

Make Those You Tubes!

More Sharing = Faster Learning

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“Video is the new text”
– Mark Anderson

“Broadcast Yourself”
– The You Tube Slogan

Without fail, wherever I travel, someone comes up to me to share something good they are doing. Just yesterday, in Texas, a woman excitedly told me about how she had put together a group of students to make PowerPoints for any teacher who needed one.

My question to that person is always “Where can I find that on You Tube?” and invariably the answer is “You can’t.” So I explain how simple it would be to have a student point a videocam or a cell phone at that person and record, for 30 seconds, their saying exactly what they just said to me. The videographer could then record a couple of students in the program for 15 seconds each, and perhaps take a few seconds of the program in action. Under 2 minutes of video in all.

In just another minute or two, that student could upload, add tags, and post that video on You Tube (or Teacher Tube, if one preferred.) Total time invested: 15 minutes tops (for someone experienced, that includes retakes and simple editing.) Number of teachers who could potentially benefit by viewing the video: millions.

That, in a nutshell, is the incredible communication power of the short video, as exemplified by You Tube, Teacher Tube, Big Think, and others. It is a medium that, in only four years has exploded into onto the scene with a vigor and a pent-up demand that the world has rarely seen. There are over *800 million* videos currently on You Tube, with almost 200,000 new ones posted each day. They range from first-time users “broadcasting themselves,” (viewed, typically, by under 100 people), to “viral” videos viewed by millions, to an incredible number of “how to” and self-teaching videos, to highly sophisticated presentations and arguments by world-class thinkers, including Nobel prize winners, in a wide range of fields.

To the surprise of many who don’t use it, this communication is not just one-way broadcasting, it is very much two-way. Feedback comes in at least four forms: number of times viewed, number of stars awarded (by watchers), text comments below the video, and video responses. There are entire communities communicating with each other via You Tube, such as that of the Silver Surfer, a 71-year-old Englishman whose community is old people, to that of the recently bereaved who share their grief and comforting with each other, to those that of people in various roles, jobs, and professions (e.g. students, mechanics, teachers) who share thoughts and ideas.

Whenever one is searching for information, it is no longer enough to use a text search engine like Google (even though it returns top You Tubes as well.) One needs to add a video search engine, such as blinkx.com, foosoo.com, trueveo.com, pixsy.com, or vizhole.com, that searches not just You Tube, but multiple video sites. Or else you could easily miss some key point that is inside, say, a recorded talk.

Why Our Kids Need It

That’s the real reason why students need access to You Tube: Video has now become such a standard means of communication that more and more truly important information is available *only* in video form. This includes videos from major authors, scientists, politicians, TV news broadcasts and other TV programs, Big Think and TED videos from all sorts of intellectuals, doers, and cutting edge folks and much more. It includes policy debates, such as the video of the weatherwoman delivering a screech against the math textbooks used in some Washington State schools and videos of a college math professor’s responses. You just don’t find a lot of this stuff in print.

Faster Learning

It is ironic that the many in the older generations still think power is obtained by hoarding information (“knowledge is power” “keep it close to the vest”), while today’s young people understand that, in this age, power comes from being the first to share (think political blogs.)

And those who share more learn faster. Our teachers have greatly reduced their learning speed through this lack of impetus to share. I’ve talked to lots of educators (teachers, tech coordinators and others) who *already have* these videos. But they’re not posted, except possibly locally, and not available of others to see and learn from.

That’s holding us back, big time. Until we start sharing—until a teacher can type “fractions” or “semicolon” or “irony” or “First Amendment,” or anything else into a video search engine and find all the very best teaching ideas in the world (as rated by their peers) presented in under 2 minutes apiece—the profession is crippled. If every teacher in the US were to post (or have their students post) just one You Tube or Teacher Tube a year about something good they have done and want to share, we’d have over two million per year to choose from. Then add in the rest of the English-speaking world.

The tools are there and they are incredibly easy to use—it just takes doing. Our teachers just need a little push.

To Do

So if you are a tech coordinator, and you don’t already have one, I suggest buying a “Flip” video camera, for under \$100. (You can probably get a used one cheaper on eBay.) Then show as many people as you can examples of the kinds of videos I’m talking about here (there are thousands of good examples in every subject to emulate), and make sure every interested teacher has a student partner who can film and post one. If there are concerns about showing the faces of kids, then just don’t show faces, or blur them out.

What’s that? You say your school or district *blocks access* to the fastest growing, most important communications medium in the world? I suggest you put at the very top of your ToDo list to unblock You Tube and its video-hosing siblings ASAP, as more and more districts are doing. You can start the process today by forwarding this article to everyone in charge. (It’s online at www.marcprensky.com/writing.)

And if ever, by chance, you ever happen to find some extra budget money in your pocket, be sure to use some of it to pick up a couple of more Flips. ☺

*Marc Prensky is an internationally acclaimed thought leader, speaker, writer, consultant, and game designer in the critical areas of education and learning. He is the author of *Digital Game-Based Learning* (McGraw Hill, 2001) and *Don't Bother Me, Mom, I'm Learning* (Paragon House, 2006). Marc is the founder and CEO of Games2train, a game-based learning company, whose clients include IBM, Bank of America, Pfizer, the U.S. Department of Defense and the LA and Florida Virtual Schools. He is also the creator of the sites www.SocialImpactGames.com. Marc holds an MBA from Harvard and a Masters in Teaching from Yale. More of his writings can be found at www.marcprensky.com/writing/. Marc can be contacted at marc@games2train.com.*