

Chapter 18

Web 2.0 Tools in Social Studies Methods

Adam M. Friedman
Wake Forest University, USA

Tina L. Heafner
University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the theory and literature behind the integration of technology, particularly the Internet, in social studies teacher education. The authors have spent significant time studying the impact of technology in the K-12 social studies environment; the results of this research are summarized in the chapter and serve as a backbone for how technology is integrated into our teaching methodology courses with the context of preparing future teachers to utilize technology as a tool to enhance content, student learning experiences, and academic achievement of their future students. Specifically, we focus on three Web 2.0 tools; blogs, wikis, and podcasts. Specific examples, vignettes, practical applications for methods instructors, and directions for the future are provided.

INTRODUCTION

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (1994) defines social studies as

...the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political

science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (p. 3).

On the surface, this definition gives credence to the wide variety of subject matter inherent in social studies, while simultaneously describing the purpose of teaching social studies. Upon closer scrutiny, in

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order for the purpose of social studies to come to fruition, students must engage in higher-level thinking, in which they evaluate evidence, consider different perspectives, and draw their own conclusions. Accordingly, this type of discourse is precisely what is advocated in terms of student engagement by several organizations whose primary focus is on social studies education. For example, the National Center for History in the Schools calls upon students “to go beyond the facts presented in their textbooks and examine the historical record for themselves” (online) and the Center for Civic Education (1994) extols the importance of students being able to “evaluate, take, and defend positions about” a myriad of issues. Regardless of the specific social studies subject (history, political science, geography, economics), the design of instruction in which students are asked to do more than simply recall facts is imperative if the higher-level thinking goals are to be accomplished.

Various descriptions of best practices notwithstanding, social studies has a stereotypical reputation of being taught as a teacher-centered, dry subject in which a teacher, through a lecture and notes, is the disseminator of knowledge and the students are resigned to absorb it. This approach, in which students recall basic facts, and rarely if ever engage in higher-order thinking, has been described in books such as Goodlad’s (1984) *A Place Called School*, and perpetuated in popular culture through movies like *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*. Oftentimes exacerbating this dilemma are end-of-course standardized examinations, which are in place in a plethora of social studies courses, and are themselves generally at a lower level of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Pahl, 2003). Meier (2002) notes that these examinations can influence pedagogy, as teachers may “teach to the test” (p. 195). Further, Friedman, in his 2006 study of world history and world geography teachers, found that an end-of-course test had a negative impact on their predilection to engage students in higher-order thinking using primary source docu-

ments, as teachers in this study felt a tremendous pressure to cover all of the requisite content.

Despite the reputation of social studies and the difficulties presented by standardized examinations, the use of technology in the social studies classroom can help to bring about change in the way social studies is taught and learned. However, it is first necessary to define what is meant by technology. As Martorella (1997) notes, the definition of technology is dependent on time and place, as technology is constantly and rapidly changing. In terms of teaching and learning social studies, a class of high school students working in their school’s computer lab to access the National Archives in 1989 is surely an anachronism. Twenty years later, the Internet’s presence in American public schools is as commonplace as chalkboards and desks (Parsad & Jones, 2005). Friedman and Hicks (2006) note that in the past century, “‘State of the art technology’ has evolved from motion pictures, to radio, television, microcomputers, educational software, and static Web pages to Internet sites that foster interaction and communication between students and teachers” (p. 248). For the purpose of this chapter, we define technology as interactive computer applications, particularly the Internet and Web 2.0 software, specifically weblogs (blogs), wikis, podcasts and digital image software.

The Internet and Teaching Social Studies

In terms of teaching social studies, the transcendence of the Internet has been a development of great magnitude, as it has made resources for teachers and students (such as tens of thousands of documents and images) widely and easily available (Cohen & Rosenzweig, 2006; VanFossen & Shiveley, 2000). This in turn has the potential to transform the traditional pedagogical practices of social studies teachers, as the vast resources that are available can engage students in material. It is therefore imperative that social studies

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