

# NEWSLETTER

NSW Computer Education Group

Term 3, 2008

## From the President's Laptop

Hi! All, What's happening?

Good question, let's start with Federal Government Policy on Education.

Just to make you aware that the DER is changing. Possibly from the Third Round, the wording is changing to something like "students to have access to technology". The 1:1 ratio will not be continued. The arguments for this are that most students have technology in their hands (mobiles, ipods etc). There seems to be a lot of thinking of around the notion of ready access to technology. There may also be a realisation that teachers need to have access to the same level of technology as students. Food for thought!

The NSW Board of Studies is consulting with us in regard to changes to HSC assessment for the Computing courses in conjunction with CSTA. If you have any feedback that you would like to give, please email me as soon as possible.

ACEC 08 is being held from 29 September – 2 October 2008, National Convention Centre, Canberra. There seems to be a variety of great keynotes. My interest is in Scratch and looking forward to finding out more.

NSWCEG Training Opportunities:  
Wireless training is continuing in the state and being held on 20<sup>th</sup> September at Penrith Panthers.

A Moodle course is being put together and is to be held on the 11<sup>th</sup> October at Homebush Boys. Limit of 20 participants. Course is for beginners and up. More details to come.

Software: Finn Cragg has offered NSWCEG members a discount on their Caravan and Emu animation software. Contact me for further details. Information was placed on the list.

Tah! Cathie Webber  
President NSWCEG  
September 2008

## Australian Computers in Education Conference 2008 (ACEC'08)

National Convention Centre, Canberra, ACT 29 September - 2 October 2008

### Conference Program

We are delighted to announce that the conference program is virtually 100% full - in excess of 170 presentations, workshops and poster sessions. You can browse all the presentations (including when they are scheduled) within the 'Conference Papers' area of the website.

### Presentation Spotlight

Our program comprises a diverse range of presentations and workshops.

Here are just a few to whet your appetite:

- Learning Materials to Fuel Your Education Revolution
- Aligning Pedagogy with Technology
- Web 2.0. Enriching Classrooms for Schools of Tomorrow
- Busy as a Bee!: Keeping young learners engaged with an integrated constructivist approach utilising technology
- The Best Things in Life are Free!
- Land Yachts: Building active online collaboration
- Designing and Knitting the Jumper: How to Transform Learning in Schools
- Interactive Whiteboards for School Leaders
- Lifestyle Computing - Web 2.0 is not a thing, it's a state of mind!
- Farmyard Hullabaloo: A Differentiated Approach Embedding an Interactive Whiteboard and Inclusive Software

### Preconference Workshops

There are 10 pre-conference half and full-day workshops being held on Monday 29 September. An opportunity to learn in depth from leaders in their field. Registration is \$35 for half day and \$55 for full day and includes free bus transport to and from the venues plus morning/afternoon tea. Full details on the conference website - places are filling fast.

### Gold Sponsor

We are pleased to announce Atomic Learning is supporting ACEC'08 as a Gold Sponsor. Atomic Learning offer a range of services to teachers including ICTPD - Online PD for teachers - <http://ictpd.net> and Atomic Learning Tutorials - <http://atomiclearning.co.uk>. We thank them for their support. Visit the conference website for a full list of sponsors.

### Trade Display

The Trade Display is almost 100% full comprising the following organisations: Academy of Interactive Entertainment, Adobe, Australian Information Industry Association, ASI Solutions, Atomic Learning, Australian Computer Society, AV Media Systems, Canberra Pro Equipment, Charles Sturt Uni/IT Masters, Clickview, Concord Australia, Corel, Cyberschool, Dalmau Designs, Data Discovery, Dataworks, DEEWR, DHTechnology, EBSCO Publishing, Editure, EdNA, Edsoft, Educational Experience, Educational Technology Solutions, Edukite, Electroboard, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Etech/Studywiz, EyePower Games, Heulab, ICDL/EXIN, Ideal Resources, Lan 1, LEGO Education, Mac 1, Modern Teaching Aids, Moore Educational, NComputing, Natcoll Publishing, Nuance Communications, Oracle, Panasonic, PCLocs, Red Apple Education, Sanyo, Scholastic, Spectronics, Sunshine Multimedia, Third Force, 2Simple Software, University of Canberra, WACOM, Yellow Edge

