

How about HTML?

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In an age when the Internet makes more of an impact on our lives, we should help students integrate the creation of web pages into their educational repertoire.

If you ever want to see what type of impact information technology has on our society, simply spend a couple of hours inside your school's computer lab. Passing notes to fellow classmates is almost a thing of the past, while net chats via *MSN Messenger* seem to be the way to go. Decorating lockers may no longer hold the same appeal as changing the background image of one's computer desktop profile. Times-they-are-a-changin'!

Although I may find that these types of activities present added challenges in the classroom, by no means will I complain about this young net-savvy generation. By becoming proficient with these tools of communication, they are learning to use technology to the best of their abilities. In this day and age, we are no longer limited to paper and pen when expressing ourselves.

One of the most pleasant surprises I remember encountering in this my first year of teaching, occurred in my grade 10 Computer Science class. Through one of our introductory activities, students were given the option to choose how they wanted to present their group's conclusions. Many of the students approached me and requested to do a PowerPoint presentation. Not only was I more than happy to oblige, I was intrigued at how many students had mastered the use of *PowerPoint*. I also noticed that the students at Crawford not only used this software for their technology courses, but for other classes as well, such as Physical Education and English. They had learned to use this tool to present both learned concepts, and researched information. Then, something dawned on me... why not use *HyperText Markup Language (HTML)*?

A number of senior students in Computer Science courses approached me about the possibility of learning HTML as part of the curriculum. Most of them were hoping to learn how to improve their own personal web pages on which they had been working. Still many other students are unaware of how to create and design web documents. Ironically enough, practically all of them surf the net frequently and know how to navigate easily between different sites. Why not use the opportunity to help them use the Internet, not only for research and gaining information, but also to post and display their personal contributions?

Creating a web-document is easy. The semantics of the Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) are simple. Providing students with a rudimentary knowledge of web pages would be extremely beneficial. As they experiment with the tools available, they can create documents to be as simplistic or intricate as they'd like. This will give students knowledge in yet another critical form of communication to use in their endeavours.

There are courses that are specifically focused on web page design and programming, but these types of courses are not always offered at many schools. I personally am trying to make a concerted effort to include HTML in the curriculum of my computer science courses, to give students an introductory look into the nature of the language, in hopes of promoting greater awareness as to the possibilities the tool

provides. I would also like to stress that by no means do I feel that this should be limited to subjects centered on information technology. Web pages are excellent tools for communication, which can be put in the same category as essays, posters, *PowerPoint* presentations, or any other form of presentation teachers use to evaluate the communication skills of students.

The Internet already demonstrates how HTML documents can be applied to any subject matter. Students have learned to use search engines to find information on an infinite number of topics, all contained on web pages. By introducing students to these documents we could be giving an opportunity to make better use of a resource that will no doubt continue to make a bigger impact in the world we know. If we as teachers could encourage students to simply consider using web pages as a medium in a course not directly related to the study of technology, they could be encouraged to think 'outside of the box'; and apply their knowledge in many different directions.

We as teachers should consider taking the first step. I encourage you, the next course you design, to consider reserving one section of a unit to the creation of web pages, and have your students display their knowledge of one of the concepts using an HTML document. Help expand their horizons!