Twelve Essentials for Technology Integration

A free resource from Richard Byrne author of Free Technology for Teachers. Permission is granted for non-commercial reproduction of this document.

There are many free tools on the Internet that teachers can use in their classrooms. Figuring out which ones to use can be daunting and time-consuming.

Image via One Laptop Per Child

This guide is designed to provide teachers with a selection of tools that can be used in most classroom settings regardless of content area.

All of the resources in this guide are 100% free for teachers. All resources have been previously featured on Free Technology for Teachers.

Document and Presentation Creation Tools

Documents, Spread Sheets, Presentations

This guide couldn't possibly be worth its salt if it didn't start with Google Docs. Google Docs gives you the power to create documents, spreadsheets, and slide shows using any Internet-connected computer.

Google Docs gives users the ability to collaborate on the creation of documents, spreadsheets, and slide shows. Collaboration through Google Docs allows for peer-editing of documents at any time or place that students can get online. Online collaboration also gives students that are working in groups the ability to add to and edit presentations and papers any time they discover new information or have a new thought about their topic of study.

Finally, having students use Google Docs eliminates the excuses of "my printer broke" or "my computer crashed" that students will sometimes use to justify having a late assignment.

http://docs.google.com

Documents, Spread Sheets, Presentations

Zoho Show is part of a suite of free web based tools offered by Zoho. Zoho also offers document, spreadsheet, and quiz/survey creation tools. You can sign into Zoho using your Google or Yahoo account.

Zoho Show offers more editing options and templates than those found on Google Presentation. Zoho Show presentations can easily be embedded in a blog or shared via email. I also like Zoho Show because my students can work collaboratively to create group presentations. Interestingly, when my students have to create a presentation I give them the choice of Google Presentation or Zoho Show and most end up using Zoho Show.

It should be mentioned that Zoho also offers a wiki service and conferencing service. All of the services in the Zoho suite of products allow for collaboration between users.

http://show.zoho.com

The End of Boring Slide Shows

Animoto's tag line is "the end of slide shows" and while Animoto has not stopped the creation of boring slide shows, it certainly has provided a great alternative to slide shows. Animoto allows students to create great looking videos without the need for any editing skills. The process of using Animoto is simple, select images, select music, click go, and Animoto does the rest.

Animoto for Education gives you the opportunity to register as a teacher. Registering as a teacher will allow you to create videos longer than 30 seconds for free as opposed to paying the fee Animoto charges regular customers. The other benefit of Animoto for Education is that you can manage your students' usernames and passwords.

http://animoto.com

Tools for Communicating with Parents and Students

Free Blogging Platforms

File sharing, conferencing, podcasting

There are numerous free blogging platforms on the web. Many of these platforms are great and have excellent support networks, but they were never designed with the express purpose of classroom use the way that Edublogs was.

Edublogs provides teachers and students with a free blogging platform. Using Edublogs teachers can set up and moderate blogs for their students to write on. For teachers just getting started with blogging, the customer service/support network provided by Edublogs is second to none.

Wondering why you should have a blog for your class? Consider this; blogging creates less work for teachers as it allows for rapid, widespread communication with parents and students. Maintaining a blog provides teachers, administrators, parents, and students with an ongoing record of the academic year.

http://edublogs.org

Getting started with Drop.io is extremely quick and easy. In fact, it's easier than setting up a blog. Using Drop.io doesn't require registration and is completely free for up to 100mb of storage. You can create as many Drop.io "drops" or pages for free.

Some of things that you do with Drop.io include recording podcasts, posting slide shows, posting lecture outlines, posting rubrics, posting links for students, leaving voice messages for students on the days that you're out of the classroom, and collecting students' assignments without cluttering your inbox. Drop.io also gives you the capability to conduct online conferencing for free.

Drop.io is lead by some very smart, forward-thinking people who are continuously working to improve the service's offerings.

http://drop.io

Just as with blogs, there are numerous free platforms for creating a classroom website. Weebly was selected for inclusion in this guide because of the excellent user support provided by Weebly.

Some people get intimidated by the thought of trying to create a website, but with Weebly if you can send an email, you can create a website.

Wondering why you would want a website instead of a blog or a drop.io page? The quick answer to this is; websites are good for providing a static resource of information with many indexed pages and blogs are good for frequent updates and communication. This is a very simplistic explanation, but often that's all people need to know when creating their first online presence.

