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Empower English Language Learners



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Tools From the Web



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Why Use Web 2.0 Tools With ELLs?

INTRODUCTION

Web 2.0 tools are becoming more and more commonplace in schools. With the change of a “read” Web to a “read/write” Web, teachers are discovering new ways in which to engage technologically savvy students in computer-based educational activities. Publishing student work to the World Wide Web is a means of providing an authentic global audience for classroom productions. When students write or speak for a broader and more international audience, they pay more attention to polishing their work, think more deeply about the content they produce, and consider cultural norms more thoughtfully. These benefits serve to strengthen all students’ skills, but they are particularly relevant to the English language learner (ELL) who is beginning to acquire or continuing to develop his or her proficiency in English in the school setting.

ELL’S IN SCHOOLS: SOME CHALLENGES TO CONSIDER

According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (n.d.):

Based on state-reported data, it is estimated that 5,119,561 ELL students were enrolled in public schools (pre-K through Grade 12) for the 2004–2005 school year. This number represents approximately

10.5% of total public school student enrollment, and a 56.2% increase over the reported 1994–95 total public school ELL enrollment. Among the states, California enrolled the largest number of public school ELL students, with 1,591,525, followed by Texas (684,007), Florida (299,346), New York (203,583), Illinois (192,764), and Arizona (155,789).

Whether you are an ESL teacher or a teacher of any other subject area, you have almost definitely worked with English language learners in your classrooms. These eager students are faced with the challenge of learning a new language and culture while also studying subjects like science, math, English language arts, art, music, physical education, and health. This can be an incredibly daunting task—even for the strongest of students who have consistent schooling and can demonstrate good literacy in their first language.

According to educational researcher Jim Cummins (1979), English language learners acquire basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS)—also known as *social language*—within the first two years of exposure to English. This is the language of personal conversations, expressing opinions, requests for information, and expressions of need. However, it takes between five and seven years to develop their cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)—also known as *academic language*. CALP is the language of textbooks, class lectures, essays, and educational videos. It is the language that students need to succeed in their academic life in an English language medium school (Cummins, 1979).

When thinking about BICS and CALP, it can be enlightening to consider a hypothetical situation in which you were a teenager and somehow relocated to the Philippines to attend a public school there. You will likely learn key words and phrases in Tagalog fairly quickly. It will take a lot longer to be able to write a cohesive essay on the history of the Philippine rainforest—in Tagalog (note: for a more challenging scenario, replace the Philippines with Thailand, where not only the language is different, but so is the script).

So, time is of the essence, and yet our ELLs can't afford to wait on either front. They must learn English alongside their other subjects. They don't have the luxury of acquiring CALP first and then entering classes involving the other disciplines. The challenge to learn English and succeed in school—not successively but rather simultaneously—is a daunting one, but it is quite common in most schools across the United States.

WHY WEB 2.0 WITH ELL'S?

The gift of time is the greatest gift that an ELL could possibly receive in school. But since the gift of time is one that we simply cannot give, we must look for ways to extend English language acquisition beyond the school day and means of maximizing learning for our students. Web 2.0

tools can provide students with extra opportunities to do meaningful language-learning tasks from the comforts of their own homes or local libraries. On a receptive level, they can sign on to a podcast for extra listening practice or view an instructive video on YouTube. However, Web 2.0 tools work best when students are asked to develop, create, and share their work online. It is in this way that they are active learners, negotiating meaning and creating media for a worldwide audience. For example, students can “meet” virtually with classmates via the Web and work on collaborative projects on a wiki. They can also create blog entries, videos, or comment on a classmate’s work—all after the school building has closed down for the day.

For beginning English language learners in particular, Web-based platforms can also provide a safer, more anonymous space in which to practice English. Beginners can be reticent and uncomfortable speaking in class, sharing their writing with peers in a face-to-face situation, or presenting work to large groups. Part of the reluctance comes from insecurity and fear of making errors and often coincides with the “silent period” in which students are taking in the new language but not yet ready to start producing it on their own. Web 2.0 tools are particularly helpful during these early stages of acquisition as they allow ELLs to be in control by giving them the opportunity to produce work in a controlled setting. If they are creating videos or audio files, they can practice, record, and rerecord until they are satisfied with their work. If using a wiki, they can cocreate work with the help of a stronger peer in a comfortable, nonthreatening online environment. Virtual worlds like Teen Second Life offer students an anonymous place in which to meet others, have conversations, and make mistakes—without need to do so in person. Web 2.0 tools are forgiving of errors and provide students with ways to save face as they practice their new language in cyberspace.

