

Sharing: *It's a Two-Way Street*

a presentation by John Hendron

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THE INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY RESOURCE TEACHER

Virginia has shown leadership in education through the establishment of the I.T.R.T. program that puts certified teachers in schools who focus upon facilitating the appropriate use of technologies in classrooms. This type of position makes it possible bring together expertise in content knowledge, pedagogy, and technology knowledge in the design and facilitation of instruction. In order to remain viable, I.T.R.T.s carry a burden of staying “current” through researching the best tools for instruction. Because today so many tools are web-based and the protean nature of the Web, the I.T.R.T.’s job is not only to partner with classroom teachers in delivering instructional experiences, but also be on the lookout for best-in-class tools. **This document focuses on this unique burden and encourages teachers in the I.T.R.T. role to share their experiences through read/write/remix vehicles on the Web.**

COPYRIGHT CONCERNS

The Web has been around for nearly ten years in many school divisions in Virginia. While federal and state dollars have been spent to put the Internet in schools, increase bandwidth, and provide access to students and staff, the “dream” presented in the 1990s to educators has by now worn-off. While there is an incomprehensible amount of content online today, so much of it is protected by copyright and/or is too difficult to find. Ideally, educators need high-quality content that is organized and flexible. In this case, flexibility means it can be reproduced, re-distributed, and re-mixed, if we desire.



Others online have recognized the needs for organization and more flexibility with copyright. While I will address organization below, I want to focus specifically on copyright in this section.

Digital content found online is protected by the **Digital Millennium Copyright Act** of 1998. And unless you are in a distance education program, this severely limits what you can do with content you find online! It means you cannot print it off, you can't make copies of it, and you can't republish it online.

Copyright was designed to allow authors of original content ownership and protection of their intellectual property in such a way that they could share, but maintain “control.” If I’m a songwriter, I want you to enjoy my music. But I also want to maintain enough control to levy fees so that I can profit from my original song. **Copyright owners get to decide how the public gets to use their content.** I have five rights as a copyright holder: distribution, reproduction, public display, public performance, and modification.

Copyright law assumes that the entity controlling all of those things doesn't want to share. But what if you are willing to share?

Several years ago, some smart folks in California came up with a system they call the **Creative Commons**. In effect, it “loosens” the restrictions associated with copyright. It allows content creators to dictate specifically what you can do with their content, and how you can use it.

I recommend teachers and I.T.R.T.s release their content with a Creative Commons license.



CREATIVE COMMONS


With Creative Commons (creativecommons.org), you can specify one of several licenses to your own copyrighted work. For instance, this very document you are reading is owned by me: not the physical document, but the original content held within the words and design. I get to say how much you get to do with this. But I want to give it away for free. I want you to be able to make copies of it, to share it with colleagues, and to learn from it. But I don't want you to steal. I don't want you to make a profit from my work. I've chosen a license that allows me to do this. Digital content yearns to be copied, reproduced, and distributed. Creative Commons helps make this a reality while still observing and respecting the constructs behind copyright.

RELEASE MY CONTENT?

Teachers haven't always been a sharing lot. Above I suggested you share your content. What types of content?

Lesson plans, reviews of new software, worksheets, PowerPoint presentations, podcast episodes, it really doesn't matter. If you're alone in your school, trying to help teachers, stay above water with what's new, and make a real dent in the changing the quality of your students' education, doesn't it make sense to pull-together with other educators to help facilitate this process?

By sharing, it's like not trying to reinvent the wheel each time we attempt a new project. Sharing



makes our lives as educators easier by communicating our experiences, by distributing our resources, and by educating one another with our own experience and expertise.

If you perform a Google search for “lesson plans,” whoa, there’s a lot out there. It seems some folks are already sharing. Why add to the chaos?

As you may do yourself, many teachers ignore lesson plans that aren’t from Virginia. They want good quality content, and one measure of quality is if it’s aligned with the Virginia S.O.L. So not only should the content be accessible via a mechanism germane to sharing (Creative Commons), but it should be well organized with metadata that communicates something about its quality.

PRAGMATICS

How are we going to do this sharing thing well? The whole concept of sharing works two ways: I’ll share with you, if you share with me. Here’s how this can work for both of us.

Instead, by you taking your time to try something and evaluate it, you’re saving me a load of time.

