In this series of blog posts, Shaun Crowley offers ideas for integrating 21st Century Skills into your lessons. Shaun continues by offering two more ideas that utilize digital tools, starting with open source website software.

In Part 1 and Part 2 I looked specifically at critical thinking skills and how to give these more prominence in your general English lessons. In this post I have suggested an idea that focuses on a number of different competencies such as creativity, developing voice, collaboration, and specifically, digital literacy and learner independence.

Have your students create a website portfolio in English

These days we are surrounded by open source software that enables all of us to be creators of content, not just passive consumers. Being able to create a website in a CMS like Wordpress will surely be an important 21st Century Skill in the near future, if it isn’t already.

Designing a website in English will help students to develop useful IT skills and apply the English they learn in a meaningful way. What’s more, a website also acts as a professional portfolio of work that students can use to record their progress and show off their proficiency in English to the wider world.

Here is a one possible process for setting this up:

- In class, as an outcome to the standard functional English theme of introductions/greetings, have students write their personal “Home” and “About me” pages in English. (For example: Hi, my name is Juan. I am studying English in preparation for a career in medicine. My hobbies include...)
- Direct students to [http://wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com) so they can register a free Wordpress domain using their name (eg: JohnSmith.wordpress.com).
- Assign students the task of creating three pages: “Home” and “About” (static pages), and “Blog” (a post page). The Wordpress support pages offer guidance on how to do this.
- On the “Home” and “About” pages, students should publish the introductions they wrote in class.
- Keep a record of your students’ website URLs and encourage students to share them with the class so they can access each other’s websites.
- Now every time you assign a written homework task, instruct students to publish it on their blog pages. If you request email updates for each of your students’ sites, you’ll be notified whenever a student publishes something. Then you can read the post and write a comment with feedback on students’ use of English.
- Encourage students to read, like, and write comments to each other’s blogs.
- As students start to feel more comfortable with the Wordpress tools, they will be able to make their pages look more professional. They may want to add photos to their static pages, create menu links so the pages are navigable, and integrate features such as testimonials and galleries – all of which can be done with a little exploration. Your students’ websites could become nice additions to their CVs.

The key to this task is to give students the freedom to jump in and work out Wordpress for themselves. Your role remains as an English teacher, to help students articulate themselves in
English. When it comes to the technology, you are merely a facilitator, pointing your students in the right direction and then letting go of the reigns.

But if your students need more support – or if you have too many students to manage individual website feedback – you could have students work in small teams to create joint websites, or create a class website that everyone contributes to.

A step further…

As students start to take pride over their online portfolios, you could have them work in teams to create video posts instead of written posts:

- Use phones to capture footage
- Use open source editing software to turn the footage into edited videos (for example, by downloading the 30-day trial of Camtasia Studio).
- Load the video onto YouTube...
- ... And copy the YouTube embed code into the blog

Having students work together to create videos provides a practical and motivating way to practise speaking skills outside class, whilst incorporating many 21st Century skills such as creativity and collaboration.

You could even combine these tasks with the question-centred approach (suggested in Part 2), by having teams work as journalists to evaluate the big question you have explored in class.

Do you assign project work using Wordpress or YouTube? Have you used any other open source digital tools to complement your language teaching?