Pop Culture in Education: Part 1

Important Terms


Refers to those born. 1982-1999 One valuable thing to know about this generation is that they are likely much more able to multi-task than you. They’ve grown up in a media-saturated environment. You know the cliché; teenager talking on the phone, instant messaging four friends, downloading music, surfing the net and doing homework at the same time. This is true. They can do all this at once—probably because they have been since they were very young, and because these activities don’t require the kind of sustained attention that traditional media (reading, movie watching etc.) do. They are not following an unstoppable, linear, narrative stand, but moving between several areas of information. This is intelligence, multi-tasking is difficult but it’s a very different kind of intelligence than sustained reading, essay writing or academic research.


This is the kind of information format Generation Y is most comfortable with. It’s non-linear, interactive, exploratory, participatory, multi-layered. Think about the way you use the net, following your interest, multiple pages open, searching, moving “deeper” into the site and out again vs. the way you watch a movie or read a novel where information comes to you in a single stream—you can fast forward or skip ahead, but it will be confusing, disorienting—these mediums aren’t designed for viewer participation.

Questions/ Considerations

1) How do we propose to discuss Pop if it’s changing so fast? Who’s Pop are we talking about? Approach/Process vs. Definitive Content

2) Why is pop not just “culture for dummies”? 

3) What are the differences between “old” and “new” media? What skills are associated with navigating each kind of media? How do we maintain the values of academic inquiry in unfamiliar media—i.e. media that’s less textual?

4) How do I keep from looking foolish or awkward while handling these materials? Genuine, shared interest vs. anthropological distance.

The Web is upgraded to 2.0

An excellent five-minute video explaining Web 2.0 (on Youtube): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nk0EOE

Over the last few years the WWW has expanded to include dynamic multimedia and interactive platforms (such as expanded audio and video use, Google and Yahoo search engines, social tagging sites such as del.icio.us, and content sharing sites such as Wikipedia and Flickr). Much of this has to do with the improving technology of connection speeds, computer systems, and digital formatting (such as high quality compression formats as MP3). As technology improves it allows for greater (and easier) access to multi-media files such as video, audio, and images. Beyond the improvements in technology individuals and institutions have begun to form Internet communities to share media with colleagues, friends, family, and the general public. This has created what has been called Web 2.0: using the “Web as a platform.” The user has the control over content, indeed they drive content forward and the Web only serves as the tool for the delivery of content as opposed to a conduit for receiving content controlled by selected sources. O’Reilly (2005) has described it as: “The Architecture of Participation” and “Harnessing Collective Intelligence.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tim O’Reilly’s initial brainstorming list:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Web 1.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoubleClick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ofoto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akamai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mp3.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britannica Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>domain name speculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>page views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>screen scraping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>publishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>content management systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directories (taxonomy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stickiness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Content Sharing:** (YouTube, podcasting, Flickr, etc.)

**What are they?** Content sharing takes on multiple forms, and can have a variety of complex uses. The appeal of these platforms and sites is that they allow for both the individual user and the hosting institution to create media and content at “equal” levels;
this is what O’Reilly has termed “harnessing collective intelligence.” Wikipedia is an excellent example with the whole system relying on the users to create their own and build upon each other’s entries. As such the basic structures of blogging, wiki, and RSS (the underlying technology that allows one to subscribe to news headlines and podcasts) technologies have created platforms that make it easy to share content from collaborative definitions, audio and video presentations, news and editorials, and photographic galleries (to name just a few). This is summed up in the 2007 Horizon Report:

Sites like Flickr, Odeo, YouTube, Google Video, and Ourmedia make it easy to find images, videos, and audio clips, but the real value of these sites lies in the way that users can classify, evaluate, and add to the content that is there. Using simple interfaces, visitors can build shared collections of resources, whether they be links, photos, videos, documents, or almost any other kind of media. They can find and comment on items in other people’s lists, sharing not only the resources themselves but information and descriptive details about them. (p. 9)

How can you use it?

Blogs: User-generated websites where entries are made in journal style and displayed in a reverse chronological order.
- Reflect on your teaching experiences.
- Keep a log of teacher-training experiences.
- Write a description of a specific teaching unit.
- Describe what worked for you in the classroom or what didn’t work.
- Provide some teaching tips for other teachers.
- Write about something you learned from another teacher.
- Explain teaching insights you gain from what happens in your classes.
- Share ideas for teaching activities or language games to use in the classroom.
- Provide some how-to’s on using specific technology in the class, describing how you used this technology in your own class.
- Explore important teaching and learning issues.

