



Connection Reflection

Posting Learning Materials Online

Editor's Note: This issue of Connection Reflection focuses on posting learning materials online. Actually, the point of the issue is, "How can we get students invested in the classroom"? As individuals concerned about the learning possibilities of one or more students, we have a lot on our plates. Why post materials online? We hear about web pages, content management systems, wikis, blogs, Nings, Google. Where do you start if you are not already "tech savy"? Maybe you will find something in this issue that is the first small step you need to involve your students both in the classroom as well as outside of the classroom.

My Challenge to You: Play!

By: **Dr. Henry Thiele**
President



Dr. Henry Thiele

On behalf of SET Connections I would like to wish you a Happy New Year. I would like to challenge you to start out this year by taking some time to play. Pick something online to spend a few hours on—it doesn't have to be school related. Pick something that sounds like fun and start playing. There are many things that have found their way into my classrooms or practices that started as a fun activity.

It was about ten years ago when I started playing around with posting things online. Back then it was hard to do—you had to know some HTML, space was expensive, and

everything took a lot of time to put together. After playing around online for a while posting stuff about friends and family, I built the skills for putting

my classes online. That changed the way I taught and changed the path my life took.

Today's tools take much less time to learn and are much more intuitive. Sites like Ning or Google Groups allow teachers to build entire online networks for their students that can tear down the walls of the classroom and provide anytime/anywhere learning opportunities. There are

plenty of sites that provide information and entertainment to us in any form of media that interests us. Others allow students to produce music, video, or art with quality that was unheard of in the past.

So here is the challenge: pick something—anything—online that interests you and take some time to play. Don't know where to start? Try the Classroom 2.0 Ning <http://www.classroom20.com> (the bottom right sidebar lists tools by type or subject) or go to <http://www.go2web20.net/> which is a directory of Web 2.0 tools and applications. Don't think about how it is going to help you in the classroom or at work. Just play—just for you.

Inside this issue:

A Challenge to Play!	1
Technology Systems Help with Communication	2
What is a Content Management System?	2
First Annual SET Connections Conference	4

Special points of interest:

- A content management system streamlines processes needed for an effective school website.
- There are many upcoming conferences. You may be interested in attending one or more.
- Try a Ning or a Wiki or create a survey with Survey Monkey.

A Teacher's Communication Vehicle

By: **Judy Okazaki**
Executive Director

Whether you have a Content Management Systems (CMS), Student Information System (SIS), have been provided with a web page or created your own, a web presence is a great means of communication between teachers and students and teachers and home.



Judy Okazaki

Initially it gives a chance for students and families to get to know a new teacher and to know what to expect. It can also provide a sense of what is to come. A calendar and a syllabus are always helpful: as a point of reference to the sequence of study, as a reminder of work to be accomplished, and as a way to stay caught up when a student is absent from class.

If class material is presented in lecture

form and notes are expected, providing an outline shell on the website, to be filled in by the student, provides a great starting point to make sure all students stay on track. Another possibility is putting answers to homework on line either before or after the due date, as a

means of review.

Links to quality reference materials can be included on the site, as well as links to recommended reading material. Links to other schools or classes can be found that may give more information as well as a fresh perspective.

A site can be enhanced with some extras such as a daily quote, word, problem or question. You can tie into self generating sites, so you merely have to

put a link to a site and the material will change each day. A survey of the week is a more active posting, but is great as a means of introducing or reviewing lessons. One tool to use to create your surveys is *Survey Monkey* (www.surveymonkey.com.)

Part of the site can serve as a bulletin board to acknowledge and display student accomplishments. Pictures of class happenings or illustrations of materials will also enhance your site.

The best websites will develop and evolve over time with input from the audience, peers, and objective observers. Sometimes that input comes unsolicited, but a survey or other method can be used to seek out information. It's important to keep in mind the unique milieu of a particular school and give considerations to both students and parents.

Just What is a Content Management System, Anyway?

Technology vocabulary often becomes an abbreviated language known only to the "techies." Hopefully this information about a Content Management System will help you understand the product. I'll bet someone in your District is tossing around the term CMS or the name of a specific product!

A Content Management System, usually abbreviated as CMS, is a package of procedures used to manage work flow in a collaborative environment. The procedures are designed to:

- allow many people to contribute to and share data. The entire district is able to add pieces of information to a content management system. This usually consists of teacher pages, activities, calendars, athletic achievements, Board information, grades,

short videos, needed forms, weekly updates, etc.

- assign roles to people. The building administrator is able to change certain pages that teachers cannot change. Teachers are able to change pages students cannot change. Users are assigned "roles" so they can access pages or spaces to add items.
- control access to data. We all know that everything in a school cannot be available to everyone. We don't want Susy checking John's grades. Therefore, assigned "roles" allow individuals access to certain information. In some cases, individual viewers can only look at a page; in other instances, they can edit a page.
- aid in easy storage and retrieval of

data. Most content management systems make life easier! They allow a teacher to log in, make changes, save, and log out in an easy fashion. There is no need to deal with FrontPage or Dreamweaver, or any number of other web page creation programs.

- reduce repetitive duplicate input. Why should you list all of the vacation dates on your page's calendar while the teacher next door does the same?
- improve the ease of report writing. Certain reports are usually built into a CMS. An example of a report could be a student's assignments for the day.
- Finally, a CMS is meant to improve communication between users. Aside from all of the posted information, there are often areas for discussion.

