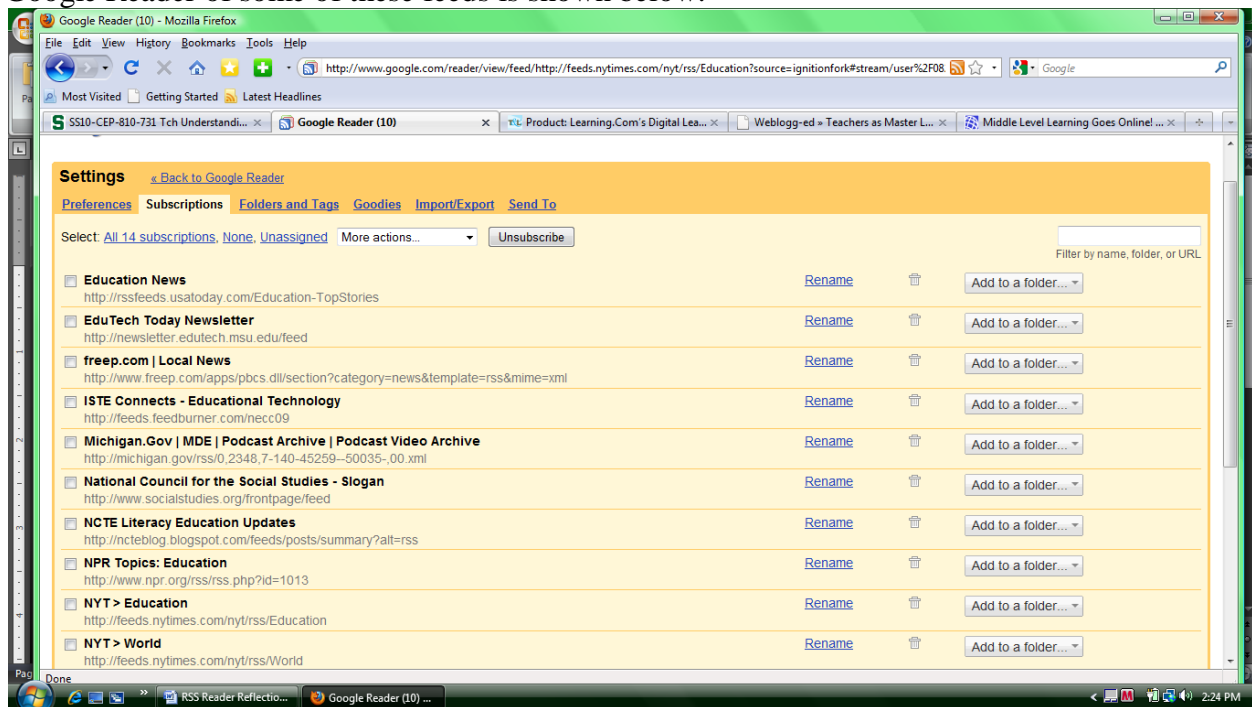


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Maintaining and RSS Reader Page

Throughout the course of this class, I have created two Reader pages in an attempt to find an RSS Reader page that works the best for me. I did so in attempt to ensure that I continue to use my RSS reader page beyond the scope of this course. Therefore, I created an RSS Reader page with Netvibes and another with Google Reader. In this paper, I will reflect on my experiences with both reader pages and compare the two.

On both reader pages, I kept track of the same thirteen websites including the Education feeds from USA Today, NPR, and the New York Times. I also kept track of news feeds from local area news sources including the Detroit Free Press, Channel 7 News, and WHMI. I chose to add the news feed for WHMI because it is a radio station that actively reports on Livingston County, where my fiancé is a local officer. We have been discussing moving out to Livingston County, so I have been using the reader pages to keep up to date on the news in the area to help in our decision making. I have also added feeds from the Edutech website at MSU, the State of Michigan's Department of Education website, and the National Council for Social Studies website. Finally, I have also included feeds from the www.techlearning.com and <http://weblog-ed.com>, two of the websites I have been following blogs on. A screen shot from Google Reader of some of these feeds is shown below.



I have learned quite a bit from following the feeds on my RSS reader pages. For example, I read an interesting article from my USA Today feed on the increase in the number of schools requiring students to take Personal Finance courses. Since I teach Personal Finance to our seniors as a requirement for graduation, I could directly relate to the article. I also gave me ideas for better ways to explain to students why they are being required to take the course. It was also nice to know that other districts across the country are requiring the course. I hope that means there will be an increase in resources and ideas for teaching the class in the future as a result.

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I also responded to two blogs I have been following through my RSS reader pages. My first response was to a blog on <http://www.techlearning.com> that talked about teachers who inadvertently teach students how to cheat through search engines. No teacher intends to teach students such things, but the article made the point that we need to pay attention to how we explain search engines and how we design lessons that deal with web searches. As the blog author and the responders pointed out, if the question can be answered or the answers found by simply typing a few words into a search engine, the question was not a good one. I added to the blog by explaining how sometimes if all we are looking to do is introduce our students to the content, it is always an option to print the material and have them sort through the information outside of the computer lab. I shared an example of how I printed off the material from a murder mystery webquest because the webquest included a link to the answers. By controlling the information that my students had access to, I could achieve the same outcome without the worry that they would simply cheat and use the answer key.

The second blog that I responded to was on <http://weblogg-ed.com> by Will Richardson titled "2020 Vision?". I responded to a blog about his reflections on how, if at all, education will have changed by 2020. Most commentors expressed the idea that they agreed that change in the education system has always tended to be slow. I commented, having reflected on my own situation this year, that the increased requirements for new teachers to continue their post-secondary education would be a catalyst for change.

I have learned a lot from this project. Not only have I learned how to create an RSS reader page, I have also taught others, including my own family, fiance, and colleagues at school, how to create their own. I have enjoyed having one place to go to see updates on news and education, without having to go to each website individually. I definitely like the view that Netvibes uses. I feel it is more user friendly and organized in terms of the way you can view each feed and change around the order in which they appear. Visually, Netvibes appeals to me. However, in terms of adding content, I found it easier to add RSS feeds to my Google reader page. Both Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox automatically take me to Google Reader when I click the RSS symbols. Of course, a few steps more though I can easily add the content to my Netvibes page. The one thing that tipped the scale for me between the two RSS readers was that on Google I could also easily access my Google email account and the Google Docs account set up for our group project. I also had difficulty trying to easily share information on my Netvibes page. Google Reader seems to make that task much easier. For all those reasons, I will be sharing my Google Reader page instead of my Netvibes page. It is located at <http://www.google.com/reader/shared/mcdon159>.

I have really enjoyed using the RSS feeds to stay up to date on important news around the world. As a Social Studies teacher in an Alternative Education school, staying up-to-date on current events is essential. Without me directly teaching my students about events like the Haiti earthquake, they would never know what was happening around the world because very few watch the news, listen to the radio, or view news websites online. I have now made viewing my RSS reader page part of my morning routine and I feel that it is an excellent way to start my day. It helps me brainstorm in the morning for discussion ideas for class.

Finally, I can only think of one drawback of my RSS reader. Over my school's mid-winter break, I was not able to check my reader page(s) for a few days since I was travelling out of state. When I finally logged on to my reader pages, I nearly fell over in my chair when I saw the number of feeds I had to sort through. If you do not keep up with your reader page regularly,

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it can feel like a daunting task to catch up on. Of course, the feeds are not going anywhere and you can easily go through them when you have extra time.

Below is another view of my RSS feeds on Google Reader.