Photo Sharing (Flickr):
- Social tagging (Folksonomy)
- Image database
- Posting student work to share with class
- Students can post commentary on images (Blogging)

Podcasting and Vodcasting: Media files that are distributed by subscription (paid or unpaid) over the Internet using syndication feeds, for playback on mobile devices and personal computers. (Also online video databases can be used such as YouTube, GoogleVideo, Yahoo! Video):
- Lectures online
- Presentations
- Supplemental Material
- Primary Sources
- Interviews with external resources
- For distance learning
- To facilitate self-paced learning
- For re-mediation of slower learners
- To allow faculty to offer advanced and or highly motivated learners extra content
- For helping students with reading and/or other disabilities
- For multi-lingual education
- To provide the ability for educators to feature guest speakers from remote locations
- To allow guest speakers the ability to present once to many sections and classes
- To allow educators to escape the tedium of lecturing
- To offer a richer learning environment

**Wikis:** websites that allow visitors to easily add, remove, and otherwise edit and change available content, typically without the need for registration. This ease of interaction and operation makes a wiki an effective tool for mass collaborative authoring.

- Easily create simple websites
- Project development with peer review
- Group authoring
- Track a group project and collect data from the group
- Review classes & teachers
- Presentations (can replace conventional presentation software, such as Keynote and PowerPoint)

**Resource Sites:**


Content Sharing Sites:


**Flickr for Education**, Retrieved February 6, 2007, http://www.flickr.com/groups/33384223@N00/


**Social networking sites**: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_networking

**What are they?** These sites provide the structure (template web pages, messaging systems etc.) for online social networks. Each page describes or represents a user. The
look, and soundtrack, of these pages can be personalized; they often list users’ personality traits, favorites (music, activities, television shows, places, etc.) or affiliations (schools, towns, teams); many users post their own creative work or local events. Users create social networks through personal affiliation, adding another user as a “friend” or joining groups organized around such diverse themes as Anarcho-Environmentalism, Manchester United or North American Jackalopes. Users can “message” each other and post comments on each other’s pages.

**What’s the appeal?** These sites are like giant, continually evolving, multimedia yearbooks. Students keep tabs on, and keep in touch with, friends from different parts of their lives, high school, college, summer camp, etc. Most of what students do on these sites is similar to browsing a yearbook. They browse their friends’ sites, post comments, or responses to other comments, check out friends’ social networks and add to or edit their own pages. One student I spoke to described this activity as a sort of “legitimate stalking”: being able to intimately track the lives of people they know. If you are initiated, these sites can be like an infinitely complex soap opera starring your friends.

**How can you use it?** These sites don’t readily lend themselves to academic use. In terms of content— they are not so useful—that is to say, the data is organized in such a way that it’s difficult to find, say, a blog entry or community dialogue on Kierkegaard. However, there’s an advantage to the lack of organization, they are incredibly useful sources of raw data or primary documents.

- **In a computer science/ information systems class:** Ask students how they might organize, index, map or store data within the site. For example, have them create a program to track the correlation between users’ favorite TV shows and their geographic locations.
- **In a history, sociology, psychology or journalism class:** Police departments have used these sites, particularly Myspace, to piece together the events and motives surrounding a crime ([http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.12/murderblog.html](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.12/murderblog.html)) You might have your students do something similar: they can find an event or social interaction documented by various users and have them build a history of the event from a particular perspective- What would a feminist history of the event look like? Or a Marxist history? Which documents/details are important- what do the disagreements mean? What do the interactions say about our current cultural norms?

**The sites:**

- **[http://myspace.com/](http://myspace.com/)** - This is the most used and most customizable of these sites.
- **[http://www.facebook.com/](http://www.facebook.com/)** - This site used to be limited to college students, so there’s a high density of membership on college campuses.

**What is it?** Instant messaging uses a client program (such as those listed below) that allows users to have text conversations in real-time. Most services offer a presence information feature, indicating whether people on one’s list of contacts are currently online and available to chat (sometimes called buddy list.)

**What’s the appeal?** Users can have several messaging windows open, and several conversations going, at once. Unlike telephone conversations, interchanges in any one conversation can be infrequent, similar to the interactions between office/roommates. Students enjoy maintaining an everyday intimacy with friends and family who are geographically distant.

