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## Educating the Web-Savvy Urban Teacher: Website Evaluation Tips and Internet Resources for Secondary Educators

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This article, *The Web-Savvy Urban Teacher*, addresses the question of what educational technology educators and scholars can do to close the pedagogical mismatch, which exists today between “digital native” secondary students and their predigital educators. The infrequent use of the Internet as a resource in urban schools is detrimental for today’s generation of students, the majority of whom consider the World Wide Web as the source of all knowledge. The purpose of his article is to: (a) introduce and establish the rationale that the Internet is an appropriate medium by means of which differentiated instruction and multiple intelligences can help foster content literacy among struggling and reluctant adolescent learners, (b) provide secondary educators with teacher-specific website criteria that will facilitate the website selection process, and (c) supply a sampling of timeless websites for students and teachers interested in working in a self-regulated environment.

“I really try hard to get good grades in school, but sometimes it is hard. Especially when it comes to homework. But I heard about a Website. I think the address is: [www.about.com](http://www.about.com). Anyway, it helps you with homework that normally gets you confused.”— Middle School Girl—(Levin & Arafah, 2002, p. 9)

On November 15, 2006, “Good Morning America” on ABC News, in consultation with a group of experts, named the Internet the fifth new wonder of the world (Hennessey, 2006). Everybody would agree with Reporter Hennessey’s observation that “the Internet has revolutionized everything from commerce to education to dating.” Today’s generation of “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001; Hertzog & Klein, 2005) has grown up so accustomed to the Internet that it is becoming increasingly difficult for teachers who are unfamiliar with technology to reach these students through a traditional print textbook approach. An adequate education for today’s net generation of learners (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005) requires that the Internet play a significant part in the educational process, especially if we want to engage the less motivated learners. On the other hand, as Leblanc (1994) sadly reported, true integration of technology in the curriculum remains a luxury, not to say impractical, in many secondary schools.

In insufficiently funded schools, where access to quality teaching and human resources is not evident, Internet information management may constitute a real challenge for “digital immigrant” teachers, those teachers who, according to Marc Prensky (2001), “were not born into the digital world,” and therefore, “turn to the Internet information second rather than first” (p. 1, 2). Whereas “digital natives” tend to turn to the Internet for answers to all their questions, digital immigrant teachers may view it as an ancillary source of academic information. Effective use of the Internet is all the more problematic for urban teachers, who must deal with heavy class size, low expectations and student ill-preparedness, among other duties. Educational leadership needs to find a way to mediate the net generation gap if the aim of K-12 education is to graduate students who are globally competitive for work and post secondary education in the 21st century.

To lessen the widening of the digital gap and the communication breakdown between digital native students and their digital immigrant teachers, school districts and teacher education programs need to: (a) recognize the vital role that the Internet plays as a teaching and learning resource both inside and outside the classroom, (b) articulate to predigital and digital immigrants the reasons why the Internet is critical to today’s teaching, and (c) provide teachers with strategies for successful management and discernment of useful information for their particular teaching purposes. These three points are the focus of this article. Mainly intended for urban educators, this article introduces and establishes the rationale that Internet is an appropriate medium by which differentiated instruction and multiple intelligences can

help foster content literacy among struggling and reluctant adolescent learners. Additionally, this document provides middle and secondary educators with a sampling of carefully reviewed, timeless websites for use in a self-monitored environment.

## INTERNET AND DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

In poor urban school settings, where technological innovations are absent and teachers have to deal with large class sizes comprised of a highly intellectually and culturally diverse student population, addressing the individual needs of low performing students becomes a serious challenge (Levin, 2002). As the Illinois Planning Commission for Educational Technology argued, the use of technology allows students at all levels “to develop skills in problem solving, decision making, data collection, self spaced instruction, research, and communications” (Barker, Hall, & Wood, 1994, p. 2). In the absence of funding to fully integrate technology across the curriculum, educational websites can serve as an intermediate solution to help individual learners develop the skills they need according to their cognitive level and their learning style. In this respect, the Internet has a lot to offer the proponents of inclusion and differentiated instruction.

