Instructional Technology News @ AB

Professional Learning at AB

On Thursday afternoon, September 22, ABRSD elementary educators had the opportunity to choose from a wide selection of technology-themed workshops, most facilitated by our own talented staff. I hope the learning experience offered by our **Boost Your Digital Toolbox!** event was meaningful for everyone. Even if the day sparked just a single idea for how you might use digital tools to enhance student learning, I consider it a success. A huge shout out goes to all the AB educators who took the time to develop and facilitate a workshop that shared their own digital classroom experiences.
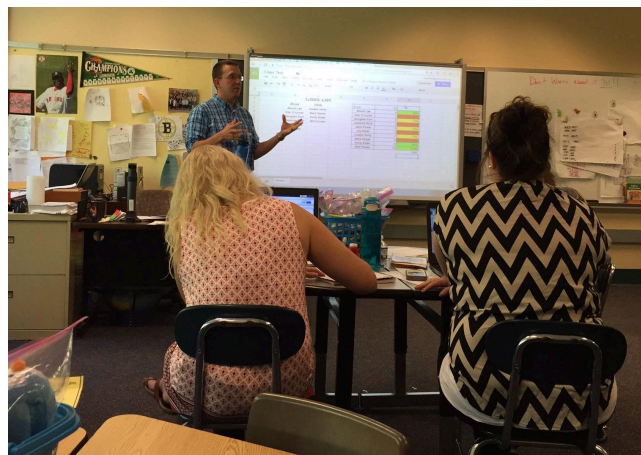
Next up is a **professional learning opportunity for RJG and ABRHS staff**. A guided workshop combining four face-to-face meetings with online learning designed to explore the many ways Google Apps for Education can be used to support high school teaching and learning will begin on **Thursday, October 6.** If you are a junior/high school educator interested in learning more about Google tools such as Docs, Slides, Forms, Blogger, Sites, Classroom, and YouTube, **please be sure to register as soon as possible via SmartEDU**. Differentiated instruction will be provided to address the needs of those who are beginning to integrate Google Apps, and those who are ready for more advanced topics. Email pharvey@abschools.org for details.

Word Clouds

Many educators are familiar with word cloud tools such as **Wordle**, **Tagxedo**, and **Tagul**, which allow students to create colorful visualizations of text that can be posted online or saved as an image. Word clouds quickly analyze text to create a shape in which the words that appear most frequently appear bigger and bolder. They're a great way for students, especially visual learners, to distill and summarize information and quickly identify what's important in a body of text. Word clouds can be used in all subjects and with all grade levels to promote critical thinking, improve vocabulary, analyze texts, assess student writing, prompt student reflection, illustrate an event, classify objects or parts of speech, and more.

Edudemic provides a great list of *5 Ways to Use Word Clouds in The Classroom*. One popular activity, especially early in the school year, is for students to create a "Get to Know Me" word cloud that includes a list of words that students use to describe themselves.

Instead of printing student-created word clouds, consider importing the images to a Google Slideshow, student blog, or classroom website. If you must print, be sure to require that students use a plain white, rather than a

solid color background, to save on printer ink. My other tip is to encourage students to copy and paste their text, rather than type directly into the word cloud tool so that, in the event of an Internet glitch, their efforts are not lost.

One of the most popular word cloud websites, Wordle, was offline for a while. It's back now, but in the interim I discovered another tool that has some great features. **WordClouds.Com** is a free tool that has a lot of cool features, including the ability to choose different shapes, colors, and fonts. On the right is a word cloud I created based on the content of this newsletter.

One challenge with some word cloud tools is their dependence on Java or Shockwave plugins, which require frequent updating. That's one of many reasons to consider using the **Word Cloud Generator Add-on** for Google Docs. Once you and your students install the Word Cloud Generator, it can be easily accessed from the Add-ons menu in a Google Doc to generate a downloadable word cloud.

YouTube Resources for Promoting Empathy

Like virtually any topic you can think of, YouTube is an amazing resource for educational videos for teaching about empathy and other themes related to mental health and wellness. Here are a few videos to consider sharing with your students:

What is Empathy?
My Philosophy for a Happy Life by Sam Berns
**Empathy in the Digital Age**

Tips for Leveraging your YouTube Channel

Use Filters: YouTube provides sophisticated search tools that allow you to filter based on video length, view count, rating, and more. Click the filter tool to customize your search for educational videos.

Create your own playlist with Empathy (or any other topic) YouTube Videos:
- While logged into your ABSchools account (typically via Mail or Drive), navigate to your YouTube App through the apps finder grid, or open a new tab and go to YouTube.com
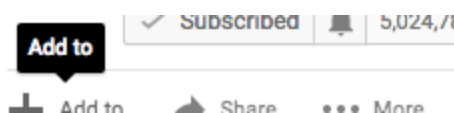
- Search a topic
- Click *Add To*
- Click *Create a new playlist.*
- Type a title and click *Create.* Playlists can help organize videos, and can be shared as an entire list, so that each video will automatically play in the order listed.

Watch YouTube videos without Comments, Ads, or other Distractions:
- Copy the URL of any video into **ViewPure**, a free website that allows you to share the videos with students without all the annoying and possibly inappropriate extraneous content.

Alternately (and just as easy), you can **insert any YouTube video into a Google Slideshow**. When you present the slideshow, the embedded video will play, completely outside of YouTube.
  - Create a Google Slideshow
  - Click *Insert* and choose *Video*
  - Search for a YouTube video here, OR paste the URL of a YouTube video
  - Click *Select*
  - Click *Present* to launch the slideshow
  - Click the *Play* button to start the video
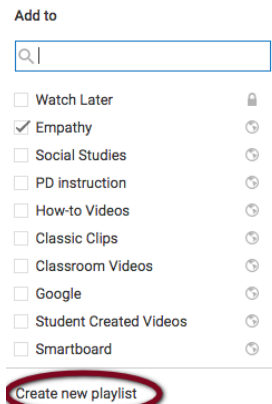
Happy viewing!

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