Sam: Welcome to the UP Tech Talk Podcast coming to you from the new Academic Multimedia Studio on the University of Portland campus, produced by Academic Technology Services, with your hosts Maria Erg and Sam Williams.

Thank you for joining us for the UP Tech Talk Podcast. Today, we have Peter Pappas, adjunct instructor with the School of Education. Thank you, Peter, for joining us.

Peter: Thank you. Glad to be here.

Maria: Peter, so glad to have you on the podcast. We just had a great conversation with you, just informally, but you managed to rattle off probably half a dozen Web 2.0 tools that you're using just like you were a fish swimming in water; it just seems so easy and natural for you. I'm just wondering, how do you go about choosing which tools you're going to use for these great projects that you're working on? What piques your interest?

Peter: I think it really begins with seeing yourself as a designer of a learning experience. You work with the tools you have and with the setting you have. You've got X number of students; you're meeting once a week; you've got three hours with them. You think about the instructional goals that you want to achieve, and then from there, you say, okay, so what kind of tools are out there. For example, there was a situation where I wanted them to collaborate and design some lessons. I wanted them to be able to share their work with one another and be able to comment on it. I also think it's important that there always be a public product, because I think we find our students producing content for their instructor as opposed to … which is kind of a ritualized thing as opposed to real-world content.

In this particular case, I said let's use Google documents, specifically the Google presentation tool, because we're going to be working with images; we're going to be working with text, with hyperlinks. We're each going to do a section of one common presentation. We can get in and comment on each other's presentation. When we're done, this is going to go out to the rest of the world, so my students are invested in doing it the right way. In that particular case, it's really about what's the instructional goal, what are the tools, what's the access, what's the learning curve for the students. In that particular case it was pretty low.

Maria: Right. When you're selecting a tool, do you just start Googling around and seeing what's out there? Or do you have some go-to sources that you look at first?

Peter: I'm a strong believer in learning networks and I have quite honestly gone out to Twitter where I have a lot of followers and contacts on Twitter. For example, there are some on Google and LinkedIn. I'm part of some groups that are focused on instructional technology. I've actually put that question out, which is to say this is what I'd like to do, what tools do you think will work? I get some feedback. I always want to try it out myself first. There is a process of practicing what you preach. If you're telling us to become lifelong learners, then you have to be willing to keep reaching out and trying for some new things.

Sam: You've definitely reached out and found some fun projects that you've been working on. There's an app. There is an iBook. We were just learning about some social media that you are using. Can you tell us a little bit about a couple of these projects, maybe a little bit about the app that you developed, maybe go into some book and [crosstalk 00:03:59].

Peter: Okay. Sure. Last fall, I was working … I should mention that I teach a social studies methods class in the School of Education. I happened to walk past a museum that's in my neighborhood down in Old Town called the Nikkei Center, which celebrates the Japanese-American experience in the US. I got chatting with somebody in there, and I said, "What if I could get you twelve curriculum consultants to work for free?" They said, "Great." I said, "Is there some stuff you could use?" They said, "Yeah."

I went back to my class. Remember, this is a social studies methods class and I want them to both think like historians and design learning experiences, so I told them, "Guess what? I just got you a gig as an unpaid consultant." Their first question to me was, "What are we supposed to do?" I said, "I don't know. You have to talk to the client." That's right at the heart of project-based learning, which is to say you are going to have to develop some skills and some competencies based on a final end product.

In that particular case, we went down and we spoke with them. The Nikkei Center said that they would love some material to go out to schools that teachers could use without a docent or an ed person going out. We developed and enhanced this thing called Museum in the Schools where we took these suitcases out with lots of artifacts and lessons. I had some other students that were looking at some of the online videos that they had and they curated them. We used SlideShare as a way of pushing them out to the public.

