



Instructional Technology Newsletter

Developing 21st Century Skills One Byte at a Time

The Connected Classroom

I am proud to highlight some of the great ways that our teachers are connecting their students with the world using technology. Throughout the school year we have invested time and resources to promote the use of video conferencing, collaborative projects and online learning K-12. The result is a showcase of authentic, engaging and to be honest, amazing learning experiences for our students and faculty.

Our faculty has invested a large amount of time and resources to organize these opportunities for our students. The result of this work and dedication in the classroom is an enthusiasm for learning, the development of 21st century skills and authentic connections to curriculum.

Ms. Reichel, grade 2, Briggs School has used many tools to connect her students. She publishes a class blog using our in-house wordpress blog server. She uses this blog to not only publish updates and news feeds for what is happening in her classroom, but she has incorporated it as a learning and collaboration tool in her classroom. Ms. Reichel uses a flip video camera in her classroom. She records her students throughout the day taking part in many different class activities. These recordings are edited and published on her blog.

If you browse her blog you may find a video of [students performing "Planet Raps"](#), interviews of students [discussing an "Author Study"](#), videos of students [working out the steps of a math problem](#) on the Smartboard, recordings and documentation regarding online projects, or video clips of a recent video conference. Ms. Reichel uses her class blog to connect her students with pen pals in Tennessee. Her students guest post letters to their pen pals on her blog. The students in

Tennessee then respond to those postings by leaving comments.

Mrs. Fastnacht, Grade 2, Cozy Lake School, has been connecting her students with classes around the country. Together, [we have published a wiki](#) that documents their travels. The students have connected with classrooms in Virginia, North Carolina, and New Jersey. Mrs. Fastnacht uses Google Earth to show her students the locations they are traveling to. They have learned about the types of communities, cultures, school day activities and various other topics of interest. They have documented their findings and made connections to their current social studies curriculum with each.

Mrs. Fastnacht has also incorporated readers theater with this new opportunity. Her students have performed their reader's theater skits for audiences using [Skype](#). Most recently they [performed the play Stone Soup](#) for all of the kindergarten students in Milton School.

Mrs. McLeod, grade 4, White Rock School has utilized technology to connect her students with an expert on sea turtles. After attending a workshop titled "[Framing a Skype Video Conference Session](#)" offered by me, Mrs. McLeod was inspired to make a connection with a subject area expert on sea turtles. I conducted a quick Google search on "sea turtle experts" and discovered Dr. Spotila of Drexel University. Dr. Spotila is one of the leading experts on sea turtles in the world.

Mrs. McLeod's class took part in a video conference with Dr. Spotila. The students engaged Dr. Spotila in a forty minute exchange of questions and answers.

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Jefferson Township Public Schools



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Points of Interest

- ◇ **Video Conferencing, Pen Pals & Online Projects**
- ◇ **Podcasting in the classroom as an alternative assessment.**
- ◇ **Create your own textbook with Google Sites.**

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Podcasting in the Classroom

The term podcasting has been around a while now. It simply refers to an audio recording that is published and syndicated. There have been variations of podcasts over the years. A podcast that includes video is referred to as a vodcast. As we have seen the terminology expand, so has the resources available for using this technology with our students.

Podcasting is an excellent alternative assessment for students. Some of the most successful learning environments allows students the option to create a podcast as an alternative project. Many teachers utilize podcasts to share class news, record tutorial or study guides and to publish original student work.

Developing a podcast is easy. All that is required is software or hardware that can record, a microphone and a place to publish the final episode. Audacity has become the software of choice in our school district for recording and editing audio files. It is easy to use, free to down-

load and install and powerful enough for the most sophisticated user or the complete newbie.

There are many ways that podcasting can be introduced into a K-12 classroom. Here are a few:

- [Record book talks or book reviews](#)
- [Literature Circles](#)
- [Meet the Author Reports](#)
- [Historical Audio Diaries](#)
- [Oral Histories](#)
- Students can record a news cast or interview in a foreign language that they are studying
- Record a documentary or narration about a topic studied.
- Explain a math or science topic
- Produce a class radio show documenting class events and activities.
- Publish audio books of student writing.
- Conduct mock interviews of his-

torical figures, famous people or subject area experts.

