

Book Review

“Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and other powerful web tools for the classroom” by Will Richardson, much like the previous two editions, was written for educators as the title also implies. The book seeks to provide educators with a quick overview of the internet and how it progressed to the state in which it is now and what tools were available to educators initially. The book then proceeds to provide the reader with some of the more common tools that can be used in the classroom along with the benefits of using the tool for learning and the pedagogical aspects that the various tools in the book provide.

This new third edition was recently published in 2010 where as the previous one was published in 2006. While four years is not normally a huge amount of time, in the field of technology especially online tools that can be used for education four years can easily translate to the equivalent of a few decades. The previous edition made mention of blogs, wikis, and the ability to subscribe to an RSS feed, these tools at the time were popular, but they were only just beginning to enter mainstream usage. The new edition covers these resources in far greater detail as well as Social Media, which in 2006 only just beginning to raise in popularity.

The book begins with an overview of the web starting with the basic beginning where it was simply a collection of computers to the major revolution that the Mosaic Web Browser brought to the internet along with the concept that it is a read/write web and what ramifications this has for education and the ability to share ideas with others via the internet.

The next two chapters that follows are one on weblogs, which is a great place to start, since this is a natural next step from just a basic static website. What is great about this section is that it begins with a quick history and explains what the makes a weblog so much more than a difference. The author states that this is the ability to post comments and replies to both the author of the weblog as well as any and all respondents. I happen to also completely agree with the author on this, the greatest feature of a blog or weblog is the ability to respond to others. This alone makes it a great tool for education. Teachers and students can post and reply to what others have posted. Weblogs in education as the author describes them are the foundation to the tools that are beginning to be used more and more in the classroom: classroom portals, online filing cabinets, e-portfolios, and collaborative spaces. The chapter gives a nice introduction into these tools as well as the pedagogical basis and why they are important to use followed by directions on how to setup a weblog based on all the information that was learned in the previous sections ranging from best practices on starting a weblog in your class. I like the fact that it helps start the reader using blogger and safety concerns that need to be taken into account to even adding more pages or pictures. Into this section though I would also include wikis, which the author gives another page to. While wikis are also important progression to weblogs in that it allows more collaborative work that blogs don't allow.

The second half of the book I found more interesting, because it gives significantly more examples of tools that we can use in the classroom. I am impressed by the chapter on RSS, the author refers to it as "The New Killer App for

Educators.” I am glad that the author decided to include this fantastic feature. The ability to subscribe to an RSS feed from a weblog or even websites. The author is right in saying that “it’s the one technology that you should start using today, right now, this minute.” I’m glad that he makes this clear to the reader that it’s an important tool too keep up on all the information that is out there.

The last section, as I thought would be the best method to divide the book by is on Social Media and Social tools. This section includes everything that can be useful to education, such as twitter, social bookmarking, flickr, podcasting, video publishing, screen casting, live streaming of web tv. These are all great examples that the author provides for sharing information to either the students or for the educator to learn new information. Again what I’ve enjoyed about the rest of the book I continue to enjoy in these sections. The author continues to provide a quick background into these tools. The history of how the tool started, how to use it, as well as examples of other sites that are along the same type which are specifically for educators if they are available. In the section of video publishing for example it also gives the reader the example of teacher tube. The final part of this section is on social networking and the concept of building connections and communities as well as the issues of sites like facebook in the K-12 classroom. What is new in this section and of interest to the educator is that it gives examples of how social networking has been used in the classroom and it’s integration into the curriculum for the class. Then it gives instructions on how to set up Ning social networking site for the classroom, the benefits of a Ning site as well as examples of how Ning has been used in other schools.

Overall I found this book to be a great resource. The author sought to give the reader an overview in to the main tools that can be used for education and I think he accomplished his goals quite well and for the most part covered the goals that the titles of the book implies. The only part that I felt wasn't covered as much as the other parts, was podcasts. Even giving the fact that podcasts weren't covered as well as the other portions of the book, I think that this will prove to be quite a valuable resource for any educator wishing to learn more on how to use these tools in the classroom.

While the book gives a general overview of the main popular tools that are used now and are beginning to get used with more frequency in the classroom. What I really enjoyed about the book was that in addition of how to use the tools that the author found important for the classroom as well as how to use them effectively in the classroom, I found that quick overviews into the history of the tool to also help contribute to how to effectively use the tools. I found that the history helps explain why the tools came into being and what they were created to do initially do and how we can build upon that as an educator. This part of the book is also the part that I enjoyed the most and found that this provided some new information that I had never known before.