

Technology makes learning fun:

Top 10 technologies to try in your school library

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The following tools offer school library media specialists innovative and useful ways to incorporate technology into classroom instruction, and each can be adapted for use in youth services within public libraries. While many of the tools may seem geared towards teachers, library media specialists should be familiar with them in order to provide support during instruction.

eBooks

An eBook is an electronic text read on an eReader or a computer. eBooks offer interactive features such as enhancements with multimedia via hyperlinks and various collaborative applications. The ability to vary text size and hear text read aloud can help reluctant readers and students with disabilities. Students can access eBooks beyond library walls and operating hours. Young readers increasingly expect interactivity and multi-media content in their books and students' personal use of eBooks and eBook readers is on the rise (Kasman Valenza, 2012; Uhlmann, 2010). According to SLJ's recent technology survey, "librarians expect their eBook holdings to increase 14-fold by 2016 to 7.8 percent" (Ishizuka, 2011, p.11). To capitalize on this trend, school librarians can provide OPAC links to GoogleBook versions of books already in the collection, increase eBook selection via traditional library vendors and free resources and consider purchasing eBook readers for the library.

Recommended sites for exploration of eBooks:

- www.childrenslibrary.org (A free eBook library that includes 4,643 books in 61 languages)
- www.tumblebooks.com (A subscription eBook service for libraries serving students grades PreK-12)
- www.inanimatealice.com (A digital book that incorporates multi-media and games)
- www.theamandaproject.com (A story told through both an interactive website and a book series)

Podcasting

A podcast is a digital audio broadcast. Podcasts are easily created using a computer, a microphone and an audio editor. Audacity (audacity.sourceforge.net) is a freeware audio editor for both Windows and Mac platforms. Podcasts can be published to a website or blog such as WordPress or Blogger and/or can be made available for download via iTunes. Students, excited and motivated to reach a diverse and real audience via their own podcasts published on the Web, have created podcasts for research projects, book reports and original poetry (Dlott, 2007). Podcast creation prepares students to be confident, effective communicators in the 21st century and can even improve their writing skills (Dlott, 2007). Teachers also have created podcasts to help students study (Langhorst, 2007).

Explore examples of Podcasting:

- spsaudiotours.blogspot.com (Third grade students tell the history of their town)
- recap.ltd.uk/podcasting/schools/ (A variety of home, school and college podcasts from the UK)
- www.amle.org/moya/StudentEngagement/ExpressionsfromtheMiddle/2009/Podcasts/tabid/1817/Default.aspx (Students podcast about their experiences in middle school)

Edmodo (www.edmodo.com)

Edmodo is a free virtual learning environment for collaboration among teachers and students. Teachers and librarians create Edmodo groups where students participate in discussion threads, take polls and quizzes and complete assignments. Group leaders may store photos, web links and other documents in their Edmodo libraries (Bell, 2011). The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) recognized Edmodo as a Best Website for Teaching and Learning for its inclusion of AASL's Standards for the 21st Century Learner (PRWeb, 2011).

Students reluctant to participate in class often feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts on Edmodo, with its Facebook-like appeal (Rogers, 2011). ESL teacher Jennifer Showalter agrees, stating, “[Edmodo] was a great way for the kids to respond, especially if they weren’t very vocal in class” (personal communication, November 10, 2012). Another use for Edmodo is an online reading group, such as the one created by two school librarians from different states, which kept students engaged in literature throughout the summer months (Barack, 2011).

QR Codes

QR (Quick Response) codes provide quick access to web links. QR codes are easily created for any url using a generator, such as Kaywa (qrcode.kaywa.com) or Delivr (www.delivr.com). Users with smartphones or tablets can use QR code reader apps, such as i-nigma (www.i-nigma.com) or NeoReader (www.neoreader.com), to scan QR codes and connect instantly to websites, videos, and images. QR codes are important for school librarian consideration because students often come to school without many necessary materials, but most never leave home without their phones (Byrne, 2011).

Creative school librarians are already experimenting with QR codes. South Orange Middle School Librarian Elissa Malespina adds QR codes to books in her collection, linking students to book trailers, authors’ websites and further reading suggestions. Her QR code presentation includes more ideas: www.slideshare.net/elliotel/qr-code-presentation-10390078

No smartphone? No problem!

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSA3YsBy_pU (Using QR Codes in the Classroom)

Google Docs (docs.google.com)

Google Docs is a free online resource that allows students to create and share documents, presentations, and spreadsheets with others for collaboration and review. When students share their work on Google Docs, multiple users can make additions and comments, leading to teamwork between peers and enabling teachers to help students revise and edit their assignments. Librarians interested in promoting collaboration among students and staff (a skill emphasized in AASL’s (2007) Standards for the 21st Century Learner) should consider using Google Docs at their schools.