**How can you use it?** Virtual office hours: sign up for an account (AOL’s service AIM is the most popular- most of your students will have an account) and let your students know when you will be available to “meet” online. This allows you to meet with several students at once and have more frequent, smaller exchanges than email. While you can’t replace actual office hours with IM availability, virtual office hours are incredibly useful on the night before a test or due date.

**The sites:**

(These are the client services)

[http://www.aim.com/](http://www.aim.com/) - The most popular of these services. Easy to use, and the newest version allows you to save conversations and use the service like a phone line (provided both computers have microphones)


[http://www.google.com/talk/](http://www.google.com/talk/) - Google automatically archives and indexes all your conversations- so they’re searchable by conversation. Like AIM, you can send files during a conversation and use the chat window like a phone.


**What is it?** A Folksonomy is an Internet-based information retrieval methodology (like a search engine) consisting of collaboratively generated, open-ended labels that categorize content such as Web pages, online photographs, and Web links. Unlike taxonomy the authors of the labeling system are often the main users (and sometimes originators) of the content to which the labels are applied. The labels are commonly known as “tags” and the labeling process is called “tagging”. Tagging is intended to make a body of information increasingly easier to search, discover, and navigate over time.
When you enter a word or term into a search engine it uses an algorithm to choose relevant pages from the web, in a Folksonomy any page retrieved was “tagged” as relevant to the term by (A) person familiar with the content of that page. Pages usually have multiple tags—a page on the history of superheroes might be tagged with Batman, Superman, and Stan Lee. All these tags would link to relevant pages—so you can follow an interest through related topics.

What’s the Appeal? Personalization, personality and relationships. “Taggers” have traceable identities- you can see all the pages tagged by a particular person so if (YOU) find users who’s “tagging” style you like (their tags are relevant, the sites they tag are generally more interesting or complex) or whose interests are similar to your own, you can go directly to a source you trust, rather than pouring through sites selected by a computer program.

How can you use it? -

In any course: You can use Folksonomy to organize a course site (unfortunately not with Blackboard). Asking students to label and build relationships between chunks of data (a map, graph, formula, summary of an event, etc.) will help them develop a more complete, more useful understanding of the subject.

Sites like del.icio.us or Citeulike can be used as advanced search engines; students can share sources and find, or contact, users doing research similar to theirs.

In a Visual Arts/ Architecture courses: Photo and video sites organized this way can be used as image banks or can be used to take a visual tour of a particular place- try the tags “Kyoto” or “Basilica”, follow a famous image through it’s permutations – “manet olympia”— or make a study of how different users visually represent abstract tags like “love”, “patience”, “individual” etc. Flickr allows users to post comments and make “notes” on their photographs- the notes are essentially an outlined box within the photo and pop-up explanation of why that section was highlighted (“nobody knows who this is” or “I wanted to crop it here but thought the couple should be more distanced.”). Both of these are great tools for talking about aesthetic choices.

The sites:

http://del.icio.us/: Extremely useful, similar to Google but results are more refined and hand- picked by users. Remember, terms for tags are entered without spaces—“webdesign” rather than “web design”—(TWO SENTENCES HERE?)a space indicates two separate tags; “cat food” tags a page with both “cat” and “food”.

http://www.citeulike.org/: Similar to del.icio.us but designed specially for academics and used primarily, but not exclusively, to tag and sort scholarly sources.

http://www.connotea.org/user/timo/tag/folksonomy : Similar to Citeulike- slightly less academic.

http://www.flickr.com: Photo-sharing organized by Folksonomy, content (photos) posted by users. You can also think of it as a free image bank—you can copy most of the pics onto your computer. Many of the users are good photographers and the site contains very compelling images from all over the world. It also has a decent number of famous
images, or pictures of those famous images, and parodies and plays on those famous images.

http://www.urbandictionary.com - In addition to being an excellent resource for slang terms- this dictionary is tagged!

**Videogames**

**What are they?** Videogames have been generally associated in the public as 1st and 3rd person shooter games, such as *Grand Theft Auto, Doom (I, II, III), Mortal Combat, Halo*, etc. But the world of video gaming is vast, both in diversity of genres (*Sims, Civilization, World of Warcraft, Madden NFL, Lego Star Wars*, and the *Myst* series), and in terms of the communities that form around these games. Some examples are the complex and detailed walkthroughs independently produced by gamers for others to access, multiplayer communities where players will play with and against each other, and video game tournaments set up in large cities.