Rich with a variety of learning resources, the educational aspect of the Internet is consistent with the inclusion philosophy that supports the belief that “all students, regardless of ability, are vital and integral part of the general education system” (Gartin, Murdick, Imbeau, & Perner, 2002, p. 7). Additionally, the Internet stands out as a unique medium through which teachers can provide, monitor, and tailor supplementary instruction according to individual students’ needs and learning styles (Jordanov, 2001). The design of internet activities is also congruent with the goals and objectives of differentiated instruction, which is defined as “the planning of curriculum and instruction using strategies that address students’ strengths, interests, skills, and readiness in different learning environments” (Gartin et al., p. 8). Internet-savvy students who are able to hone their skills using the Internet might appreciate the environment of privacy, interactivity, and adjustability that it offers. Most educational websites break down students’ activities into elementary, middle, and high school levels, and some sites even go further in arranging the information according to students’ intellectual ability levels (beginning/easy, intermediate, difficult/advanced, etc.).

Additionally, because they are enhanced by web devices, educational websites allow for the integration of the theories of multiple intelligences and individual learning styles (Gardner, 1999; Veneema & Gardner, 1996). Some activities include traditional multiple choice and sentence completion tasks appropriate for the linguistic and logical-mathematical mind; others offer graphic-enhanced, three dimensional, and concentration activities for the visual-spatial learner. Kinesthetic and auditory learners connect with colorful and vibrant simulation activities that incorporate music, sound and/or action. Finally, web-based practice offers digital learners the opportunity to draw from their digital intelligence (Adams, 2004) to develop academic abilities. With adequate guidance in using educationally-oriented Internet activities, teachers can achieve success with learners for whom the traditional approach has not proved effective.

#### A SAMPLING OF WEB SITES FOR MIDDLE AND SECONDARY EDUCATORS

Tables 3-9 (later) provide samples of educational websites, most of which have been recognized as exemplary websites in the 101 best websites for secondary educators (Lerman, 2005), an ISTE publication, or other accredited agencies, such as: PC Magazine, the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education, and the Educational Source.

***Website selection criteria.*** Authors of educational websites come from diverse backgrounds, academic experiences, and different professions. However, their intention may not necessarily be educational. Therefore, the websites included in this project had to demonstrate a direct connection with either students or the teachers, and sometimes both.

Moreover, in addition to meeting the generic evaluation criteria listed in Table 1, the websites found in Tables 3-9 reflect five instructional criteria, including: audience, grade level, contents level of difficulty, teacher and learners' needs, and the learning environment. Teachers need to know whether the website they are about to access is intended for educators, students, and/or the community at large.

**Table 1**  
Four Models of Educational Website Evaluation

Kathy Schrock (1999)	Paul Gorski (1999)	Leon Bantjes and Johannes Cronje (2000)	Kelli Boklaschuk and Kevin Caisse (2001)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authority</li> <li>• Efficiency</li> <li>• Bias</li> <li>• Citations</li> <li>• Dates</li> <li>• Fallacy</li> <li>• Graphics</li> <li>• Handicapped Access</li> <li>• Information Availability</li> <li>• Knowledge</li> <li>• Links</li> <li>• Misinformation</li> <li>• Navigability</li> <li>• Pertinence</li> <li>• Quantity of Information requirements</li> <li>• Scholastic reviews</li> <li>• Uniqueness</li> <li>• Verifiability</li> <li>• Xtra information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance</li> <li>• Appropriateness</li> <li>• Credibility</li> <li>• Accuracy</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> <li>• Navigability</li> <li>• Multiculturality</li> </ul>	<p><b>Scope</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breadth</li> <li>• Depth</li> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Format</li> </ul> <p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accuracy</li> <li>• Authority</li> <li>• Currency</li> <li>• Uniqueness</li> <li>• Links</li> <li>• Quality of writing</li> </ul> <p><b>Graphic and Multimedia design</b></p> <p><b>Reviews</b></p> <p><b>Workability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Userfriendliness</li> <li>• Required Computered environment</li> <li>• Searching</li> <li>• Browsability and</li> <li>• Organization</li> <li>• Interactivity</li> <li>• Connectivity</li> </ul> <p><b>Cost</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience</li> <li>• Credibility</li> <li>• Accuracy</li> <li>• Objectivity</li> <li>• Coverage</li> <li>• Currency</li> <li>• Aesthetic</li> <li>• Navigation</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> </ul>