First, share **what you are using**. Tell me what it is—give me a U.R.L. to follow, a title, a description of what you have found. Next, **tell us how you are using** what you have found. Don’t just tell us you’ve begun to use blogs with your kids, tell us more—tell us how they kids are using the blogs, details about

how they're learning from the blogging experience, etc. And lastly, but very important, **evaluate the tool and the experience of using it**. You may decide blogging isn't for your kids, but tell me why. Tell me about your experiences. Give me your take on the experience of using that particular tool.

So many educators today are focused on just finding the latest tools. They may use Twitter or their blog to say "Hey, new tool! New website! Go look at it!" which is great, to a degree, but soon you realize there's too much "newness" out there to keep up.

Instead, by you taking your time to try something and evaluate it, you're saving me a load of time. I don't have to see if it "works" or figure out "what it does." I can see that this particular tool, used in this way, might benefit me and my students.

By sharing myself, I'll repay the favor when I try out the next Web 2.0 tool in my school.

PLACES TO SHARE


Another pragmatic issue is *where* to share all of this content. The Web obviously! But what makes the most sense?

First, use a tool that helps you stay organized. Whether it's a microblogging tool, a regular blog, or a wiki, use something that's easy to search and can be found on Google.

Second, use something that accommodates tagging. Keyword tags are about the best way we have

One place to share content, where it can be tagged, is through your free account on delicious.com.





at organizing content today. If you used sites like *Diigo.com* or *delicious.com* to organize your bookmarks, you'll recognize the power of *folksonomy*. Folksonomy is the mechanism by which you and I both can tag digital content so that it has both personal and more universal meaning. Many blogging and wiki tools can accommodate tagging in the ways *delicious.com* and *Flickr.com* do. Trust me, it works.

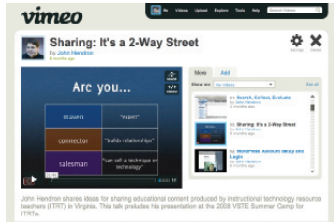
Third, choose a place to share that's accessible. Don't choose a Web 2.0 tool that your school blocks with its filter. For obvious reasons, *edublogs* might be a better choice than *Blogger.com*. Both are great tools, but one's designed for educators, and the other, Joe Public.

Fourth, consider a space that can invite collaboration or commenting. You might be surprised by the number of folks who are willing to give their 2-cents, or improve your content. Wikis are excellent candidates here. I especially like the new *Google Sites* wiki platform.

Last, consider joining another, bigger community. There may already be an entity where you can share that has an established membership. Whether it's a website like *Connexions*, or *Curwiki*, or a specific Ning-based social network, you'll find sharing in spaces that already have a following of educators will more immediately put the content in the hands of your peers.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

See a version of this presentation online, in video format at: <http://vimeo.com/1310609>.



BEYOND TEXT

Finally, just as I've shared with you a video of slides, images, and my talking head, **consider sharing more than just "text."** The best way to share might be through multimedia. **Screencasts** are an excellent way to demonstrate software, and video can really give a sense of how something might work by depicting real students and teachers.

Just remember about that copyright stuff, not to mention Internet safety. Be sure you have permission before publishing video of school activities, or content through screencasts (video and music, in particular).

TAG IT

As I mentioned above, use tags to make your content easy to find. Consider tags that other educators might be using themselves: ITRT, SOL numbers, subject areas (math, science), grade level (middle, elementary, 5thgrade), and don't forget your own name as a tag. If I find great content from you, I might search out more that you've done in the future!

Sharing is a two-way street. By sharing the content you are already producing, you help strengthen your abilities in the school. By accessing the content of others, you help yourself to content that's relevant, scrutinized by others, and is backed by the experiences of the authors—your peers.

Video services like Vimeo, Viddler, or TeacherTube can be allies in publishing your multimedia.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Hendron has been a presenter at the TechFest/EdTech conference since 2000, held each year at Randolph Macon College in Ashland, Virginia. John serves on the **Greater Richmond Area Educational Technology Council** (GRAETC). He currently is employed as supervisor of instructional technology for **Goochland County Public Schools** (Virginia). Among his accomplishments in Goochland, John implemented the *Teacher Blogging Initiative* in 2005 and the *G21 Projects* in 2008.

John was recognized in 2006 by the **Virginia Department of Education** as Virginia's state technology leader at their **Educational Technology Leadership Conference**. He is a member and director for the **Virginia Society for Technology in Education** (VSTE).

John writes regularly for four weblogs, including *Hendron's Digest*, a blog dedicated to education and technology, available online for free at <http://www.johnhendron.net/digest/>.