**What’s the appeal?** Video gaming is a huge industry with revenues surpassing Hollywood films (2006 = 13.5 (video games) vs. 9.2 billion (domestic Hollywood)), and these games have production costs rivaling and sometimes surpassing big budget Hollywood films. Individual appeal for video games is complex, and hotly debated, but some basic areas to consider:

- **User “creates” multi-layered and changing narratives.** There is a feeling of controlling the storyline and direction it takes you.
- **Exploration and reward:** Johnson (2005) cited video game scholar James Paul Gee that this can be equated to the similar process of scientific method:
  - The player must *probe* the virtual world (which involves looking around the current environment, clicking on something, or engaging in a certain action).
  - Based on reflection while probing and afterward, the player must form a *hypothesis* about what something (a text, object, artifact, event, or action) might mean in a usefully situated way.
  - The player *reprobes* the world with that hypothesis in mind, seeing what effect he or she gets.
  - The player treats this effect as feedback from the world and accepts or *rethinks* his or her original hypothesis. (p. 45)

- **Multi-media experience.**
- In conclusion video games create an active medium in which the user feels immersed in the action.

**How can you use it?**

- Video games as **content delivery tools** (video games for educational purposes range from *Immune Attack: A new video game for learning immunology* and *Peacemaker: A Video Game to Promote Peace* [for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict]).
• Constructive criticism of the video games themselves.
• Types that are being explored in education at this time (The Horizon Report - 2006, pp. 17-20):
  o Simulations (games that replicate “real-world process” such as a flight simulator)
  o Virtual Environments (expanded in the 2007 report to a separate category and includes games like World of Warcraft and platforms such as Second Life)
  o Social and cooperative play (such as group role-playing games)
  o Alternative reality games (combining computer and real-world scenarios and clues)
  o Expanded in the current 2007 report (p. 26) to the focus on Massive Multiplayer Educational Gaming and the benefits for:
    ▪ Study foreign language and culture.
    ▪ Develop leadership and management skills.
    ▪ Practice strategy and apply knowledge competitively.

Questions/Thoughts to consider:
• The 2007 Horizon report projects four to five years as a time of widespread and broad adoption for educational gaming to occur.
• What are the fits across the academic disciplines?
• Can a product be created that will engage students who might be used to high production standards?
• University resources to produce educational games? Is there the staff and funds for a project of the scope you need?
• In general is it worth it?

References:


Example Sites:

Virtual Worlds: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_world

What are they? Computer based simulated environments where users interact via avatars. Unlike videogames you play “offline”, these environments continue to run- other players interact, change the landscape, advance, etc. - 24 hours a day. Some of these worlds are similar to videogames (World of Warcraft is the best example) in the sense that there are explicit goals, missions, puzzles, and battles between players. In others, like Second Life, objectives are subtler. Much like in “first” life “goals” might be to have satisfying interactions, build status or personal reputation. Sometimes these less tangible ends lead to more explicit, often economic, goals.

All of these worlds – but Second Life in particular- are microcosms of the larger, actual world. These worlds have dealt with issues of governance, economic policy, and political revolutions. Real world economies have been built around these worlds also. There are gaming versions of sweatshops, where low-paid workers game for hours to create an avatar with special powers or useful weapons etc. and the fruits of their labor are sold on eBay.

Some of these games require and cultivate the same skills as traditional “gaming”, exploration and problem solving similar to the scientific method. To make objects- houses, clothes, wings, pets, etc. in Second Life, you practically need digital imaging experience – see the creation of Suzanne Vega’s guitar in the second life showcase (http://secondlife.com/showcase/).

What’s the appeal? Often the appeal is similar to that of videogames; these worlds are complex and rewarding to explore. They are also beautifully rendered- one player described the scenery as “painfully mesmerizing”. There is also the appeal of building community, sometimes despite large geographical distances. There are community events, such as Suzanne Vega’s performance, or lectures and debates. And of course, there is the appeal of having another – possibly more exciting- life.
How can you use it? Keep in mind that, because these are very complex environments, it takes a while to become (BECOME) fluid in these worlds. Don’t expect your students to walk on (IN?) without prior experience and easily navigate the more advanced interactions, like making objects, opening a store, purchasing real-estate, observing the “nightlife”, etc.

