

Katrina Lehman
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Web 2.0 Technology Opportunities and Uses

Rationale

Web 2.0 technologies are changing how we communicate, share, design, and collaborate on the World Wide Web. According to Stephan Abram, the librarian must be the “guru of the information age” by using Web 2.0 tools and recognizing their power (qtd. in “Exploring Web 2.0 and Libraries” 12). If our goal is to help prepare our students to be active citizens and successful participants in a democratic society, then educating them on proper use of Web 2.0 technologies is crucial. Media specialists must educate the learning community in Web 2.0 use and implement participatory applications into library programs.

According to Paul Bausch, Web 2.0 has three defining qualities: openness, decentralization, and participation. It encourages users to create and share content and engage others in establishing resources (“Exploring Web 2.0 and Libraries” 10). David Warlick claims that “through Web 2.0, new information constructs are possible [with] interactive and community-contributed documents that tie in with dynamic, and independent digital libraries of web resources” (“Exploring Web 2.0 and Libraries” 10). Steve Johnson takes it a step further when he suggests

[t]here’s a quiet revolution underway right now, one that is likely to transform the way we use the web in the coming years... Essentially, the web is shifting from an international library of interlinked pages to an information ecosystem, where data circulate like nutrients in a rainforest (“Exploring Web 2.0 and Libraries” 10).

With advances in technology and shifts in how we interact online, the way we access and share information continues to evolve. Though these changes in information flow might seem chaotic and unmanageable to media specialists, addressing user needs and user expectations is crucial to remaining current and flexible in a constantly-changing

environment. If we want our students and faculty to continue to be life-long learners, then we must use, teach, and implement Web 2.0 technologies into library programs.

Core

The term Web 2.0 is commonly associated with “web applications that facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration on the World Wide Web (“Web 2.0”). Examples of Web 2.0 technologies include online communities, image-sharing sites, video-sharing sites, social networking sites, blogs and wikis.

A few of the main collaborative strengths of using Web 2.0 technologies are: overcoming physical distance, asynchronous communication, and synchronous communication (Hastings “Collaboration in 2.0” 16-17). Users can work together from a distance, communicating either in real time or at different times.

As is the nature of Web 2.0 technologies, tools and applications are constantly evolving. Before we know it, new tools will emerge. Currently, the following Web 2.0 tools are used to allow users to interact and participate online:

Calendars: Shared social calendars are designed to be used by multiple users to maintain a schedule. One key resource for this type of tool is eConsultant Web 2.0, which keeps a list of top social calendar sites. Before choosing a calendar, school communities should select features they will need, such as RSS (or XML) feeds. One commonly used social calendar is iCalendar, which allows the receiving or sending of calendar dates through text message or email reminders. 30 Boxes and Google Calendar (which is part of the Google application suite) are useful applications available free-of-charge. These tools allow for easy access to milestones, dates, and common free time for meetings. They can be embedded in to FB profiles or posted at wikis (Hastings “Collaboration, 2.0 Style” 19). Libraries can use social calendars to plan advisory meetings or develop library reservations and sign-out calendars.

Bookmarking: Social bookmarking applications give teachers, students and librarians a convenient place to store needed links and references to online resources. Currently, Delicious is the most popular social bookmarking tool. The features that make social bookmarking so popular to users are: a) they allow users to access bookmarks from any computer that's connected to the internet, b) they allow users to organize links, and c) they allow users to share them with others. The bookmarks are easily retrieved later because of the "tagging" and "bundling" features. They allow RSS feeds, and the ability to create private bookmarking networks. For online reference management services for researchers, Connote and CiteULike are often used, as well (Hastings "Collaboration, 2.0 Style" 22-23). In research units, students can use social bookmarks to organize, share, and develop a body of sources for research papers. Teachers can use social bookmarks to develop a bank of teaching resources and professional links.

Wikis: Wikis allow groups to collaboratively interact in authoring, editing, revising and publishing web-based content. An application that can be installed on a server, a wiki has the appearance of a webpage where users can make changes, comment, and add content. Wet paint and PBwiki are solutions for managing group data, and MediaWiki allows for the application to work inside a firewall (Hastings "Collaboration, 2.0 Style" 23-24). Librarians can use wikis to share library information and develop book discussions. The comments feature, along with the embedded discussion components, allow for discussion of unit themes and literature book talks.

Document sharing: Applications like Google Docs provide options to read and write in Microsoft documents and allow users to save in pdf format. Word processing, presentation software, and spreadsheet sharing occur within this application (Hastings "Collaboration, 2.0 Style" 25). Google Docs also provides file conversion options such as changing a pdf file into a text-based document. Using Google docs allows students and teachers to work online in groups on shared projects.