Web 2.0 tools are also beneficial in that they support and even entice students to become creators and not merely recipients of knowledge. According to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, it is crucial that our students come away from their K–12 educational experience with the ability to not just consume information but also create it. This creation of information has gone from a one-person endeavor to a collaboration with people from many different cultures and from all parts of the world.

Using Web 2.0 tools in the classroom involves students in activities that expand their problem-solving skills as they are required not just to find information but also to judge its worth and accuracy. With the inception of the read-write Web, anyone is capable of authoring material. This democratization of the Web has led to a proliferation of information—not all of it trustworthy. Media literacy—in the past mainly focused on television and print media—now includes the Web and its explosion of information and material. And since ELLs are only just acquiring more challenging language, such as idiomatic expressions, they are especially vulnerable to advertisements and other media that often use this type of language as a means of persuading audiences. Now more than ever, it is imperative that

our students become critical consumers of the material that is available to them at the click of a computer key.

While there are many reasons why Web 2.0 tools are beneficial for ELLs, perhaps the most convincing reason is the one that we teachers often underestimate: The World Wide Web is fun! There is a solid base of research available on the link between the use of technology with English language learners and motivation and/or improvement in certain skill areas. A study by Johns and Tórréz in 2001 found that “the new technologies offer many possibilities to the second language learner” (p. 11). Svedkauskaite, Reza-Hernandez, and Clifford (2003) have also found that

technology has evolved from its support function to play a role in initiating learning processes. It can provide a flexible learning environment where students can really explore and be engaged. Hypermedia, for example, individually addresses levels of fluency, content knowledge, student motivation, and interest, allowing inclusion of LEP [limited English proficient] students, who can thus monitor their comprehension, language production, and behavior. (“Frameworks for Successful LEP Learners” section, para. 4)

More recently, research about the use of Web 2.0 tools in the language classroom has shown that the use of technology is appreciated by students (Stanley, 2006), linked to greater motivation (Goodwin-Jones, 2005), and tools like blogs have been responsible for improvements in students’ writing (Thorne & Payne, 2005).

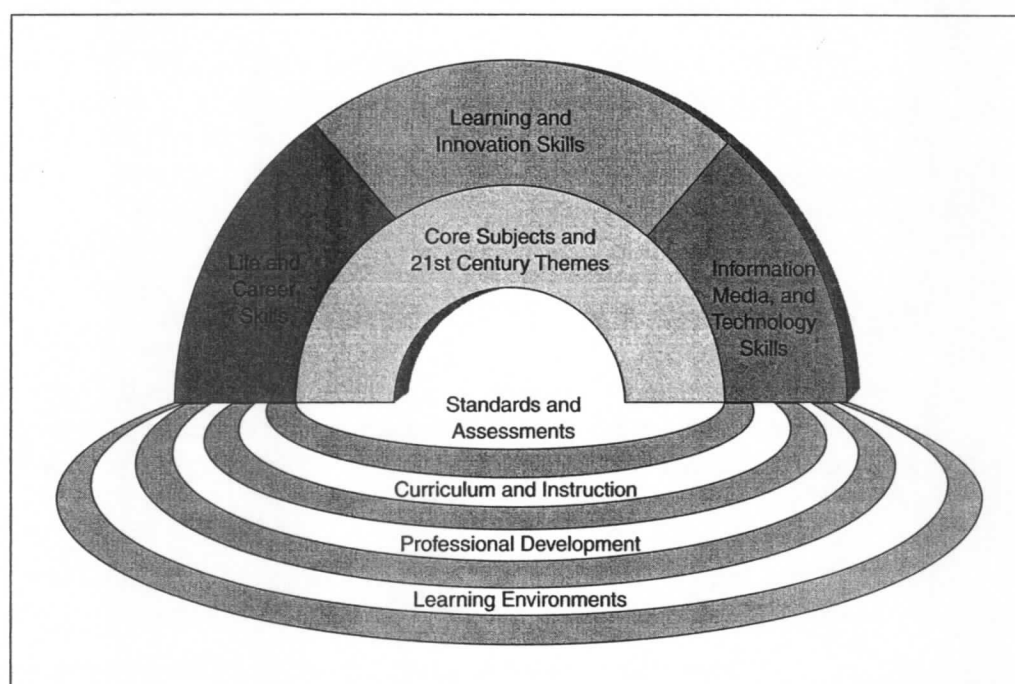
Students come to us with preestablished positive relationships to these technologies. They own and view MySpace and Facebook accounts, write and read blogs, create and view videos on YouTube, and record and listen to podcasts. The exciting aspect of their familiarity with these platforms is that they not only access and consume but also develop, edit, and share their work with classmates and others via the Web—and they are not being asked to do it! What better way to motivate, excite, and connect to our students than to dive into the media that they already know and love?

