Chapter 23

Using Online Collaborative Tools to Foster Middle School Students' "Public Voices":
Payoffs, Perils and Possibilities

Nick Lawrence
East Bronx Academy, USA

Joe O'Brien
University of Kansas, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Digital participatory media offer urban social studies teachers a unique opportunity to foster students' civic skills and public voice while enhancing their understanding of social justice within a democratic society. This case study addresses how an 8th grade U.S. history teacher in a New York urban school, when using wikis and online discussion with his students, came to realize that "what [technology] users need in order to take charge of their own online decision making is at best an art and, more often than not, a series of trial-and-error solutions" (Lankes, 2008, p. 103), while operating within two constraints identified by Bull et al (2008): "Teachers have limited models for effective integration of media in their teaching; and, only limited research is available to guide best practice" (p. 2). While using digital collaborative tools enabled students to develop collaborative and communication skills and begin to learn social justice oriented content, the teacher faced challenges related

to technology integration, curricular alignment, selection of appropriate digital tools, and fostering online academic norms among students. This chapter focuses on a teacher's three-year journey from his first day of teaching to his connecting the use of technology to relevant curricular content to promote his students' use of online public voices for social justice.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

While digital participatory media in the classroom no longer is a revolutionary concept, practitioners and researchers still are searching for best practices for how to use such media to further student learning. This case study addresses the experiences of a teacher in one of America's most urban areas who over the course of two years and in planning for his third year has sought to integrate technology into his classroom so as to better align students' academic experiences with their social, online experiences.

In order to achieve this aim his students have used digital participatory media not only for academic purposes and to develop online social skills, but also to explore social justice themes. The latter has served as a way for the teacher to tie together the curriculum at the urban school and to support a collaborative effort by his students with students in a Midwestern suburban classroom. The case study opens with the teacher's first and second years in the classroom wherein he began with smaller attempts to integrate technology into his curriculum and then gradually integrated more use of the technology as his management skills and confidence improved. The case description then discusses how the use of technology in the classroom and curriculum has been set up to support not only an expanded use of the technology in the third year, but also has set up this teacher and a colleague to explore in more depth the theme of social justice and to cultivate students' online public voice, the art and skill of persuading "other people—beyond one's closest friends and family—to take action on shared issues" (Levine, 120).

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The students attend a Title I new small school with grades 6-12 in a large city in New York where more than 90% of them receive free or reduced lunch. The school is working toward a 1:1 student to laptop ratio. Grants support much of the school's technology, which are used both to sustain current technology and to invest in new

Related Content

Feature Extraction/Selection in High-Dimensional Spectral Data
Seoung Bum Kim (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 863-869).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/feature-extraction-selection-high-dimensional/10921

On Interacting Features in Subset Selection
Zheng Zhao (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 1079-1084).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/interacting-features-subset-selection/10955

Inexact Field Learning Approach for Data Mining
Honghua Dai (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 1019-1022).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/inexact-field-learning-approach-data/10946

Multilingual Text Mining
Peter A. Chew (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 1380-1385).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/multilingual-text-mining/11001

Evolutionary Approach to Dimensionality Reduction
Amit Saxena, Megha Kothariand Navneet Pandey (2009). *Encyclopedia of Data Warehousing and Mining, Second Edition (pp. 810-816).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/evolutionary-approach-dimensionality-reduction/10913