It is easy to characterize the incorporation of 21st century literacy skills and technology into the classroom as a clash between the old and new. It could be likened to the clash in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter where Professor Umbridge, the High Inquisitor, is appointed to critique and question Dumbledore’s unconventional teachers and their teaching methods. A more constructive approach, however, is to acknowledge the value of both old and new ways used together in order to meet students where they are, helping to bring them forward in the technologies they are already using.

In the opening chapter of her book Adolescent Literacy (2007), Kylene Beers, former president of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), implores readers to imagine school through a 21st century lens. She asks teachers to think about the value of students having a voice in what they read and write; she advocates for employing technology as a sophisticated tool for learning. Instead of school being about the exchange of information between teacher and student, Beers challenges us to envision school as a place where inquiry, collaboration, creating, wondering, and questioning are the foundation of learning.

As we contemplate what it means for students to be literate in the 21st century, we must pay particular attention to how literacy has evolved and continues to evolve. The NCTE policy statement on 21st century literacies emphasizes the need for knowledge of technological tools, the ability to collaborate with others and communicate effectively, and the application of inventive thinking, including adaptability and synthesis of multiple, simultaneous sources of information. The technological tools we describe here are three ways teachers might begin the process of integrating the goals of 21st century literacies.

Incorporating 21st century technology into the classroom can be messy and difficult at first, but with consistency, teachers can help students use these tools critically and effectively to meet literacy goals. Students can use Twitter and Schoology, for example, to communicate in new ways, or they can use Prezi to present information in a completely different format. In using innovative tools such as these to approach learning, students and teachers can work together to re-envision how school will function for the century to come.

### Twitter: Typing Tweets Together

#### What is it?

Twitter has become a popular social networking tool used by celebrities and regular folks alike. Some may look at Twitter and see the technology as simply superficial, mindless entertainment. However, Twitter is a technology that can be
used in the classroom to help students learn, stay engaged, and feel connected to the content they are learning.

Twitter is, essentially, a social networking site in which members send and read 140 character messages called tweets. Users can follow other tweeters and receive updates on new tweets via computer or smart phone. Members are able to reply to others’ tweets using the @ symbol followed by the username. Hashtags (#) are used to group specific posts together by topic. Twitter has created a variety of tools to help users interact more effectively including TweetChat. TweetChat is similar to a chat room and can be used for prearranged chats and business group chat meetings. TweetChatters also use a hashtag (#) to find specific topics and connect with others who are talking about those topics. The YouTube video “Twitter in Plain English” provides more information on what Twitter is and how it works.

How is it used?
Twitter can be used to help engage students and get them interested in the content they are learning. Twitter is a technology that many students are familiar with and may use in their everyday lives. By connecting the content to a technology that students use on a daily basis, teachers are able to make content more relevant to learners. For example, in the article, “Pleased to Tweet You: Making a Case for Twitter in the Classroom,” a seventh grade English teacher utilized Twitter via TweetChat to chat in real time with the author of a text introduced in class the day before. Twitter provided the medium to contact this author quickly while student interest was still high. According to the teacher, the students were “glued to the screen” while the class posted questions and chatted with the author (Messner, 2009). Thus, Twitter can be used to turn a classroom of twenty-four students into a classroom consisting of writers, professionals, other teachers, and students from other schools. Twitter can open up classrooms for a new kind of communication, one that is both concise and instant.

Teachers also may use Twitter to communicate with students outside of the classroom or to keep parents informed of classroom and school-wide activities. For example, teachers can tweet a reminder to students about their multicultural Prezi presentations due Wednesday. Then teachers can tweet a notification to parents about the multicultural showcase event happening on Thursday evening. Twitter also may be used to turn in short assignments, conduct discussions, or ask questions about literature being read in class. For a short assignment, students could tweet a haiku capturing a theme present in the text they are reading in class. The possibilities for Twitter in the classroom truly range as far as the imagination and creativity we put toward implementing the technology.

How does it meet 21st century literacy goals?
This popular social networking technology can be used in the classroom to meet student literacy needs. Twitter can increase the amount of communication happening in the classroom and also expands students’ repertoire of communication tools. As educators, we know that literacy means more than simply words on a page. Opening a new channel of communication through Twitter provides an opportunity to break through the barriers of traditional literacy assignments. Literacy has become a bigger concept that encompasses the ability to read a variety of texts such as photographs, billboards, and even clothing choices. Twitter does not only include written text, but also can include pictures and links to videos, which can help students to see an expanded definition of what is considered to be text. Twitter helps students learn how to write concise statements because of the 140 character maximum within each Tweet. This way, students are able to practice getting their point across in the most direct way
possible, avoiding the wordiness trap that many students fall into.

**Schoology: The Social School Site**

**What is it?**
Social networking sites have become extremely popular over the past five years. **Schoology** is a social network-based tool that allows teachers to interact with students in a way that satisfies both technological needs and curricular elements. The most well-known social networking site is Facebook. The design of Schoology is parallel to that of Facebook in which conversations take place, messages are sent, statuses are updated, and information and other media are shared within a classroom network.