Blogs: Blogs are easy-to-use communication tools with discussion and commenting components built in to the interface. Wordpress, one of the most popular blog service

applications, has the option of internal or external hosting. Blogs are often used for internal communications or to publish reports for an outside audience (Hastings “Collaboration, 2.0 Style” 25-26). The “comments” feature of blogs allow for student discussion around any subject including literature, health, and science. The ability to add hyperlinks into blog content allows for other sources to be brought into the discussion. The archival nature of the blog allows for the content to be saved over time, and accessed from any place in the world at any time of the day. Teachers and librarians can use blogs to post assignments and important links to important supplementary materials. Students of all ages can interact on blogs of scientists who live in remote locations to follow scientific work and interact with other experts in various fields by using synchronous or asynchronous forms of communication. Blogs remove the obstacles time and geographical distance.

Micro-blogging: According to Carscaddon and Harris, microblogging media sites like Friendfeed and Twitter are personal and professional outlets where users can connect and share content with colleagues and friends all over the world (24). Limited to a 140-character “status update”, Twitter began as an application used primarily by teens and then evolved into a social network used by business professionals, political activists and news reporters, to name a few. Sonja Cole suggests that Twitter can be a way for librarians to ask for help, be helpful, promote themselves and their library program, and make connections (Carscaddon and Harris 25).

Social Networks: Social networking sites such as Facebook can be used as a single place to post information and updates for a team, facilitating communication and shared information. If social networks are used a collaborative platform, making use of Facebook’s instant messaging tools and message boards is key (Hastings “Collaboration, 2.0 Style” 21-22). Librarians can use social networking sites such as Facebook to post updates, add links, and include images of special programs such as visiting authors and school-wide library events.

Conclusion

As with any new online applications used in the school setting, issues around internet safety arise. How do we keep our students safe online when they're using Web 2.0 technologies? How can we incorporate Web 2.0 into our information literacy programs? Should our role as media specialists include the training of members within the school community about Web 2.0 applications? How do we deal with issues of privacy loss that often comes with information sharing? How do we navigate the lengthy and ever-changing "terms of service" agreements that accompany Web 2.0 technologies? How do we deal with copyright in the online world? Most importantly, how do we overcome the challenges of filtering programs and school policies that prohibit students from accessing and interacting with Web 2.0 technologies and valuable social networks?

One way to help the school community understand the implications and risk of online access to create policies that protect the school, users, and the library program. The risks that come with using the internet and Web 2.0 technologies should be included in network usage agreements for schools and districts. One good example of this is found in "Policy on District-Provided Access to Electronic Information, Services, and Networks":

Parental Permission:

I understand that the school district network and access to the Internet have been installed to help students develop the ability to research, evaluate, and synthesize educationally valuable information from any sources, to develop critical thinking skills, and to enable students to work effectively with communication technologies. I expect that the school district will use its best efforts to limit student access to only those areas that have educational value. However I understand that despite careful monitoring and supervision, there will always be the potential for students to come into contact with offensive or illegal material on the network or the Internet. Furthermore I understand that the school district will not be held responsible for specific Internet sites visited by students. Nonetheless, I recognize the importance of my student's use of the Internet as a tool for learning (Valenza 2-22C).

The technological changes in the Web 2.0 environment are deeply affecting how we communicate, share, and collaborate in the online world. Indeed, "the web paradigm has

completely shifted over the past 15 years; it's evolved into a multi-authored, participatory communication space" (Rethlefsen 32). With Web 2.0 applications, writing becomes the most important tool in communication and the development of good writing skills becomes more crucial than ever.

These changes in the online environment affect our educational environment, raising questions around the definition of a "credible source". Are academic discussions at professional blogs of established literary writers and respected journalists reliable sources in research?

Other questions include: What skills do our students need in order to function as contributing members of society? Could educating the school community on proper behavior in the blogosphere be just as important as public speaking skills? Could our "letters to the editor" unit be expanded to include posting comments on an article at an online magazine or newspaper?

With Web 2.0 technologies embedded in all aspects of society including religion, entertainment, education, and family life, library programs are faced with the challenge of how to best use Web 2.0 to enhance their media center programs. In this constantly-changing environment, it behooves the librarian to remain flexible, open, and curious about emerging technologies. After all, the school is looking to us to model these technologies and to give direction in information sharing, access and retrieval.

Works Cited

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