Brynn Kelly

EDUC 538

Summer 2011

Technology Toolbox Critique

Critique Summary

The criteria I chose to use for this critique include user friendliness, cost, instructional value and safety. With regard to user friendliness, I wanted to evaluate how easy each tool is to navigate, and in turn, use for my classroom. I also took into account whether or not it would be an adult using the tool or if the tool would be used by students. When looking at cost, I wanted to see if the tool was free, or if it would cost any money; if it did cost money, was it worth it? Thirdly, I looked at the instructional value of the tool. I asked myself if it would be a tool I'd use in my own classroom, or if it would be more valuable out of the classroom. Lastly, I wanted to look at the safety of the tool; would it be something that elementary students could safely use without the risk of linking to an inappropriate site? And also, would any of the information put on the internet be placed in a safe place, where those who shouldn't have access wouldn't have access.

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| Critique | | |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 4 5  Mean Friendly | How easy is it to use this tool? |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 5  Expensive Free | Does this tool cost money? |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 3 4 5  None Useful | Will this tool be useful in my classroom? |
| Safety | 1 2 3 4 5  Un-Safe Safe | Is this tool safe to use to put content onto the internet? |

**Aggregators: Google Reader**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 **4**  5  Mean Friendly | Very clean and well organized. Easy to add things to follow. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | FREE! |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 **3** 4 5  None Useful | This tool could be great for a specific unit—perhaps while studying US government, students could find sites to follow each day (or something similar). |
| Safety | 1 2 **3** 4 5  Un-Safe Safe | Seems to be fairly safe, but would definitely have to monitor what sites students are following. |

**Social Bookmarking: Digg**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 **3** 4 5  Mean Friendly | The site is very chaotic at first glance and a little difficult to navigate at first. After some investigation, the site is easier to use. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | FREE! |
| Instructional Value | 1 **2** 3 4 5  None Useful | Do not see much use for instruction; would be helpful to store links and sites to refer to, |
| Safety | 1 2 **3** 4 5  Un-Safe Safe | The ads on this site make me a little nervous. While I never encountered any inappropriate ads, it seems that this site is powered by advertisements, which always has potential to have an ad students should not see. |

**Search Tools: Google**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Mean Friendly | Google is so clean and simple and easy for all to use. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | FREE! |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 3 **4** 5  None Useful | Google can be a great tool to help research – you can use Google *scholar* or *images*, depending on what you’re looking for. |
| Safety | 1 2 **3** 4 5  Un-Safe Safe | In a school setting, Google is fairly safe to use- the majority of dangerous sites are blocked by the district firewall, but some advertisements and sites that are suggested could be dangerous for students. |

**Webstart: Protopage**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | Very easy to get started and discover ways to make the page better. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | FREE! There is an option to pay a small fee to remove ads. |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 3 **4** 5  None Useful | Protopage is somewhat limited in the things you can put on the page, but there are some simple ways to get around that! |
| Safety | 1 2 3 **4** 5  Un-Safe Safe | Can be open or password protected. |

**Weblogs (BLOGS): Blogger**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 **4** 5  Mean Friendly | Blogger is one of the easiest blogs sites I have ever seen |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | FREE! |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 3 **4** 5  None Useful | There are plenty of ways to use Blogger for your classroom, whether it is used as a classroom communication tool or a tool for discovery based learning. |
| Safety | 1 **2** 3 4 5  Un-Safe Safe | Very public. |

**Wikis: Wikispaces**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Mean Friendly | Very user friendly; good, clear instruction to get started. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | Option to upgrade, but FREE to begin with! |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 3 **4** 5  None Useful | Like protopage, Wikispaces has several options for use. Could be a great way to do a discovery based/problem solving model for student use. |
| Safety | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Un-Safe Safe | Plenty of options about keeping the WIKI private, having to invite guests to join, etc. |

**Web-Based Word Processing: Google Docs**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 **4** 5  Mean Friendly | I may be biased, but I love Google products. Very simple to use; logical. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | FREE! |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 3 **4** 5  None Useful | Could be really fantastic if students were working in a computer lab or with COWS to process a document as w hole group. I like the thought of this. |
| Safety | 1 2 3 **4** 5  Un-Safe Safe | Students must have a gmail account to use; seems fairly safe. |