- Develop a news broadcast from a time in the past or a time in the future.
- [Use the RAFT writing strategy](#) to develop and publish an audio version of your writing: **example: You are a Trout writing a diary entry to yourself about the effects of acid rain on your lake.**

These are just a few of the many examples of podcasting in the classroom. If you are interested in bringing projects of this type to your classroom please contact me directly. I will help you plan, organize and implement podcasting into your curriculum.

This type of alternative project is supportive of the Universal Design for Learning framework. It allows students alternative ways to show understanding, become engaged with the curriculum and display creativity.

..... Student Created Online Textbooks Using Google Sites

As part of our Google Apps for Education membership we have access to [Google Sites](#). Google Sites allows all of our teachers and students to create wiki style websites with just a few clicks. There is no need to learn any advanced website design skills. Just click edit and start typing.

On Google Sites you can add text, images, file attachments, and hyperlinks. You can embed videos, Google Presentations and Google Docs. .

The availability of this resource

creates many classroom opportunities. One idea that some educators have initiated is a class developed digital textbook. Throughout the school year students will contribute resources and information to a shared Google Site.

The site would be organized by pages that identify various units of study or curriculum topics. Students would share links, documents, videos and any other content that this pertinent to the topic.

This project will result in a web-based online textbook or an adden-

dum to the hard cover text. Students would be able to access these materials to review or learn important concepts. By having access to a variety of information on a topic we are supporting the universal design for learning framework that calls for multiple forms of representation.

We are providing resources that match student learning styles as well as providing them an opportunity to publish for an audience and self-direct their learning.

The Connected Classroom Continued

[We developed a Google Site for the exchange.](#) On that site [we published Glogs](#) that the students had developed after conducting research on a particular sea turtle. Upon completion of the video conference the students wrote reflections on what they learned. [These reflections are also available on the site.](#) The students are currently finishing digital stories that will be published as well.

Mrs. Brzostowski and Ms. Behm, White Rock School, have been using technology to take their students on virtual field trips. They have also connected their students with pen pals in Virginia. The students have applied what they learned about formal letter writing by exchanging letters to their pen pals on a wiki. The wiki provides a collaborative workspace where students can share conversations, links, files and videos.

Mrs. Brzostowski will be work-

ing with Mrs. Mcleod's students and myself to organize a video conference with a CPA. This supports what the students have been learning about personal finance. The students have developed a list of questions to share with Mr. DePalma C.P.A.

Video conferencing, online projects and digital pen pals have a low barrier to entry, and provide your students with opportunities for learning that can not be matched by a textbook or classroom lecture.

Mrs. Myketyin, French teacher, middle school has connected her students with a class located in France. The ultimate goal of a world language is communicating and building connections with those from another culture. The students in Ms. Myketyin's 8th grade French classes are doing just that. Ms. Myketyin's students use a Wiki page to digitally communicate with French pen pals from a middle school in Marseille, France. The Wiki allows students to

quickly and safely build international connections.

This is just a sampling of the connections that are occurring in our classrooms around the district. I had to leave out a number of other examples because of space constraints in this newsletter. We have a number of other reader's theater skits, pen pal connections, online projects and upcoming video conference sessions to share. I will be sure to highlight them on my blog and in upcoming newsletters.

If you are interested in learning more about how you can bring this type of experience into your classroom, please do not hesitate to contact me. It is easy to establish and the rewards are bountiful!



What is cool on the web?

CK12 Flexbook

<http://www.ck12.org/flexbook/>

The CK12 Foundation offers customizable, standards aligned free K-12 digital textbook in math, science, engineering and technology.

Curriki

<http://www.curriki.org>

Curriki is an open-source project that allows educators around the world to share full curriculum, lesson plans, interactive resources and activities. You can search by subject, grade and content type.

Snag Films

<http://www.snagfilms.com/films/>

Watch free documentary films online. There is a large collection of films that can be searched by topic. Once you find a film that interests you it can be viewed online. You can also grab a widget that can be posted on your blog or website. This widget will contain an embedded copy of the film that others can view on your site.