



## Surfing the Net

# Teaching and Learning about Skills for the 21st Century Using the Internet

C. Frederick Risinger

**Those of you that have** read previous columns have heard me say, after discussing a curriculum topic or issue and the relevant websites and other Internet resources, that “I wish I was a classroom teacher again! I would love teaching using these resources.” After doing the research and examining some of the technologies for this column on essential skills for the 21st century, I’m more hesitant. In order to utilize the latest web services, programs, and other resources, the up-to-date teacher must acquire a myriad of new skills and figure out ways to meld those skills and web services with the content to produce an integrated curriculum.

For a variety of reasons, the concept of “Essential Skills for the 21st Century” received a great deal of attention even before the 21st century had begun. Even though we are eight years into the century, the issue continues to be in the educational limelight. *Education Week’s* EPE Research Center indicates that 44 states have established standards for teachers that include technology. Most of these have standards aligned with those developed by the International Society for Technology in Education.

And just a few months ago, Congress passed and President Bush signed the latest authorization of the Higher Education Act, which creates The National Center for Research in Advanced Information and Digital Technologies. The Center’s objectives will be to support research and development of new education technologies, including Internet-based technologies. It will “also help adapt techniques already widely used in other sectors, such as advertising and the military, to classroom instruction.”

More significantly for social studies educators, The Partnership for 21st

Century Skills, in conjunction with the National Council for the Social Studies released the *21st Century Skills and Social Studies Map*, the first of its kind to be released. The joint Partnership/NCSS news release says that the map “demonstrates how the integration of 21st century skills into the social studies supports teaching and prepares students to become effective and productive citizens in the 21st century.” The map “provides educators with concrete examples of how 21st century skills can be infused into classroom practices and highlights the critical connections between social studies and 21st century skills.” The release of this partnership report was written up in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *eSchool News*, and dozens of other news outlets and magazines. This is a noteworthy event and project for NCSS and the report will help social studies educators throughout the nation as we battle to hold our place in the curriculum, despite the marginalization of social studies by NCLB and the pressures of standardized testing. You can download the entire *21st Century Skills and Social Studies Map* in

PDF format at [www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents/ss\\_map.pdf](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents/ss_map.pdf).

I was excited to download and read the Map. It’s an excellent document that does a great job of combining the NCSS *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (currently being updated) with the expertise of the leading advocacy group focused on infusing 21st century skills into education.

However, as I read the document, I noticed that many of the skills and understandings were very similar to what all good social studies teachers have tried to teach since I walked into my first history classroom in September 1962. Let me explain. Here are several of the primary skills listed in the Map: (1) Creativity and Innovation; (2) Critical Thinking and Problem Solving; (3) Communication; Collaboration; Flexibility and Adaptability; (4) Social and Cross-Cultural Skills; (5) Initiative and Self Direction; and (6) Leadership and Responsibility. I don’t think that I used these specific terms with my sophomore world history students; but I did stress creativity through individual projects; I did want my students to be critical thinkers and solve problems; and I did want them to take initiative, become leaders, and take responsibility. The Map has an excellent group of suggested activities and projects designed for the 4th, 8th, and 12th grades; and at the very end is a list of “tools” (many of them Internet-based) that can be used to achieve the objectives. At this point,

the little light bulb in my mind turned on. The overall goals of social studies haven't changed—we still want our students to be critical thinkers, to be able to use primary sources, to compare and contrast issues, to understand the relationship with humans and their environment, to recognize propaganda—but Internet and related technologies provide us with an ever-changing list of tools to accomplish these goals.

And then I remembered a news item from my local paper about the New Tech School that opened its doors here in Bloomington a few weeks ago. New Tech is a school model that originated in Napa, California, now home of the New Tech Foundation. The schools are limited to 100 students per grade for the 9-12 high school, and it has a one-to-one student-to-computer ratio. A quote came back to me. The school “embraces project-based learning and teaches students skills that 21st century businesses seek, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and literacy skills.” Again, the same goals we've been striving to accomplish for decades, but utilizing cutting-edge technologies and tools.

I decided to place the websites that I want to feature into two broad categories. First, I'll present and briefly discuss sites that provide information about the general concept of skills for the 21st century. Then, I'll suggest several websites that help teachers use some of the newer tools and strategies, particularly those associated with the “Web 2.0” (a buzzword describing changing trends in the use of World Wide Web technology that strengthen creativity, information sharing, and collaboration). Toward the end of the listing, I'll provide the websites of some incredibly innovative classroom teachers that are demonstrating these Web 2.0 technologies and services.

### **Partnership for 21st Century Skills**

[www.21stcenturyskills.org/index.php](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/index.php)

This is the home page of the advocacy organization that partnered with NCSS on creating and producing the *21st*

*Century Skills and Social Studies Map*. The announcement of the project's release is prominently featured. There are several other tools and items that social studies teachers and supervisors will find useful on the “Resources” page, including how to use the Map in school and to raise public awareness about the role of social studies in the curriculum.

### **International Society for Technology in Education**

[www.iste.org/](http://www.iste.org/)

This is an international organization that sponsors the annual National Educational Computing Conference—the 30th one is taking place in Washington, D.C., next June. Click on the Educator Resources tab to view a very interesting section titled “Your Learning Journey.” This section explores Web 2.0, Project-Based Learning (including a review of research showing the success of PBL), and “Envisioning the Future of Education and Technology.” Don't miss a link titled “A Day in the Life of Web 2.0.” It's a hypothetical look at a middle school that's “harnessing the latest tools to transform and expand the learning experience.” (It reads like science fiction to me, but I've seen several examples of this in action.)