PREPARING ELL’S FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

English language learners in K–12 schools are charged with the task not only of acquiring a new language and increasingly challenging subject area content (i.e., science, math, social studies) but also to be a successful citizen of 21st-century global society; students are also required to be fluent in the use of the most important technologies. While it is still important to have basic core knowledge and skills in a variety of subject areas as in the past, it is no longer enough. According to theorists such as Daniel Pink (2006) and organizations like the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, students need to develop additional skills like crosscultural communication, critical thinking, and creativity and innovation skills as well. The Partnership for

21st Century Skills (www.21stcenturyskills.org) is the leading advocacy organization focused on infusing these newly important skills into education. The organization brings together the business community, education leaders, and policy makers to define a powerful vision for 21st-century education to ensure every child's success as citizens and workers in the 21st century by providing tools and resources to help facilitate and drive change. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills represents these skills through a rainbow image with the important skills listed in the rainbow and the support systems represented as pools below:

Figure 1.1



Source: Used with permission from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

The skills that make up that rainbow portion of the image are

1. Core Subjects and 21st-Century Themes
2. Learning and Innovation Skills:
 - Creativity and Innovation Skills
 - Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills
 - Communication and Collaboration Skills
3. Information, Media, and Technology Skills:
 - Information Literacy
 - Media Literacy
 - ICT Literacy

4. Life and Career Skills:

- Flexibility and Adaptability
- Initiative and Self-Direction
- Social and Cross-Cultural Skills
- Productivity and Accountability
- Leadership and Responsibility

Source: Used with permission from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

Aside from the obvious connections to information, media, and technology skills, Web 2.0 tools provide students with real opportunities to *communicate and collaborate* (Skill 2) in unique ways. Wikis, for example, foster student *creativity and innovation* (Skill 3) by allowing students to make meaning in a multimedia format. Students not only use the written word but also audio, video, and images in their own creative ways. Wikis also offer students a platform through which to coauthor articles or essays, do peer editing of projects and reports, and communicate their ideas to a wider audience. They certainly help students to show *initiative and self-direction* (Skill 4) as they design, edit, and build their wiki to best reflect their own spin on any given topic.

WEB 2.0 AND THE TESOL STANDARDS

Web 2.0 tools can also connect directly and deeply to the TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) national standards. Below is a list of the national TESOL standards, followed by examples of Web 2.0 tools and activities that correspond to each one.

Goal 1, To use English to communicate in social settings:
Standard 1 Students will use English to participate in social interactions.

Example: *Blogging to share information about favorite music, families, interests*

Goal 1, To use English to communicate in social settings: Students
Standard 2 will interact in, through, and with spoken and written English for personal expression and enjoyment.

Example: *Posting information about themselves in Facebook or MySpace accounts*

Goal 1, To use English to communicate in social settings: Students
Standard 3 will use learning strategies to extend their communicative competence.

Example: *Commenting on friends' photos on VoiceThread or on blogs*

Goal 2, To use English to achieve academically in all content areas:
Standard 1 Students will use English to interact in the classroom.

