

# RESOURCES

## An Online Tool To Boost Teacher Effectiveness

What happens when two teachers who are used to working together to create interdisciplinary units suddenly lose their shared planning time? Technology might hold the solution: Focus on Effectiveness, a new online resource, shows how a free, Web-based technology called “social bookmarking” can support collaboration and overcome the challenges of distance or scheduling.

Focus on Effectiveness ([www.netc.org/focus/](http://www.netc.org/focus/)) was developed by the Northwest Educational Technology Consortium (NETC) to boost student achievement by improving teachers’ access to educational research. At the same time, it demonstrates what effective technology integration looks like. The section on social bookmarking is one of the site’s 30 detailed examples of how teachers can use technology in all phases of their teaching in primary to high school classrooms. Each example is linked to additional content on technology and other resources to address key educational challenges.

Research on effective instruction is woven throughout Focus on Effectiveness with the goal of helping teachers fine-tune what they are already doing in the classroom. For example, nearly every teacher routinely asks questions, assigns homework, and provides students with feedback. But, researchers have found that teachers who apply those familiar strategies in particular ways are more effective in increasing achievement. Each example in Focus on Effectiveness demonstrates the use of a particular strategy for effective instruction, then links to additional information about the supporting research.

For instance, the example that includes social bookmarking shows how teachers are using it as a planning and collaboration tool, along with a summary of the research about thematic instruction, a practice that helps to make learning more meaningful. The example includes a description of Furl ([www.furl.net](http://www.furl.net)), the free online resource that allows users to create a personal archive of Web pages they have visited. The shared Web site fosters collaboration and helps teachers organize online resources into categories they consider important. What’s more, they can add comments or ratings about each resource, creating an annotated reference list to aid in project design. Focus on Effectiveness also suggests three online resources that allow users to set up their own social bookmarking accounts.

Focus on Effectiveness also demonstrates how both new and older technologies can be effectively integrated into classroom practice. One teacher uses a simple word processing feature—“track changes”—to help students summarize

key ideas in their reading. Another teacher uses text messaging with cell phones to prompt high school students to summarize their understanding of Shakespeare. Both stories illustrate how a teacher’s use of a research-based strategy—in this case, summarizing—can be combined with effective technology use to add up to improved learning for students.

Readers looking for resources to address specific challenges will also find some new ideas in Focus on Effectiveness. One example shows a teacher setting up a blog (or Web log) for his high school language arts students, many of whom are learning English as a second language. The example illustrates how the blog facilitates the research-based strategy of providing timely, useful feedback to support student learning.

High school math teacher Susan Pfohman gives Focus on Effectiveness high marks for its clear and concise information and useful examples. “The site was very easily negotiated,” she said in a review of the resource. “The examples could be useful to get ideas or follow directly, but the references are something I would look at frequently.” Another reviewer, Norrine Smokey-Smith, program administrator for Portland Public Schools Title VII program, says she would recommend the site to others. “It’s great that teachers have access to this information that might only be available at conferences on innovative strategies.” ■

Resource Annex