In any class

As an object of study: Students can observe economies, politics and social interactions and compare them to theorists’ models of social behavior? What might Marx say about the Warcraft gold trade, or the commoditization of play?

In the future

* Virtual classroom- ask students to attend lectures – your own or guests.
* In a language class, practice speaking/writing the new language with native speakers
* Students can participate in mock economies or political upheavals etc.

The sites:

http://secondlife.com/

http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/index.xml

http://www.virtualworldsreview.com/ - This is an index site for virtual worlds. They describe/review each world and provide basic information about virtual worlds.

http://terranova.blogs.com/ - A blog devoted to everything having to do with virtual worlds.

Wired Travel Guide Second life:
http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.10/sloverview.html


Playing Real Money to Win Online Games, Retrieved January 29, 2007

Mashups:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bastard_pop - Basic information and links to music mash-ups.

What are they?
This term has two distinct uses – the original use refers to music and comes from the Jamaican Creole for “destroy” but, like “bad”, actually takes on a positive connotation – as in “wicked cool”. In music a mashup is an extension of sampling—two separate, and often stylistically disparate, tracks that have been mashed-up, most often the music track of one was layered with the vocal track of another—such as the music of the Beatles “Mother Nature’s Son” with Jay Z’s lyrics from “December 4th”. Mash-ups have since expanded to include vocal tracks from non-musical media, such as the speeches of President Bush. This genre is sometimes called Bastard Pop and often listed as A vs. B. The second use of this term refers to web application- or sites- that combine two or more applications to form a new tool. A classic example is the genre of Mapping mashups where for example—photos from Flicker labeled with a place name are “mapped” to their location on GoogleMaps (a navigable, browse-able map that provides both satellite photos and street names, etc.) a mash-up of Flicker and GMaps would allow you to search, for example, Seaside Heights, NJ and find not only an aerial satellite photo of that location- and exact co-ordinates, but also pictures of a local antique shop, the boardwalk and residents’ houses.

What’s the Appeal? In music, the appeal is a natural one, surprise, and recognition of the familiar within the strange. Music mash-ups can be densely layered and relatively complex- as compared to other pop songs. Application mashups appeal because of their novelty and how easy they are to personalize. Many of the most successful mash-ups make current application more convenient by layering data more densely, rather than having to switch back and forth between two or more pages all relevant information is in one. The map mashups appeal because of their sense of immediacy and relationship to places all over the globe. The social networking mashups strengthen the interpersonal connections so important to this generation. There is also an appeal to making mashups of either kind; it’s a novel kind of creativity in choosing which songs or applications compliment each other.

How can you use it? It’s highly dependant on the Mashup, but here are some examples.

In Music: Mashups can be used as guessing games ( “Crazy”- a mashup by Gnarles Barkely contains selections from the scores of spaghetti westerns, “Go Go Gadget Gospel” contains cartoon themes and the works of American composer Nicolas Flagello. Or mash-ups can be discussed as compositions .)

In Law: Mashups, of either variety, can illustrate or complicate the value and parameters of copyright and fair-use.

In any class: Map-Mashups are powerful and engaging ways to visually represent geographical information. For example, looking at the distribution of Starbucks in
Los Angeles can elucidate both the company’s real estate strategy and the city’s distribution of wealth.

The Sites:

http://googlemapsmania.blogspot.com/ - An index of links to various GoogleMaps mash-ups.

http://www.placeopedia.com - An excellent example of a Map Mashup. Combines Google maps with all place specific articles from Wikipedia, so that a search for Los Angeles brings up a map and Wikipedia articles about sites like Dodger stadium, or 20th Century Fox studios.

http://www.programmableweb.com/ - Index of Web application mash-ups, browse-able by category- reference, map, music, video, etc. The site also has a blog and mashup “how-to”s for developers, or people with some programming experience.

Ex. http://eugene.listpic.com/ - Listpic is a mash-up of Craigslist and a photo viewer that allows you to look at only the postings with photos- and the photos lead you to the listings rather than vice versa.


Internet/ Usage Research
Reference sites that track general Internet usage and popularity of particular sites.

http://www.aboutus.org/Domain_Directory - A semi wiki- like wikipedia- where you can look up any website and find it’s description, ownership, user- reviews, news stories etc.