**Creative Writing: Glypho**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 **4** 5  Mean Friendly | I had some issues with the site itself; it was up and working the first time I stopped at it, but then was down every other time I checked. From my one experience, Glypho was very simple to use. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | FREE! |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 **3** 4 5  None Useful | Really great idea; could see using it as an introduction to brainstorming, showing students how other individuals can contribute ideas. |
| Safety | **1** 2 3 4 5  Un-Safe Safe | Very open, very public. Cannot control what people reply with. |

**Web-Based Spreadsheets: iRows**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 **4** 5  Mean Friendly | Very comparable to Microsoft Excel. Some people have experienced problems with iRows when not using Firefox. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | FREE! |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 **3** 4 5  None Useful | Could be really great for older classrooms; do not see much use for it in 3rd grade. |
| Safety | 1 2 3 **4** 5  Un-Safe Safe | From what I can tell, fairly safe. User name and password required. |

**Assessment, Surveys, Polls: Survey Monkey**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 **4** 5  Mean Friendly | Very simple and easy to use. Several survey options. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | Several upgrade options but basic is FREE! |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 **3** 4 5  None Useful | Good for feedback or maybe even practice exams. |
| Safety | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Un-Safe Safe | Requires user name and password. |

**Podcasting & Screen Casting: Audacity**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 **2** 3 4 5  Mean Friendly | I felt very confused the first time using Audacity. I wasn’t sure where to go or what to do. And when I did figure it out, the computer microphone wouldn’t work. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | FREE! |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 3 4 **5**  None Useful | Has great possibilities; if students are not able to come to school (terminal illness, etc) the teacher could podcast their lessons. Could be fantastic for working on fluency in literacy. |
| Safety | 1 2 **3** 4 5  Un-Safe Safe | Seems relatively safe, but it depends on how the content is used and stored. |

**Video: YouTube**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Mean Friendly | YouTube is a very simple tool to use; generally, it is very easy to find what you’re looking for. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | FREE! |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 3 4 **5**  None Useful | You have to be careful; there are some really great videos on YouTube that are safe and reliable and great for instructional use; there are several that are not reliable. |
| Safety | 1 **2** 3 4 5  Un-Safe Safe | While a firewall generally blocks videos on YouTube, it’s pretty scary thinking about all of the potential videos students could land upon. |

**Photo and Drawing: MS Photo Story 3**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Un-Safe Safe | Very simple to use! I love this tool! |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Un-Safe Safe | FREE! |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Un-Safe Safe | Would be a very engaging way to introduce a new topic in social studies or science. I love this! |
| Safety | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Un-Safe Safe | Very safe- once downloaded on individual computers (from Microsoft) you no longer need internet access to run. |

**File Sharing: 4 shared**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 **4** 5  Mean Friendly | Seems fairly easy; upload a file onto your 10gb of space. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | There is a FREE plan or a premium plan. Free version has acceptable ads. |
| Instructional Value | **1** 2 3 4 5  None Useful | I don’t see the difference in file sharing over this tool and sending it via email. It does allow you to see what other people are sharing, but I don’t see a place for this tool in my own classroom. |
| Safety | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Un-Safe Safe | User name and Login required. |

**Webquests and Games: Oregon Trail**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 **4** 5  Mean Friendly | I looked at the Facebook version of the Oregon Trail game; if allowed to access Facebook from school computer, very easy to use. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | FREE! |
| Instructional Value | 1 2 3 **4** 5  None Useful | The Oregon Trail game has very good historical references; very engaging and fun for the students! |
| Safety | 1 2 3 **4**  5  Un-Safe Safe | Seems safe. If the class had a Facebook page (with no friends or no one to chat with) I think the FB version of the game would be perfect! |

**Presentation Tools: Slideshare**

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| Criteria | Rating | Comments |
| User Friendliness | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Mean Friendly | Very simple and easy to use. Upload a PPT file and share with others. You can search other’s uploaded files as well. |
| Cost | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Expensive Free | FREE; upgrade version available for a price. |
| Instructional Value | 1 **2** 3 4 5  None Useful | I don’t see a ton of use for my classroom; unless I needed a PPT that was relevant to the subject we were focusing on. |
| Safety | 1 2 3 4 **5**  Un-Safe Safe | User name and password required. |