24/7 Learning IS Possible!

By: **Alice Schmitz**

Director of Education and Professional Development



Alice Schmitz

I **like** the idea of a school web page. I **like** the idea of being able to post school/class information online. I **like** the idea of students and parents being able to access more information about the school, teacher, course, and class work. I **like** the idea of students *thinking* about school outside of school—and of parents doing the same.

In the years I've spent as an educator, it became more and more obvious to me—households that value education produce stronger students with stronger educational goals. Students from these households will graduate from high school and go on to be successful citizens whether they are regular education students or special education students! So, what better way for a school and its teachers to help households get "up to speed" than to make resources available online.

Now, you're wondering why anyone would bother to spend a page of paper and your time telling you this! You already know this from your experience as an educator . . . and many of you, from your experience as a parent! You probably already have a web site with pages of resources and information for your students and their parents. Your school is probably your partner in this endeavor. Certainly, this communication and contribution to education is expected, appreciated, and possible. Parents, students, and other teachers—particularly resource teachers—rely on a teacher's web presence to guide learning.

However, there are still numbers of educators who are hesitant to provide a web page for their students. Why?

For some, it is seen as one more task on a list of growing duties; for others, a learning curve too steep to climb; and yet, for others, the attitude that no one really cares about their page, so why bother! I'd like to give you a few thoughts about web pages, portals, classroom

management systems (or whatever you choose to call them) that might either peak your interest if you are a beginner or move you to assist someone else.

Okay . . . So You're a Beginner

I totally agree with Dr. Thiele. You need to play with a few different tools. Go to <http://www.classroom20.com/> and check out one of more of the tools listed in the bottom right sidebar. There has to be something there that interests you. Once you've played with the tool, you will see applications to your classroom. You will probably run into other teachers to talk with . . . and in a short time, will be experimenting with some type of Web 2.0 tool. Believe me, this is catching. It is the first large step.

After you become more familiar with technology tools and their application to your classroom, you will see the advantages of keeping up your web page/site. I would even bet that you will find it timesaving rather than time consuming. Posting handouts certainly takes away the student argument about losing a paper and being unable to do homework!

How do you go about this task? Find a "buddy," another teacher who is willing to experiment with you. Contact your technology department. Your district may have an individual whose job it is to assist teachers with technology—I don't know any technology integration specialist who wouldn't love to help a teacher one-on-one to learn more about

technology tools. Maybe your district sponsors classes in which you could enroll. Another possibility is an on-line tutorial. Consider searching online for available training materials. There are many available for use through the web. I've been successful with You Tube videos (www.youtube.com) available for many different tools. I also like to check the tool's website. There is a wealth of written as well as video tutorials available.

Maybe You've Had Some Experience

Maybe you have a web page, maybe you're providing handouts on that page. You may be ready to move on. Talk to the technology leaders in your District. What do they see as your next step? Maybe you have a content management system (SchoolWires, Blackboard, Moodle, Edmodo, American Eagle or something from any number of other vendors). Work to learn more about your school's content management system.

Maybe there is no "district" product but you still want to share content with your students. If you are at this point consider exploring a Ning (www.ning.com) or a wiki (www.wikispaces.com is one product) so that you and your students can share content.

I'm an Expert

Then, it is your responsibility to help someone else. Instead of taking Dr. Thiele's advice to play with a new tool this year, make it your "job" to set up a "play date" with a colleague. Coach a colleague in the use of a product that will assist in 24/7 student learning! I am quite sure there is someone in your school who would love to learn from you.

And remember the goal . . . anytime we can get students working on learning activities outside of school, the students win in the end.

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Connecting
Special Education and
Technology

Join Us

Log on to our website at
www.setconnections.org
OR
Email us at
info@setconnections.org
for information

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Saturday, May 1, 2010

The FIRST annual SET Connections Special Education-Technology Conference

8:30 AM to 12:30 PM

Maine South High School
1111 South Dee Road, Park Ridge, IL 60068

Keynote Speakers: Meg Ormiston and Dr. Henry Thiele
Variety of Breakout Session Presenters

Cost: \$20

Three CPDUs may be obtained for attendance

Watch for Updates: www.SETConnections.org
Additional Details to Follow

Other Dates Which May Interest You . . .

Here is a list of some other conferences that may interest you. Check the website or link for more information.

- February 23 through 26, 2010—**ICE 2010: A Learning Odyssey**. More information about the ICE Conference is available [here](#). Registration is open at this time.
- March 13, 2010—**5th Bi-Annual GET CONNECTED!** Parent Conference, at McHenry County College.
- April 18-20, 2010—**Illinois Rehab Association 54th Annual Conference**, "*The Hills Are Alive with Rehabilitation*", at Eagle Ridge Resort and Spa in Galena, IL. Contact Jan Koch for further information, janet.koch@illinois.gov Click [here](#) for a link to more information.
- April 23, 2010—**Tech Forum** (sponsored by *Tech & Learning* magazine). Hyatt Regency-Woodfield, Schaumburg, Illinois. SET Connections is one of the partners for this conference which is targeted at technology leaders throughout the Midwest. For more information, click [here](#).