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Learning has a social context.

Learning is enhanced by opportunities to share and learn with others. Students need to develop skills to share knowledge and to learn with others, both in face-to-face situations and through technology.

AASL Standards for the 21st-Century Learner (AASL 2007, 2)

It is no secret that learning has a social context. Think of a time when you enthusiastically demonstrated how to use an online database for research or quietly led a student toward self-discovery. As we work with students nearly every day, we take for granted our pedagogical roots in social learning theory based on the premise that students

need modeling and observation to learn from one another (Kearsley). With the support of the U.S. Department of Education, the Center for Technology in Learning at SRI International articulates this 21st-century *School 2.0* vision <http://etoolkit.org/etoolkit/map> in which students construct, observe, and share knowledge in learning ecosystems with peers, parents, and community partners. Information gathering becomes a key activity, and social technologies are the lead tools for sharing knowledge.

Think of your school's learning ecosystem—a dynamic, delicately balanced interplay of forces, with no one part larger than its whole. Can you articulate what technology means to teaching and the social context of learning? As an advocate of social technologies in schools, I am surprised to find myself

agreeing with the late media critic Neil Postman. In *The End of Education* he writes that we need to develop a critical attitude toward technology; not that we see it in a negative light, but that we see it with all its nuances and power. We need technology education, Postman suggests, as a part of the humanities, for "...a new technology does not merely add something, it changes everything" (Postman 1995, 192). Social technologies have revolutionized the idea of learning in a social context; students will expect learning to take place with people they never even meet or see. By understanding how social media impacts our learning ecosystems, we will enable student learning to reach its full potential.

Unfortunately, the description of this 2.0 ecosystem is imperfect. In their landscape of learning, the library media center appears a

Social Learning by Design:

The Role of Social Media

passive repository: e-books pass hands and library media specialists offer to e-mail resources. Where is the active, social learning that we know can occur with our leadership? I think, no matter what our own ecosystem lacks, we can better express our belief that learning is social for 21st-century learners.

Where does technology fit? Some school districts blithely embrace technology, while others avoid it altogether out of fear or misunderstanding. Both of these extremes fall short because they embrace or reject technology without a clear vision of how it complements or confounds our pedagogical goals. In the early adopter schools we find Palm Pilot programs, podcasting initiatives, blogs and wikis implemented without clear goals. Their students may have opportunities to use advanced

technologies, but does their learning extend beyond *how* to use these tools? These programs become showcases of technology rather than a means to educate students.

While technology is an ideal medium for sharing, it presents further challenges to thoughtful educators. We can't conclude that students have made deeper learning connections merely because they use blogging software efficiently or because we put them into social groups. These social tools can provide the motivation and opportunity for collaborative learning, but we need to ascertain, through cues or assessment guides, that students have, indeed, reached higher cognitive levels. Recently I developed a book review blog for fifth-grade students and, in spite of repeated attempts to guide them toward a thoughtful exchange of ideas, ended up with superficial, chat-

room-style interactions. Wowed by the technology, my students lost sight of our primary goal.

The common belief that "learning has a social context" and the concomitant benchmarks bridge an important divide between teaching *how* to use newer social media and *why* they are vital to education.

As coordinator of school libraries in Clovis (CA) Unified School District, Rob Darrow observes, "...unfortunately...class assignments, especially at the high school level, do little to challenge students to do ongoing presenting let alone choosing their own tools for presentations" (2009). It is time for library media specialists to step forward, teach, and model thoughtful, as well as efficient, use of these tools.

Those of us in more evolved learning ecosystems can directly impact both the vision and policies of other schools. We can promote a philosophy of technology use that ensures students learn *why* sharing new knowledge and agile media use are essential.

"Collaboration with others" for school librarians in the 21st-century involves looking beyond our traditional teacher-collaborator role. We need to start being more active in student learning through direct collaboration with them on projects. Further, collaborating more closely with the technology coordinators in our schools would result in students benefiting from social technologies as we educate our colleagues, breaking through the outmoded perceptions that Web 2.0 tools are unsafe. We need to start working with others to change or shape policies, so our students can actually take advantage of these resources.



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Although she has taught use of computers and persistently promotes social technologies to teachers, she has yet to blog or tweet.

Most of us, however, will work from the ground up. In collaborating with teachers on class projects, we can suggest social contexts as a learning goal and offer to measure student progress in choosing appropriate tools for sharing. Even within the confines of a fixed schedule environment, we can lead; the common ground lies in design and assessment. We must design and assess with deeper content in mind, designing meaningful projects using social technologies. We will gauge learning through designing and applying rubrics that measure how well students express content through social media. Our students will express themselves clearly through speaking and writing, constructing and sharing their knowledge.

After all, we are library media specialists. It's time, now more than ever, to accept, embrace, and promote social media to make a difference for our students' learning.

Works Cited

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If you are interested in this topic, check out these (and other) related programs in Charlotte:

2.0 Learning Tools Smackdown Joyce Kasman Valenza & guest panelists

Rev Up Your Library: Bring on the Boys! Helen Werner Cox

"Riders in the Stream"—The Role of School Libraries and Metadata in Enabling Dynamic Streaming Media-Based Instruction Thomas Adamich

Turbo Charge Your Resources: Fabulous Freebies, Great Gadgets, & Sweet Sites that Go the Distance! Gwyneth Anne Bronwynne Jones

Let's Go! Google Earth and GIS Resources Across the Curriculum Larry Johnson

Not Just Another Brick in the Wall: Engaging 21st-Century Learning Through Participatory School Librarianship Buffy J. Hamilton

Rev Up Learning for All Students Using Layered Curriculum Marge Cox

Engaging Kids in Research with Web 2.0 Tools Connie Champlin & Nancy Miller

Start a Game Program for under \$100 Terri Kirk

10 Reasons why Board Games PWN: Lessons Learned and Games Aligned Chris Harris & Brian Mayer

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