The users of educational websites also need to know the general content area a given site focuses on, what grade level the content is suited for, the material's level of difficulty, the nature of the information it provides, and the learning environment it requires. These additional criteria were summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
Teaching-Specific Website Evaluation Criteria

Nature of the Materials	Level of Difficulty	Grade Level	Audience	Learner Type and Style	Learning Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lesson Plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-6 (Elementary)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gifted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large Group</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic Information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intermediate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6-8 (Middle)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small Group</li> <li>• Pair Work</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tutorials/ Demonstrations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advanced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9-12 (High School)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English Language Learners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual setting</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice or Testing Material</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K-12</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School administrators/ educational service providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remedial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online/ Interactive</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Development</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-educational community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special needs</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Teacher Tips</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning Games</li> </ul>					

To enhance the manageability of the tabled information, the tables highlight only URL's, the audience, and academic disciplines.

In the process of selecting websites of relevance, teachers, students, and parents received the most attention as the target audience. On the whole, like most educational websites, the websites discussed here provide teachers with teaching tips, lesson plans, supplementary content, strategies, quizzes, student activities, and links to related sites. The selection process gave precedence to the major academic disciplines, including math, science, English language arts, social studies, and English as a second language. Additionally, these samples include interactive review and test preparation websites which provide teachers with a means to ensure that both digitally inclined and paper and pencil learners have equal opportunities to enhance learning. Student links feature interactive practice activities, such as online quizzes, learning games, and simulations. Parents' links mainly advertise information related to homework help, learning software, learning games, and home schooling resources.

At first glance, some websites included in this article might not seem directly relevant to education. However, after a closer look the reader will discover that, while intended for the general public, these sites contain

sublinks to useful information for children and educators. Usually, public programs, such as: [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org), [www.nytimes.org](http://www.nytimes.org), and [www.ipl.org](http://www.ipl.org), fall under this category. In a comparable fashion, there are websites which, while being of high interest for students and educators, contain useful information for other services outside of the field of education. This is the case with <http://www.queendom.com> and <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit>, among others. The heading “miscellaneous” category designates this type of website, stressing the fact that the readership extends to other disciplines beyond education.

***The no-fee-required criterion.*** The cost factor received serious consideration during the selection and compilation of these the websites included in this work. Plainly commercial websites scarcely appear in the listings for two main reasons. In addition to being expensive, business websites tend to prioritize advertisers’ pop-ups and promotional links over educational content; this interference may discourage educational web surfers from using the Internet. A minimal number of commercial websites were included in the provided website list after an in-depth examination of the educational value of the information made available to nonsubscribers.

***Website coverage.*** The websites listed in Tables 3-9 are far from exhaustive. However, as the term World Wide Web suggests, each address opens a wealth of information and an endless web of opportunities for the practice of skills and enhancement of knowledge. Parents, tutors, and self-monitored learners of English, English as a Second Language, mathematics, social studies, and science will find the links to practice activities invaluable, as they provide for immediate self-evaluation.