### **Harnessing Virtual Worlds for Arts and Humanities Scholarship**

[www.fas.org/programs/ltp/emerging\\_technologies/humanities/](http://www.fas.org/programs/ltp/emerging_technologies/humanities/)

Ok, do you know what virtual worlds are? I've heard about them, and I even briefly participated in National Public Radio's “Science Friday” virtual world to get a better idea. It's fun, but I have enough trouble leading my own *real* life without trying to live another one. Yet it's one of Web 2.0's fastest growing “collaborative technologies.” I've even read articles about people who spend more time on their virtual world than they do experiencing this one. This site provides information and ideas about using virtual worlds in the classroom, and some innovative teachers are doing this in conjunction with the 2008 national elections or as a high-tech role-playing activity using historical

events as a setting.

### **A Practical Guide to Blogging**

[www.writerswrite.com/journal/jul02/gak16.htm](http://www.writerswrite.com/journal/jul02/gak16.htm)

Bloggging isn't on the cutting edge anymore. It's been around for several years and more and more classroom teachers—even entire schools—are using blogs as a way to communicate with students and parents and as a forum where students can exchange ideas and share ongoing projects. A blog is similar to a teacher webpage, but it's a bit easier to create and maintain. This site features a “non-techie” description of what a blog is, what a blog can do, and, more importantly, how you can start one of your own.

### **Mr. Gilchrist's Social Studies Blog**

[kgilchrist.blogspot.com/](http://kgilchrist.blogspot.com/)

This is the blog site of a Canadian social studies teacher in Calgary, Alberta. It provides a good example for other teachers of how a classroom blog can be used. Kevin Gilchrist uses his to announce homework, summarize what happened in his class on a particular day, and provide links that will help students complete assignments. He uses “BlogSpot,” one of the most popular blog creation and maintenance websites.

### **Classroom 2.0**

[www.classroom20.com/](http://www.classroom20.com/)

This website has it all—all the Web 2.0 features that teachers might want to use, including collaborative sites such as Twitter (Do you know what a “tweet” is?), and one of my new favorites, del.icio.us (see next listing). You'll also find a link to a teacher-oriented Second Life community, hosted by Kathy Shrock. I've frequently featured links to Ms. Shrock's website. She is a classroom teacher who's been on technology's cutting edge for years. If you want to explore Web 2.0, this is a great site to start with.

### **Using Del.icio.us in Education**

[www.scribd.com/doc/212002/Using-delicious-In-Education](http://www.scribd.com/doc/212002/Using-delicious-In-Education)

Del.icio.us is a website URL (also del.icio.us.com); the “.us” identifies it as

a United States site. It's a free Internet social bookmarking service that allows users to identify, store, classify, and share "bookmarks" or "favorites." Basically, users sign up, send their bookmark list with descriptive "tags" (such as "social studies" or "project based learning") to the big del.icio.us website in the sky. Users can then type in their interests and find bookmarks from people with similar interests around the world. (Individuals can make these available to anyone or just to friends and family.) You can see what favorites other people have on topics of interest to you. Yahoo bought del.icio.us a year or so ago and it's a rapidly growing site. A short video from a New Zealand teacher explains how he uses del.icio.us in the classroom at [ictfhs.blogspot.com/2008/01/using-delicious-in-classroom.html](http://ictfhs.blogspot.com/2008/01/using-delicious-in-classroom.html).

### Welker's Wikinomics

[welkerwikinomics.wetpaint.com/](http://welkerwikinomics.wetpaint.com/)

Even if you didn't know what a "tweet" was, you are more likely to know what

a "wiki" is—a site where people can collaborate on a project. The collaboration can be as small as a two-person project on Lincoln, or as enormous as Wikipedia, the online dictionary that has become one of the top 10 visited sites on the World Wide Web. Mr. Welker, an economics teacher at the Shanghai American School, has won several international awards on his use of wikis in the classroom. This site offers information on creating and using wikis in the classroom and also highlights Mr. Welker's outstanding example of wiki-based economics courses.

### The Cool Cat Teacher Blog

[coolcatteacher.blogspot.com/](http://coolcatteacher.blogspot.com/)

This is the blog of Vickie Davis, who teaches at Westwood Schools, a private school in Camilla, Georgia. Ms. Davis provides links to her "Where I share" sites on Twitter, del.icio.us, Digg (one that I didn't have space to talk about), YouTube, her own Wiki, her classroom website, and many, many more. I really can't describe

it all. Just go to her "cool cat" website to look around; it makes you wonder how she finds time for one life, much less a "Second Life." She also has a website on how to use wikis in the classroom that is very informative.

When I began pulling together information and sites to use in this column, I had no idea of the scope of advances in technology that can be used in classroom teaching. As I said at the beginning, I'm not sure I have the skills or the time to do the things that Kevin Gilchrist, Vickie Davis, and many others are doing. But it certainly looks interesting and fun. I know I'll be spending several hours over the next months exploring these exciting developments. 📖

**C. FREDERICK RISINGER** retired as director of professional development and coordinator of social studies education after 31 years at Indiana University, Bloomington. He currently is working on two social studies writing projects, is developing a new website, and works two shifts a week as a bartender at a local microbrewery.



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