We also decided that we'd want a app walking tour of Old Town, which was at one point Japantown, though we tend to call it Chinatown, Old Town now. I reached out to the app community here in Portland, found a couple of developers that were willing to do the backend work for us, and we focused on curating the content, working with the curatorial staff at the museum, and we now have a free iPhone app called Japantown PDX.

Maria: Yeah. I was at the [inaudible 00:06:18] Conference when you gave that presentation about the app. I am amazed that you were able to find some developers to work on the project for free. How did you do that?

Peter: For quite awhile, I've been going to these Mobile Portland meetings, which are once a month, and I got to know some people there. Then I just went out and knocked on a lot of doors. I had a budget of nothing, so that sort of limited me. I eventually found a partner. What I would have loved to do but quite honestly I didn't have time would be partner with someone here at the university because I know you have students that are learning to make apps. I think the takeaway is to perhaps look for synergy where instead of you're just developing apps, say, in a computer technology class, that you're reaching out to some of the other schools and parts of the university to say, "Would you like to collaborate on the content side? We'll take care of the back end." That's something for your to-do list.

Maria: Oh, I would love to see that happen.

Sam: Then you just keep the innovation in the classroom moving forward, of course, with all your projects. Now, you've gone from the app to an iBook. You didn't want to do an app again. What was the big push for the iBook?

Peter: I've done eight iBooks, so it depends which one you're talking about. There's one called Japantown Revealed, which was kind of a follow-up to the app, because I thought there was some great content that really needed to be told in a narrative orientation because the app is location-based, it's all geo-located, so I wanted that to be narrative. There's a couple of other projects which I think are applicable. Both my class last fall and most recently this fall published iBooks which are now in the top … I can't call them top-selling because they're free, but they're among the most downloaded American history books on iTunes.

Essentially, what I did with both classes is we took the work that they were doing in terms of developing lessons around historic thinking and I gave them a workflow which we could get into if we wanted to. Basically, they each wrote a chapter of what became an iBook. One of the nice things about iBooks Author is that it's pretty much drag and drop. You can drop in a video; you can drop in text. You can whatever. My students did all the thinking, all the curating ahead of time. Quite honestly, we were in the lab in 125 for maybe three hours total, because all the work in terms of the research and the writing was all done ahead of that.

Sam: I put a note here that I wanted to bring up. It was this note I have here, that student-driven content for the world. You're opening up. This is not like they're putting it into a learning management system or turning it in as an assignment. You're having them be authors of content that you're just putting out there for anybody to consume, and as you noted, that people are downloading this content. How are people finding out about the content, though?

Peter: We use all sorts of social media. We have a class blog which is a WordPress site. My students are all authorized as authors, so they're there. One of the focuses of the class was using social media, so they all have Twitter accounts. It was sort of interesting, earlier in the course I mentioned in this podcast using the collaborative Google Document, and we were using a model of historic thinking developed by Sam Wineburg and the folks at the Stanford history education group. We very openly credited their method, but we also turned around on Twitter and we reached out to Sam and to SHEG and they Tweeted back at us and said, "You guys are doing great work." Then they pointed other people to our work. My students were kind of stunned that we not only did the work, but the people whose work we modeled ours after reached out to us. That was all done through social media.

Maria: Yeah. I'm curious. How are your students responding to this new way of being in your class? This has got to be maybe one of the only times they get to do this type of work in their preparation and school event.

Peter: It's interesting. One of the things I found, we did the first iBook last fall, the fall of '13, and I quite honestly think my students weren't really sure that we'd do it. It was one of those things the teacher says, oh, yeah, and we're going to do this project, but they didn't quite believe it. This year, of course, as I was kicking off that process here, I said, "By the way, here's last year's book on iTunes." The first thing that happened is my students went back and looked at last year's work and said, "We're going to make this better." It's not a matter of competition, but it's a matter of real-world standards. They realize that everything they write for me is done as a blog post. Everything they're writing, the entire world can see, and they're not only creating their own digital portfolio online, but they're having a chance to showcase it.

