Professional Resource:
The Socially Networked Classroom: Teaching in the New Media Age (2010)

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The Socially Networked Classroom: Teaching in the New Media Age. By William Kist. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2010. 135 pp. ISBN 978-1-4129-6701-3.

In 2005's *New Literacies in Action: Teaching and Learning in Multiple Media*, William Kist showcased half a dozen classrooms that utilize media or new technologies on a daily basis. With the recent explosion of Web 2.0, in which one becomes a creator of internet-produced content, Kist follows up his first text with his equally influential *The Socially Networked Classroom: Teaching in the New Media Age* (2010), once again providing practical and accessible examples which enable teachers to move their classrooms into the 21st Century by focusing on his and other teachers' lessons for using social networking in the schools. In her forward, Kylene Beers nicely sums up the main idea of Kist's new text by stating, "Bill asks us to consider what happens when our classrooms become as big as the world" (p. ix.). This is a serious issue Kist tackles as he gives a plethora of examples on social networking tools that support how communication is changing in the 21st century.

One great aspect of the book is that Kist's ideas, activities, and assessments come from his own experience in the classroom and from the teachers that he has met via social networking— what better way to inform educators about the advantage of social networking than to model this practice? Kist also mentions that all teachers in the book are faced with the same dilemma: teaching with new and emerging technologies, within a standards-based curriculum. While he advocates the need to incorporate social networking and new media in today's classrooms, Kist understands that all teachers are on varying ends of the technology spectrum.

Another positive attribute of *The Socially Networked Classroom* is its appeal to all educators regardless of their technological abilities and resources. Whether you are a teacher who declares "We have no technology in my school", one who proudly exclaims, "We are encouraged to use technology," or somewhere in the middle, Kist's book is appealing to all. Kist conveniently breaks down the chapters so that each one represents a level of technology accessible to the school. Rather than naming each chapter by level he uses a creative coffee metaphor (such as naming the chapters "Venti " and "Short" to describe levels of technological access) to compartmentalize activities, lessons and websites so that a reader can decide which chapter he or she should read first. This format is cleverly representative of new ways of reading that one must be able to do in an electronic and connected society demonstrated by allowing the reader to begin with the chapter that applies to his or her classroom.

The book follows an inquiry-based approach as each of the headings within the chapters are in the form of questions one might have about teaching with social networks or with media and new literacies. From, "What are the generally accepted rules for blogging?" to, "How do we communicate safely online?", Kist covers a great deal of territory for both novice and expert educators who are working with technology and new media.

For educators who might be skeptical about including media and social networking in the classroom (or for those who have little or no technology) Chapter Two ("Short") would be a great place to start reading. With its focus on collaboration, audience awareness and analysis, this chapter provides many ways for students to start thinking about how technology may influence their learning. The multi-genre literacy autobiography (p.

14), for instance, prepares students to consider the many different ways technology has had an impact on their lives. Kist also provides one teacher's two-part lesson on film analysis to show how the medium of film can introduce students to the deconstruction of visual texts.

Regarding what Kist calls an "offline-online world" (p. 71), Chapter Three ("Tall") is representative of school environments that have ample amount of Internet access but an atmosphere that might be limited by filtering or blocking. Assignments in this chapter build upon the ideas found in the "Short" chapter. For instance, Kist opens "Tall" with a discussion of online safety and even provides links to secure online networking sites for districts that would like to host monitored discussion avenues. Following this, Kist provides some examples of how other teachers have set up safe blogging sites for their classrooms. For instance, teachers go over expectations for their students that include treating the blogs space like a classroom space, and not giving out personal information. Also, Kist shares how some teachers work within school only intranets that are monitored by the teacher.

In Chapter 4 "Grande", Kist discusses social networking in a high-tech environment and opens the possibilities for those who are able to operate in a Web 2.0 classroom. The notion of blogging is expanded, complete with possible guidelines and tasks that extend to the World Wide Web. A portion of the chapter is dedicated to website and Internet content evaluation, a skill necessary for educators and students as they sift through an over-abundant wealth of information online.

A majority of the chapter (under the heading "How do we discuss issues with people face-to-face and across the world?") provides assessments that engage students in writing for an audience. Whether students are writing an original story in a blog, debating political issues in a class wiki, or creating Facebook profiles for historical figures, the "Grande" chapter encourages students in all content areas to produce and critique each other's work for a more constructivist approach to learning in a wired world.

For those educators who are eager to learn about how to use Facebook in the classroom, Chapter 5 ("Venti") includes a powerful example of how one teacher used the popular social networking site as a platform in which his students posted podcasts and blogs about serious ethical issues and received feedback from experts in the field in which the students explored. Kist explains how the teacher set up a secure group, in which only the students and professionals could view content and interact with each other. The teacher followed up this discussion with a traditional test based on the issues students researched, and found that all students showed increased levels of achievement. Kist closes out "Venti" by examining teachers who may demonstrate what the future of education looks like—the hybrid course.

The Socially Networked Classroom is an excellent source for any educator who wants to teach using the tools with which many of today's students are familiar. Whether one has great or limited access to technology, whether one is working in a filtered or filter-less school, or whether one has knowledge of new literacies or not, this text will allow all individuals to gain the exposure and knowledge they need to function in a 21st Century classroom. While the text's strength is addressing how to use social networking in the classroom, one of the limitations of the text is Kist's notion that all students are familiar with this technology and automatically possess the skills to use these resources. The text doesn't really consider the students who aren't familiar with these genres and makes the assumption that all students are automatically tech savvy. Aside from this small assumption, the text provides many lessons, activities and assessments that have been used by Kist and other teachers all over the world. *The Socially Networked Classroom* is a must-read for educators across disciplines and grade levels, no matter the level of expertise in using new media in the classroom.

References

Kist, William. 2005. *New literacies in action: Teaching and learning in multiple media*. New York: Teachers College Press.