

# Wikis and Blogs for Students

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**A**s teacher-librarians, our role has always been all about change and growth. Dependent upon to be both curriculum and technology experts, we embrace change as we lead the way in school, board and province-wide initiatives and in the implementation and use of new technologies.

The primary mandate of the teacher-librarian has always been to meet the needs of learners in their library. Although this hasn't changed, our students have, as have the methods we use to meet their educational needs. Often referred to as "millennials" or "net-geners," students today seem to be "programmed" differently from those of generations past. They function best when networked; they like to parallel process and multi-task, expect to be able to gather and share information in multiple devices in multiple places, and share it in ways that allow them to act quickly and without top-down direction. For them, reality is no longer real, doing is more important than knowing, and learning more closely resembles Nintendo than logic (Prensky).

In order to really connect with the way they learn, we need to "meet them where they live" and where they will continue to live in the workplace when they move on from high school. One powerful way to accomplish this is to incorporate the social Web into the school library program, to tap into its potential for developing the critical learning skills that will serve them well in the years to come. "Today's students will be working in a global marketplace and living in a global society. In order to succeed and become leaders in this new world, they must acquire a far different set of knowledge, skills, and perspectives than previous generations..."

(*Educating Leaders for a Global Society*). Carol Koechlin has identified these skills to be:

- ◆ thinking critically and creatively
- ◆ applying knowledge to new situations
- ◆ analyzing information
- ◆ comprehending new ideas
- ◆ communicating
- ◆ collaborating
- ◆ solving problems
- ◆ making decisions ("Assignments That Work" PowerPoint)

There are an increasingly significant and growing number of resources and teacher-librarian advocates supporting the use of the social Web to teach these skills. Students are already familiar with the Web 2.0 platform because of the hours they spend on such sites as Facebook, MySpace and YouTube. Creating a social Web forum such as a wiki or a blog with an educational angle allows students to participate in discussion and the sharing of ideas both in and out of school hours, wherever they have access to the Internet.

### Wikis

A wiki is simply a collaborative website that allows registered visitors to create, edit and link content. We all know about Wikipedia, that online encyclopedia which anyone can edit and which kids most often turn to for information first. A wiki adopts the same principle, except the teacher or teacher-librarian sets up and monitors the information to be shared. According to Brian Lamb (2004), there are five characteristics separating wikis from other collaborative technologies:

1. Unique – student created, includes links to other sites and sources
2. Collaborative – synergy created by multiple authors working as a virtual team
3. Open editing – anyone with a password can add anything at any time
4. Simple coding – even young children can create and edit pages and add links
5. Evolving – wikis are in a constant state of change

It is this synergy and constant flux that makes the wiki experience unique.

Using pbwiki.com, we developed our first wiki in May, 2007, for a Grade 11 University English class, to study the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in its social and historical context. Together we designed the assignment which involved students creating a collaborative website through group research, comparing life in the 50s and early 60s to life today. From the home page, we were able to give an introduction to the assignment and instructions on wiki use, and provide links to pictures, articles and music in preparation, or to whet their appetites for their group research topics. In the sidebar, we provided links to a