Example: *Creating a class/group podcast on a particular content area topic*

- Goal 2,
Standard 2** To use English to achieve academically in all content areas: Students will use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form.
Example: Researching a topic and sharing relevant Web sites on a social bookmarking site
- Goal 2,
Standard 3** To use English to achieve academically in all content areas: Students will use appropriate learning strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge.
Example: Cocreating a group wiki on a particular content area topic
- Goal 3,
Standard 1** To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways: Students will use the appropriate language variety, register, and genre according to audience, purpose, and setting.
Example: Creating a podcast to be broadcast on school radio or posted to the school Web site
- Goal 3,
Standard 2** To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways: Students will use nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose, and setting.
Example: Filming a video for posting to YouTube or to show in school
- Goal 3,
Standard 3** To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways: Students will use appropriate learning strategies to extend their sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence.
Example: Sharing comments on a blog or wiki, adding comments to a photo on VoiceThread

Source: Adapted from Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (2006).

TESOL has also developed technology standards—both for students and for teachers. The technology standards for students are listed below, along with examples of student work or projects that connect to each one.

Goal 1: Language learners demonstrate foundational knowledge and skills in technology for a multilingual world

- Standard 1** Language learners demonstrate basic operational skills in using various technological tools and Internet browsers.
Example: Using Microsoft Word to write essays, Microsoft Publisher to create a brochure or book, Microsoft Excel to organize and analyze data, or Google to find information
- Standard 2** Language learners are able to use available input and output devices (e.g., keyboard, mouse, printer, headset, microphone, media player, electronic whiteboard).

Example: *Using headsets and microphones to record newscasts and to create podcasts, printing work, creating student presentations on interactive electronic whiteboards*

Standard 3 Language learners exercise appropriate caution when using online sources and when engaging in electronic communication.

Example: *Brainstorming and developing classroom guidelines for safe use of Web 2.0 tools, keeping personal information safe while sending e-mails*

Standard 4 Language learners demonstrate basic competence as users of technology.

Example: *Knowing how to find information on Google or answers to questions on WikiHow*

Goal 2: Language learners use technology in socially and culturally appropriate, legal, and ethical ways

Standard 1 Language learners understand that communication conventions differ across cultures, communities, and contexts.

Example: *Comparing and contrasting texting language from different parts of the world, using Skype to understand different cultural gestures and greetings*

Standard 2 Language learners demonstrate respect for others in their use of private and public information.

Example: *Developing Voki avatars to serve as virtual identities, not revealing addresses or other sensitive private information in e-mails or on Facebook*

Goal 3: Language learners effectively use and critically evaluate technology-based tools as aids in the development of their language-learning competence as part of formal instruction and for further learning

Standard 1 Language learners effectively use and evaluate available technology-based productivity tools.

Example: *Using Microsoft Word to write prose or poetry, using Excel for spreadsheets, posting files to GoogleDocs, finding and saving bookmarks on Diigo*

Standard 2 Language learners appropriately use and evaluate available technology-based language skill-building tools.

Example: *Using podcasts like EnglishPod to practice pronunciation, watching videos on YouTube to observe nonverbal communication*

Standard 3 Language learners appropriately use and evaluate available technology-based tools for communication and collaboration.

Example: Using wikis to do group projects, posting comments on blogs, Skyping with classmates to practice for a class presentation

Standard 4 Language learners use and evaluate available technology-based research tools appropriately.

Example: Using Wikipedia to find initial information on a topic, vetting websites to determine validity

Standard 5 Language learners recognize the value of technology to support autonomy, lifelong learning, creativity, metacognition, collaboration, personal pursuits, and productivity.

Example: Using a variety of Web 2.0 tools to create and share school and personal information

Source: Adapted from Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (1996–2007).

The integration of Web 2.0 tools into ESL and mainstream curricula will create natural connections to these TESOL technology standards both for the students and for ESL teachers. Web 2.0 tools can help teachers develop and maintain technological skills while also learning ways to enhance student learning. These tools also allow teachers to provide more frequent and meaningful feedback and assessments while facilitating record keeping and communication with students.

