

EITN Issue 17 Book Reviews

Edited by Sarah Cornelius and Claire Molloy, November 2009

Blogs, Wiki's, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms. Second Edition

W. Richardson

California: Corwin Press (2008), pp. 168, Pbk., £14.99, ISBN 9781412959728

Reviewed by Andy Brown, UHI Millennium Institute

Writing for Web 2.0 novices, Richardson uses the preface to share his frustration as a parent over the educational system's failure to adapt to the changing world. This is an important message but how many people read prefaces? Chapter 1 begins with a history of the Internet, which, while impressive (120,000 blogs, 1.5 million Webblog posts, millions of photos etc., added each day), does little to excite the uninitiated and tempt them into taking part. Thereafter, however, Richardson's writing style changes and his enthusiasm for the subject becomes both apparent and infectious.

As students operate in a Web 2.0 world Richardson questions how educators can take advantage of this. He answers this extremely well, introducing readers to the basics of using Web 2.0 technologies and collaborative learning and providing online examples. As his screencasting example (p. 122) illustrates, the Web is constantly changing while books remain static. It is surprising, therefore, that he does not refer to his own up-to-date resource site ([://weblogged.wikispaces.com/](http://weblogged.wikispaces.com/)) although he does give information on how readers can 'meet' him online.

The screencasting example also shows how learners can so easily be exposed to offensive material and he offers good advice on how to deal with this. There is a small section on staying safe online but Richardson does not cover dangers such as malware and phishing. A paragraph and a reference to, for instance, sites such as Get Safe Online ([://www.getsafeonline.com](http://www.getsafeonline.com)) or the BBC's Online Safety course ([://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/course/safety/menu](http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/course/safety/menu)) would add to the book's value.

There are other omissions. WYSIWYG is mentioned without explanation, a glossary or a reference to an online glossary would be useful and e-Portfolios merit more than a paragraph. Copyright and IPR are glossed over—readers may get the idea that anything may be used so long it is for educational purposes.

Richardson recommends that teachers and learners sign up to sites that offer free hosting without mentioning the need to read the terms and conditions, privacy policies and to beware of ‘opt out’ statements, used, for example, by 21Classes ([://www.21classes.com/shop/buyPackage.htm?kind=classroomportal](http://www.21classes.com/shop/buyPackage.htm?kind=classroomportal)). He also fails to warn that acceptance of these terms often means giving the company the right to freely reproduce, distribute and publish any content. Although he mentions data protection in his chapter on blogs, a recommendation to check national laws would be useful.

His coverage of the Wikipedia debate is interesting, although not all will agree with his views. As Hunt (2007) said, "*The beauty of Wikipedia is that anyone can edit it. The problem is that anyone does.*" Richardson does emphasise, however, that information on the Web is unverified and students need to be taught analytical skills. This is confirmed by recent research showing that although young people are quite at ease with technology they rely on basic search tools and are not able to critically assess information (Pothen, 2008).

Although information about Web 2.0 technology is freely available on the Internet, this book is aimed at those more comfortable with the printed word. Naturally a book cannot keep pace with the fast moving cyberworld, but it is a good starting point for educators who wish to explore the potential of Web 2.0.

References

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