Additional resources:

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYPjJK6LZdM (Demonstrates how students can collaboratively use Google Docs for school projects)
- Dorman (2012) offers additional videos and tutorials on getting started with Google Docs at sites.google.com/site/cliotech/google-docs

Diigo (www.diigo.com)

Appropriate for all ages, Diigo is a cloud-based service offering librarians and educators a way to promote critical thinking, information literacy, and organization skills within a collaborative learning atmosphere. Free student and educator accounts allow instructors to create learning groups, import web-based materials, and design instruction sessions. Instructors organize information by theme or topic and embed reaction essays, quizzes and discussion questions (Rees, 2012). Interactive features include highlighting text, making sticky note comments, adding tags and screenshots and creating research bibliographies. Educators share information about online education and instructional best practices using Diigo’s professional learning communities (Lourcey, 2012).

For ideas on how to “Save, Share, and Teach with Diigo” see: prezi.com/uip0dfpokppm/save-share-and-teach-with-diigo/ or explore more social media pedagogies with Derek Bruff on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IOJFT_-sIQ.

Subtext (www.subtext.com)

Focusing on digital texts, Subtext is a free iPad app (with optional embedding in Edmodo) that works with digital texts to support collaborative learning, information literacy instruction and critical thinking. The application offers the current Google Books catalog, purchased and self-created texts in ePub format, static web articles, and integrated web content such as videos and maps (Kulowiec, 2012). Students can highlight, tag, and annotate texts and respond to comments made by the instructor or other students. The comment feature allows constructive commenting on others' ideas regarding a particular section of text (Reyes, 2012). Additional tools include embedded quizzes and other assignments, real-time commenting and text-to-speech capability. Subtext offers groupings of books that meet the requirements of the Common Core Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012).

Teachers and media specialists are currently using Subtext with students in elementary school through high school (Subtext Media, Inc., 2012). The following resource includes a Subtext lesson plan for students in Grades 2-4: www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/exploring-subtext-strategy-thinking-310.html

Prezi (prezi.com)

Prezi is a free online presentation tool that goes beyond the linear slide format. It embraces creativity in an innovative, 3-D, easy-to-use way that students, teachers and librarians can use to share, teach and collaborate. The information is stored on the cloud and can be accessed anywhere. Most presentations are public, but educators who acquire the newly developed education license can create private prezis for free (Prezi Inc., 2012). Prezi U (edu.prezi.com) is the online educational community where educators and students can share and explore presentations from school districts from all over the world and discuss the uses of Prezi in an educational environment through forums and articles. Library uses include library instruction, student presentations on library materials, and advertisement of library events and news.

Examples of librarianship-related prezis:

- prezi.com/hnoat6xsmuie/banned-books-week-8th-grade-english/
- prezi.com/akixj5eqduyx/welcome-to-the-high-school-library/

Blogs

Blogging is a way for people of all ages to communicate with different communities of similar interests and purposes by posting content online through a blogging platform. Librarians use blogs to interact with students and patrons. Examples include book discussions, book reviews, content sharing and library marketing. Visit [webtools4u2use.wikispaces.com/Blogs+\(Weblogs\)](http://webtools4u2use.wikispaces.com/Blogs+(Weblogs)) for more information on how blogs are being used in school library media centers. School and public librarians also blog about what they have read and share their thoughts about youth materials. Their blogs help the librarian community stay informed and deliver better readers' advisory services. Popular platforms include Blogger (www.blogger.com), Tumblr (www.tumblr.com), and WordPress (www.wordpress.org).

Blogs about school librarianship and/or children's and young adult material:

- The Salem Press Library Blog Center: www.salempress.com/Store/blogs/blog_home.htm
- School Library Journal: "This Blog's for You: Ten of the best blogs for folks who take kids' lit seriously (but not too seriously)" by Elizabeth Bird: www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6703692.html

Xtranormal (www.xtranormal.com)

Xtranormal is an online text-to-movie making tool. Users choose the characters, settings, and camera angles for their movies, making their text a fully-animated film. Xtranormal is free, but users must pay a monthly fee to access all available features. School and public libraries use Xtranormal to educate, inform and entertain their young patrons. Library uses include sharing information, planning contests or assignments, programming, and creating book talks. Viroqua Area School Library had students use Xtranormal to create booktalk movies. Check it out at: vhs-vmsblackhawklibrary.wikispaces.com/XtraNormal+Booktalk+Movies

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