**Table 3**  
Reading/English Language Arts

URL Addresses by Academic Discipline	Audience			
	Educators: Teachers/Parents Guardians/ Tutors	Students	Community /Researchers	
<b>Reading/English Language Arts</b>				
<a href="http://www.ncte.org/">http://www.ncte.org/</a>	X	---	X	
<a href="http://www.readwritethink.org">http://www.readwritethink.org</a>	X	X	X	
<a href="http://www.nytimes.com/learning">http://www.nytimes.com/learning</a>	X	X	---	
<a href="http://school.discovery.com/lessonplans">http://school.discovery.com/lessonplans</a>	X	---	---	
<a href="http://www.webenglishteacher.com">http://www.webenglishteacher.com</a>	X	X	---	
<a href="http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/tools/initiative/index.html">http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/tools/initiative/index.html</a>	X	---	X	
<a href="http://edsitement.neh.gov/">http://edsitement.neh.gov/</a>	X	---	---	
<a href="http://eduplace.com">http://eduplace.com</a>	X	X	---	
<a href="http://school.discovery.com">http://school.discovery.com</a>	X	X	---	
<a href="http://www.quia.com/shared">http://www.quia.com/shared</a>	X	X	---	
<a href="http://www.funbrain.com">http://www.funbrain.com</a>	X	X	---	
<a href="http://www.pbs.org/teachersource">http://www.pbs.org/teachersource</a>	X	---	---	
<a href="http://www.discover.tased.edu.au/menu/practice.htm">http://www.discover.tased.edu.au/menu/practice.htm</a>	X	X	---	
<a href="http://teachershub.com/teaching/teaching.cfm">http://teachershub.com/teaching/teaching.cfm</a>	X	X	---	
<a href="http://highschoolace.com/ace/ace.cfm">http://highschoolace.com/ace/ace.cfm</a>	X	X	---	
<a href="http://www.wordplays.com/p/morph">http://www.wordplays.com/p/morph</a>	X	X	---	
<a href="http://edinformatics.com/lessons/lessons.htm">http://edinformatics.com/lessons/lessons.htm</a>	X	---	---	
<a href="http://www.education-world.com/">http://www.education-world.com/</a>	X	X	---	
<a href="http://www.brainpop.com/">http://www.brainpop.com/</a>	X	X	---	







**Table 6**  
Social Studies

URL Addresses by Academic Discipline	Audience		
	Educators: Teachers/Parents Guardians/Tutors	Students	Community /Researchers
<b>Social Studies</b>			
<a href="http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/">http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://www.cnn.com/EDUCATION">http://www.cnn.com/EDUCATION</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://vhf.org/">http://vhf.org/</a>	X	X	---
(survivors of the SHOAH visual history foundation)			
<a href="http://www.nytimes.com/learning/index.html">http://www.nytimes.com/learning/index.html</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://school.discovery.com">http://school.discovery.com</a>	X	X	X
<a href="http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu">http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://www.historyteacher.net">http://www.historyteacher.net</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/tools/edpicks.jhtml?src=in">http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/tools/edpicks.jhtml?src=in</a>	X	---	---
<a href="http://edsitement.neh.gov/">http://edsitement.neh.gov/</a>	X	---	---
<a href="http://eduplace.com/">http://eduplace.com/</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk">http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://www.nationalgeographic.com/education">http://www.nationalgeographic.com/education</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://www.quia.com/shared">http://www.quia.com/shared</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://www.funbrain.com">http://www.funbrain.com</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://www.pbs.org/teachersource">http://www.pbs.org/teachersource</a>	X	---	---
<a href="http://www.discover.tased.edu.au/menu/practice.htm">http://www.discover.tased.edu.au/menu/practice.htm</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://highschoolace.com/ace/ace.cfm">http://highschoolace.com/ace/ace.cfm</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/">http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://edinformatics.com/lessons/lessons.htm">http://edinformatics.com/lessons/lessons.htm</a>	X	---	---
<a href="http://www.education-world.com/">http://www.education-world.com/</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://www.ushistory.org/">http://www.ushistory.org/</a>	X	X	---
<a href="http://www.brainpop.com/">http://www.brainpop.com/</a>	X	X	X