In terms of grading or quality, I don't need to worry about anything because none of these students really want to put out junky stuff, knowing that the whole world is watching. I think we sometimes, as Sam said earlier, we're writing inside this LMS; we're writing for the professor, for the teacher. It becomes ritualized. It's a bit pro forma here; how does that look? Great. I got my grade. Good, we're done. Let's move on. This really raises it to a whole different level.

Sam: You brought up that your students also hosted a Twitter chat.

Peter: Oh, right. Yeah.

Sam: I would just love the listeners to know a little bit about that, because it sounded like the students got pretty excited about this opportunity.

Peter: Twitter chats, if you don't know what they are, you've probably heard of hashtags. Periodically, what happens is various groups get together around a particular hashtag. There is a hashtag SS chat, which stands for social studies chat, which meets 4:00 pm Pacific time, Monday nights, which coincides with the beginning of my class. For one of my classes, I said let's tune in to Twitter chat, which basically means open up your laptops, your devices, and start following this particular hashtag.

My students did, and this excitement broke out because one of them says, "I just posted a question on I need resources for this Roman history unit and somebody wrote back to me." Somebody else got excited, and virtually the entire class was totally enthralled with this, and this comes on the heels of them asking me what's Twitter for anyway. They suddenly saw that it really works as a professional learning tool. As luck would have it, the Twitter chat organizers got so excited about the strong presence of my class that day that at the end of Twitter chat, they said, "Would you guys host this in the future?"

Three weeks later, my students did and they developed the agenda. They developed all the questions; they took some roles in terms of hosting it. We just had this whole network of computers in the room as we kicked this thing off. They had different roles. Some were greeters, some were posting questions, some were keeping people on focus. For the next hour, it just flew by as these students are interacting with people all over the country and certainly outside the country as well around … This was election eve of this past fall, and we were talking about how do you teach about elections and controversial subjects in the classroom. Again, all the questioning was all driven by what my students were interested in hearing answered. It was very exciting for them.

Maria: Nice. How about new projects for you? Anything on the horizon?

Peter: New projects. Good question. Right now, one of the things that I'd like to do … We just had our latest iBook come out, and I think my next immediate project is to take the chapter that each student did and roll it over into a blog post so that people that are interested in these specific subjects can find them. They did some fascinating topics. I've got some other ideas for some different iBooks. I've got some other workshops I'm doing in the area and a couple around the country, and I'll get geared up for next fall back with my social studies group.

Sam: I know we're getting to the end of our podcast here. Earlier, you mentioned that … Maybe this is a good place for us to bring it full circle. You said it isn't about the technology. All these projects are technology-based. Is there any words of wisdom around it's not about the technology that you could leave us at the end of this podcast?

Peter: Yeah. I would say the big question is what's the least amount of technology you could use to get the job done. Taking something and making it prettier by putting it on a white board when you could have written it up on the chalk board really doesn't get you anywhere. I think that the transformative part of technology is getting it in the hands of the students so that they can research and create and produce in ways you couldn't do without it. For me, those are the essential elements that I'm looking at, not simply just something that's a bright shiny object.

Sam: Those are great words of wisdom there. If people want to follow you more, just talk about Twitter, they can find you on Twitter with the handle Edteck, so Edteck with a K.

Peter: Yeah.

Sam: They can find you with your website peterpappas, and that's P-A-P-P-A-S.com.

Peter: Right.

Maria: We'll have those initial notes as well.

Peter: Great. It's been lots of fun, and this is quite a nice rig you have here for podcasting. I'm impressed.

Sam: Yes. We'll have you back. I'm sure we'll have you back because you're going to have all kinds of fun projects in the future here at the university.

Maria: Definitely.

Peter: That will be fun.

Sam: Yeah. Thank you.

Peter: Thank you.

Maria: Thank you, Peter.

Sam: Thank you for joining us for another episode of the UP Tech Talk Podcast. Just a reminder that we post a new podcast every Friday morning. You can find us at techtalk.up.edu.