-year history." With the advent of Web 2.0 and social network technologies, such predictions have only increased.

However, these observations too often beg the question of how to transition our classrooms to incorporate new information and social networking technologies into our teaching and learning processes. The third edition of Will Richardson's book *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms* addresses this practical issue by providing a range of strategies to show any practicing teacher first how to use this new technology in his/her own professional practice and then how to integrate it into the learning practices of his/her students, believing as he does that teachers "make these connections in our own practice first so we can thoroughly understand the pedagogical implications for the classroom" (p. 9).

Blogs, wikis, podcasts

Richardson operates from a basic assumption: emerging information technologies – what Richardson calls the Read/Write Web – will change education at all levels, from pre-school through graduate school and beyond, and educational institutions and practitioners should be mindful of this change or risk irrelevance. In keeping with the conventional wisdom, he asserts that "the Read/Write Web holds transformational changes in store for teachers and students of all stripes," but, he adds, "education has been slow to adapt to these new tools and potentials" (p. 3). He

intends to help teachers integrate the Read/Write Web into their classrooms.

To do so, he gives an overview of some practical ways to use various Web 2.0 technologies in the classroom, specifically the K12 classroom. He devotes individual chapters to why and how teachers can use a list of online communication tools:

- blog tools such as Google Blogger and WordPress,
- wiki tools such as Wikispaces and Google Sites,
- RSS feeds and aggregators such as Google Reader and iTunes,
- social bookmarking tools such as Digg and Diigo,
- online image and video galleries such as Flickr and YouTube,
- audio and video podcasting,
- Twitter, and
- social networking sites such as Facebook and Ning.

He provides ample examples of how these tools are being used in education today, mostly in K12 classes, and describes the benefits that the teachers believe they and their students are gaining by using the tools. He then guides the reader through the steps necessary to use each tool. His descriptions are clear and detailed enough that any teacher familiar with a computer mouse and a web browser can follow along, and his wide-range of examples can add to the instructional repertoire of even experienced web users.

However, he devotes very little text to discussing the theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings of his assumptions about technology and education. This is not a criticism, but an observation, for this is a practical book, not a theoretical book. Those looking for theory should consider instead George Siemens' (2004, 2006, 2008a, b) discussion of Connectivism, which Richardson references and which provides a theoretical basis for thinking about and researching teaching and learning processes in networked environments.

Moreover, Richardson focuses on K12 education; however, corporate and higher education practitioners should not dismiss the book because of this focus. The tools and techniques that he describes can contribute to teaching and training at any level.

When it was originally published in 2006, *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts* was a unique work that brought together strategies from the cutting edge of educational innovation. It is perhaps not so unique today, as scholarly conferences regularly feature workshops and handbooks about how to use Web 2.0 technologies in their respective fields. Still, the updated edition continues to provide very useful examples of how to integrate Web 2.0 tools into any classroom.

Conclusion

Web 2.0 has developed very quickly, even in higher education. In historical terms, it has exploded, and more and more teachers are using blogs, wikis, and Twitter regularly in their professional practice. Still, Richardson's book remains a useful introduction to Web 2.0 tools for those educators who are already convinced of his central assumptions about the importance of this technology to education or who are at least intrigued with the new technology enough to give it a try. It is not useful as an introduction to the pedagogical framework which makes sense of this educational shift and which guides scholarly investigation of that shift; however, it is not intended to provide that theoretical framework. Rather, it is a practical guide to using a handful of Web 2.0 tools to change the way we teach and learn, and it does that well.

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About the author

Keith W. Hamon is the coordinator of a program at Albany State University to integrate writing and computing into classes across the curriculum. He has taught English for 30 years, conducting hybrid courses for the past 5. He has also administered educational technology programs in both higher education and K12 schools. Currently, he is exploring the effects of networking structures on the way we write and communicate online, and his research is informed by the thinking of Edgar Morin, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and George Siemens and Stephen Downes. He can be reached at keith.hamon@asurams.edu.