**Table 8**  
Test Preparation

URL Addresses by Academic Discipline	Audience			
	Educators: Teachers/Parents Guardians/Tutors	Students	Community /Researchers	
<b>TEST PREPARATION</b> <a href="http://highschoolace.com/ace/ace.cfm">http://highschoolace.com/ace/ace.cfm</a> <a href="http://teachershub.com/teaching/teaching.cfm">http://teachershub.com/teaching/teaching.cfm</a> <a href="http://quizhub.com/quiz/quizhub.cfm">http://quizhub.com/quiz/quizhub.cfm</a> <a href="http://www.iclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/toefl.html">http://www.iclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/toefl.html</a> <a href="http://apdl.rice.edu/">http://apdl.rice.edu/</a> (Advanced Placement Digital Library at Rice University) <a href="http://www.internet4classrooms.com/act_sat.htm">http://www.internet4classrooms.com/act_sat.htm</a> <a href="http://www.algebra.com/testing/scripts/st.mpl">http://www.algebra.com/testing/scripts/st.mpl</a> <a href="http://www.testprepreview.com">http://www.testprepreview.com</a> (the source for free practice tests) <a href="http://regentsprep.org">http://regentsprep.org</a> <a href="http://www.nysedregents.org">http://www.nysedregents.org</a> (Regents examinations) <a href="http://www.edinformatics.com/testing/online.htm">http://www.edinformatics.com/testing/online.htm</a> (online state tests preparation, mainly 4 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> ) <a href="http://www.4tests.com/exams">http://www.4tests.com/exams</a> <a href="http://www.brainpop.com/">http://www.brainpop.com/</a>	X X X X X  X X X X  X X X X  X X X X  X X X X	X X X X X  X X X X  X X X X  X X X X	--- --- --- --- ---  --- --- --- ---  --- --- --- ---  --- --- --- ---	



## PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR ENHANCING INTERNET-ASSISTED INSTRUCTION

In an era when technology, especially hypermedia, pervades young people's daily lives, the education field must join the digital bandwagon and make a paradigm shift (Rogers, 2000) from print based to hypertext instruction. If it is true that successful learning must build on the learner's prior knowledge and experiences, hypermedia needs to be placed at the center of today's educational system. With the World Wide Web's endless expandability as a showcase for all sorts of digital actions and inventions, internet technology needs to be an integral part of teaching and learning in the 21st century classroom. Therefore, politicians and policy makers must find successful means to address the widening digital divide between the rich and the poor; the young and the old. Access to technology is the "civil rights" issue of the new millennium. Further, given the fact that technology is only as good as the person using it, teachers with no previous training in using technology should receive substantial support and inservice training at the school site to acquire the skills they need to effectively implement internet-assisted instruction. Finally, it should be the primary role of instructional technology professionals, including scholars, teacher educators, and staff developers, through well planned forums and workshops, to connect teachers to technological tools that "focus on developing curriculum, evaluating learning materials, and thinking about how to provide better learning opportunities for their students" (Sandholtz & Reilly, 2004, p. 487). Teachers need to be continually updated about web resources that are relevant to their instructional agenda. Ongoing training should insure that teachers can select:

- websites that are educationally relevant;
- websites that target a specific discipline, grade level, and audience;
- websites that do not require the installation of new software programs in order to be successfully viewed;
- websites that have been carefully reviewed for authenticity; and
- websites that are update and current.

## CONCLUSION

Internet resources are essential in the education of reluctant and struggling adolescent learners. While most of these adolescents have not been conditioned to respond positively to print information, as part of today's generation of "digital natives," they have acquired the ability to read and make sense out of hypermedia through the World Wide Web. Integrating web resources in the curriculum should be viewed as a natural way to scaffold the learning process for digital natives. Schools that cannot afford commercial educational software should invest in training their teachers to make effective use of the wealth of educational information available on the World Wide Web, the most trusted source of information and knowledge in the 21st century.

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