SAFETY CONCERNS AND THE WEB

Before completing our discussion of the reasons for using Web 2.0 tools with our English language learners, we should address one of the biggest challenges to incorporating them into the school curriculum: safety concerns. There are legitimate fears regarding the sharing of students' identities and the posting of personal information online. However, fears based on sensationalized media reports of cyber stalkers and other relatively rare incidents can cause a school to close itself off to the powerful potential of Web 2.0 tools. According to the Web site ConnectSafely.org, some of the negative effects of "technopanics" are damaging because they

- Cause schools to fear and block digital media when they need to be teaching constructive use, employing social-technology devices, and teaching new media literacy and citizenship throughout the curriculum.
- Turn schools into barriers rather than contributors to young people's constructive use of technology.

- Increase the irrelevancy of school to active young social-technology users via the sequestering or banning of educational technology and hamstringing some of the most spirited and innovative educators.
- Reduce the competitiveness of U.S. education among developed countries already effectively employing educational technology and social media in schools.
- Reduce the competitiveness of U.S. technology and media businesses practicing good corporate citizenship where youth online safety is concerned.
- Widen the participation gap for youth—technopanics are barriers, for children and teens, to full, constructive participation in participatory culture and democracy. (Adapted from Collier, n.d.)

Every school district **must** come to some consensus regarding students' (and teachers') use of the **Internet** relating to schoolwork. Most school districts, for example, have a **policy** that details what can be uploaded to the school Web site, what student information can be shared online, and how students can use the **Internet** during the school day and for homework. Check with your school's technology specialist for information about your school's policies.

Whatever your school's **rules** and regulations regarding the appropriate use of Web 2.0 tools, **there** are ways to make the experience safe and enjoyable for your students. For example, some schools choose to allow students to post only their **first** names and first initial of their last names on their blogs or wikis. Other schools post video and photos of students with no names listed at all. Many schools block sites like YouTube, since students can come across **inappropriate** videos very easily, while others opt for allowing YouTube **and** teaching students how to navigate the site safely. Different rules **work** for different contexts. Before working with Web 2.0 tools with your students, it is important to understand your school's policies. If your school doesn't have a policy in place, volunteer to be on a committee to **establish** them. (Check out discussions on the topic of "Acceptable Use Policies" on the Classroom 2.0 Web site at <http://www.classroom20.com/forum/topic/listForTag?tag=aup>.) To help start the discussion, each chapter of this book contains a section including guidelines for **safe** use of a variety of Web 2.0 tools.

As the use of these technologies grows in the K-12 school setting, it is imperative that schools **establish** a clear and comprehensive set of rules that allow teachers and students to feel comfortable and supported in the work they do on the World Wide Web. For more detailed information, download and read the excellent publication: "Enhancing Child Safety and Online Technologies," the final report of the Internet Safety Technical Task Force to the Multi-State Working Group on Social Networking of State Attorneys General of the United States (available online at: <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/pubrelease/isttf/>).

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SUGGESTED READINGS

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HELPFUL WEB SITES

- Classroom 2.0: <http://www.classroom20.com>
- Connect Safely.org—a forum for parents, teens, experts to discuss safe socializing on the fixed and mobile Web: www.connectsafely.org
- EFL and Web 2.0—an excellent online college course on a wiki page designed to teach EFL and ESL students the basics of using different Web 2.0 technologies: <http://eflcourse.wikispaces.com>
- IALLT (International Association for Language Learning Technology): <http://iallt.org>
- Integrating Technology Into the ESL/EFL Classroom—a series of lesson ideas with links to videos: <http://integrate-technology.learnhub.com/lessons>
- International Society for Technology in Education: <http://www.iste.org>
- Langwitches—a helpful blog with links and tutorials for teaching languages through technology: <http://langwitches.org/blog>
- NCELA (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs): <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu>
- SafeKids.com—Internet safety and civility for kids and parents: <http://www.safekids.com>
- Social Networks and the Web 2.0 Revolution (blog post and video): <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/blogs/nik-peachey/social-networks-web-20-revolution>