Some other good options for building a website are Yola.com and Webs.com.

http://weebly.com

Tools for Creating Collaborative Student Projects

Wikispaces - Create a Reference Together

As with most resources mentioned in this guide, Wikispaces is not the only option in its category. PBWorks is another wiki service that is popular with educators.

To date, Wikispaces has provided educators with more than 100,000 free advertising-free wikis. The user interface of Wikispaces is clear and intuitive. There aren't a lot of fancy bells and whistles, but Wikispaces does offer everything you could need in a wiki including video embed options, image hosting, and easy navigation.

One way to use a wiki in education is to build a resource page with your students for your students. As students progress through course curriculum they can share notes and references through a wiki. For example, throughout the year students could build a wiki about the topics they've studied. The students can then use the wiki as a study guide for tests and assessments.

http://wikispaces.com

VoiceThread - Conversations About Artifacts

VoiceThread can be described as an online slide show accompanied by commentary (voice and text) from other VoiceThread users. To start a VoiceThread one person posts images and records their commentary about those images then other users can login into their accounts and share their commentary on the same images or what was said by the previous person. In short, it's like having a conversation at an art gallery, but the conversation is held and recorded online instead of in-person.

Voicethread has been used by math teachers to create "how to" videos about math problems.

VoiceThread could be used as a great tool for students, parents, and teachers to collaborate on a local history project. Gather and scan some pictures of your community from years past then have students and parents talk about the history of the town.

http://voicethread.com

Ediscio - Collaborative Flashcards

Ediscio is a little different from a lot of flashcard creation tools because Ediscio lets you build sets of flashcards individually or with the help of other Ediscio users. The other distinguishing feature of Ediscio is that flashcards can include images.

Ediscio could be used by an entire class to create a "card box" that all of the students can study. Not only does studying flashcards help students retain information, the process of creating flashcards also helps students learn. The option to include images in the flashcards makes Ediscio a good choice for students in courses that require the identification of items by sight.

http://ediscio.com

Educational Alternatives to YouTube

YouTube is blocked in many schools, these alternates provide quality content.

Snag Films - Free Documentaries

Since Snag Films launched in the (Northern Hemisphere) summer of 2008 I have been able to watch dozens of NOVA and National Geographic films that I otherwise would have had to buy or rent.

Snag Films solves two problems for me. The first problem is overcoming a limited budget. The second problem is providing a way for a student that is absent from class to watch the film I showed in class without having to lend out a dvd.

All of the movies on Snag Films can be embedded into the blog that you maintain for communicating with your classes.

http://snagfilms.com

SchoolTube - Share Videos

SchoolTube is similar to TeacherTube in that both are designed for classroom use. SchoolTube was chosen for inclusion in this guide because it generally has less advertising and faster upload times than TeacherTube. That said, both are good alternatives to YouTube.

SchoolTube's purpose is to give students and teachers a place to find videos and share videos. You can locate videos appropriate for classroom use on SchoolTube. If your students create videos of their own they can share those videos with the world. Sharing videos provides students with an authentic, real-world audience for their work. SchoolTube occasionally runs contests to which students can submit their video entries.

http://schooltube.com

DotSub - Videos With Subtitles

DotSub is a great resource for foreign language teachers, ESL/ EFL teachers, and teachers of students with hearing impairments.

DotSub is full of user generated content that is subtitled into many different languages. Transcribing of videos is done by volunteers. Anyone with the time and patience can transcribe a video for use on DotSub. One of the better channels on DotSub is the TED Talks channel which, in some cases, has videos available in up to 40 languages.

Foreign Language teachers could have students find their favorite short YouTube videos or SchoolTube videos to transcribe into the language that they are studying.

http://dotsub.com

Resources.

Below you will find links to all of the resources mentioned in the guide as well as some additional resources that may be of interest to you.

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http://animoto.com

Additional presentation tools.
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Additional blogging and website tools.
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Additional collaborative project tools.
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Additional Alternatives to YouTube

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http://history.com
http://hulu.com
http://bigthink.com
http://fora.tv
http://current.tv

About the Author

Richard Byrne is a high school social studies teacher in a western Maine high school. He currently teaches US History and has previously taught Contemporary World Studies.

The award-winning blog Free Technology for Teachers is written by Richard Byrne. Free Technology for Teachers is written for a global audience of teachers interested in discovering and trying the latest free web-based technologies in their classrooms.

Need help putting this guide into action?

Richard Byrne is available for inservice workshops and consultation.

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