**How is it used?**
Schoology consists of two main contexts 1) interactive communication and 2) academic information exchange. Teachers can create discussion questions, collaborative groups, or boards for assignments that allow for dynamic interaction between students and their teachers. For example, students participating in reading workshop can ask questions and post comments about classmates’ book choices. Teachers can participate in and monitor these student-led discussions. The second aspect that Schoology has capitalized on is the ability to deliver academic information to students. Within Schoology, students are able to access their grades, attendance records, and teacher feedback on electronically-submitted assignments. Access to this information increases communication between teachers and students and holds students accountable for their academic responsibilities.

**How does it meet 21st century literacy goals?**
As teachers, we have the opportunity to use this popular phenomenon of social networking to the advantage of learning in our classrooms. With new sites like Schoology that base its premise on the idea of Facebook, students are able to see the overlay of the social networking they do on their own and the social networking for educational purposes they do for school. Not only does Schoology encompass keeping our teaching styles updated to the twenty-first century, but it also provides a bridge for teachers to learn new ways to connect to students’ learning styles.

That being said, Schoology helps meet literacy goals by keeping relevant the ways we teach and the ways students are expected to learn. What better way to have students interpret, formulate, compare, construct, explain, or investigate than in their own realm of technological comfort? Instead of forcing conversations to take place in our classrooms that rely so much on old ways of teaching and learning, we can incorporate our teachings into this new digital age. Students can interact with one another, as well as their teachers, outside of the classroom in academic ways, emphasizing the bridge between academics and real life situations and helping students to be more involved in their schooling.

Twenty-first century literacy emphasizes discussion and interaction as well as individualized activities, marking them equally important in the growth and development of each learner. Our job as teachers is to utilize the tools we find that will aid us in furthering these discussions and interactions among our students, creating a firmer classroom foundation to cooperate and learn together. Schoology is a technological tool that encourages students to converse more openly with each other and their teacher, promoting the community of the classroom hand-in-hand with the academic motives behind its use.

**Prezi: The Powerful Presenter**

**What is it?**
**Prezi** is an interactive and visually pleasing tool that uses zooming and spatial relationships to present information. Similar to a traditional PowerPoint, Prezi has the ability to incorporate various types of media. However, Prezi’s interactive interface allows for a more
streamlined approach to presenting information, emphasizing both the big picture as well as the connections among ideas. Teachers are able to access this program online for free and, if using an education-based e-mail address, are rewarded with a larger storage capacity. If finances allow, a downloadable program which does not require Internet access is available, as well. For a basic tutorial on how to use Prezi, follow this link: Prezi Tutorial.

How is it used?
We have developed three useful ways to implement this program within the English/Language Arts classroom. For a visual of the following cited examples, follow this link: 21st Century Literacy.

Prezi can be used as a way to develop virtual graphic organizers or word charts. The benefit to using Prezi as a way to create organizers or words charts is its interactive and expressive nature. It allows students the option of creating more dimensions to explore a topic and to incorporate their thoughts and ideas into a focused venue. For example, students can use Prezi to map the relationships among the complex array of characters in Romeo and Juliet, incorporating links to websites, videos, and images. Displaying information in this way caters to students' learning styles and multiple intelligences. Using Prezi also allows students to more deeply explore the relationships presented by visually seeing the connections as well as delving into the content presented in the links.

Additionally, Prezi can be used as a tool for assessment. As a replacement of or supplement to a traditional 12-point, Times New Roman, double-spaced, five-paragraph essay, a student can use Prezi to express the same thoughts and ideas they would in a paper through a more visual medium. Through Prezi students can insert video, upload images, and link to websites and sources in order to better weave their research within their final assessment and demonstrate their process of inquiry. In the linked Prezi, a short-response essay paper is turned into a Prezi presentation where the student has inserted various media to illustrate characters' views of assimilation in John Okada’s No-No Boy.

Our final idea for using Prezi within the classroom is as a tool for analyzing literature. Similar to written annotation, Prezi enables users to develop and record ideas in relation to a specific piece of literature. Prezi takes this traditional method of annotating a step further by allowing students and teachers to visually enhance the reading. For example, in our Prezi a teacher provides students with an explanation, through text and visual representation, of rhyme scheme and vocabulary words from Dr. Seuss's “Oh the Places You’ll Go.”

How does it meet 21st century literacy goals?
Prezi is a transformative tool that builds students’ abilities to present information through logical, visual, and spatial relationships. This ability can lead to an alteration in the traditional relationship between student thought and research. Whereas traditional instructional methods encourage this relationship, using Prezi requires students to effectively communicate the explicit connections between their research and their own ideas. Through the ease of incorporating simultaneous sources of information, such as videos, images, and web links, students are able to show what knowledge they have acquired through their inquiry process. The adaptability of inquiry and research necessary for constructing a Prezi calls for students to utilize and synthesize the vast amount of information available at their fingertips.

Bridging Students and Teachers
Whether we believe it to be positive or negative, our students’ lives are inextricably connected to technology. As teachers, we can take advantage of students’ experience and comfort with technology as a bridge to literacy learning. The technologies that we implement in the classroom
Tech Tools for Teachers, by Teachers

can help students not only to stay engaged, but also to feel a personal connection to and genuine interest in the content they are learning. Through both delivery of content and expanded communication, technology tools can help students become better readers and writers in the complex literacy landscape of the 21st century.

References

Manning is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire; email maminck@uwec.edu.

Copyright © 2011 by the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English.