Where to get further Conference Information

- from the website - [www.acec2008.info](http://www.acec2008.info)
- from the Registration Brochure downloadable from the website
- from the Conference Secretariat by email - [enquiries@acec2008.info](mailto:enquiries@acec2008.info)

# Teachers: Give us better tech training, support

New report reveals continued barriers to using technology for classroom instruction

From eSchool News staff and wire service reports

***Educators say they do not feel fully prepared to use technology in the classroom.***

## ***Teachers: Give us better tech training, support***

After more than decade of investment in school technology, educators say they still don't feel adequately prepared to integrate instructional software into their classrooms and aren't getting the technical support they need to fully impact student achievement, according to a joint study by the nation's two largest teacher unions.

Released June 10 by the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the study--called Access, Adequacy, and Equity in Education Technology--examines the state of educational technology resources and support in public schools across the country, as reported by classroom teachers and instructional assistants.

Although they often have access to computers and the internet in their classrooms, many teachers don't feel adequately prepared to use technology to enhance their lessons, the report suggests. What's more, many teachers in urban schools say they have insufficient or outdated equipment and software.

***"Teachers and students should have the same level of technology in schools that is being used outside of schools. How can we expect our teachers to provide kids with the education they need to join today's high-tech workforce without the necessary equipment and training?"***

asked NEA President Reg Weaver.

The report shows that most educators use technology for administrative tasks, but substantially fewer use it for instruction. Although most educators believe that technology is essential to teaching and learning, they are less likely to use technology when the technology is outdated and has not been maintained. Educators also say they would like better support and technical assistance for using both software and hardware, especially in

urban schools.

***"When you see the overall condition of many of our schools and the support they receive, it is really not surprising that so many schools are lagging in technology,"***

said AFT President Edward J. McElroy.

***"This is just one more indicator that policy makers need to set a much higher value on supporting our public schools and our students."***

More than half of the educators surveyed said they had no more than two computers available for students' use in their classroom--and fewer than half mentioned their classroom as the main location where students work on computers for class assignments.

Elementary-level teachers have more computers inside their classroom for student use, but they are less likely to be satisfied with the software for their students and are less likely to have high-speed internet access in their classroom, according to the study.

Although three out of five educators said their districts require them to take part in technology training, respondents indicated their training has been more effective for non-instructional tasks, such as how to use the internet for research and how to use administrative software. Only 46 percent of educators believe they were adequately trained to integrate technology into their instruction.

Most teachers say their own access to technology at school is sufficient to

do their job, but they reported getting little help with access to technology outside of school. Fewer than a third of those surveyed said their district has provided them with a laptop for planning and instructional purposes inside and outside of school, and only one-fifth said their district offered assistance for them to buy a computer for use at home (such as through low-interest loans, grants, or discounts).

So why should this be any different when it comes to technology integration? Some people are waiting for technology integration to fall out of the sky. I don't think it will happen. Share your ideas and expertise, it can make all the difference in the world to someone who feels isolated and without support. When one of us succeeds in education, we need to pass on the wealth. Sharing ideas can turn that one person in a positive direction that may not have been successful.



## NSWCEG

New South Wales Computer Education Group

### Look for more PD courses in Term IV

- \* Moodle
- \* Web 2.0 Tools
- \* Google Apps for Educators
- \* Wireless Networking

Keep an eye on the website

## FaceBook Users

If you are not a FaceBook user, then go to: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

Sign up and then go to groups and join the NSWCEG group and I suggest you join the ISTE group.

Join us in exploring this application as a communication and Professional Development tool.

# Collaborative Writing

By Julia K. VanderMolen  
from Educators' eZine

According to *Wikipedia*, the term collaborative writing refers to projects where written works are created by multiple people together (collaboratively) rather than individually. Some projects are overseen by an editor or editorial team, but many grow without any top-down oversight (*Wikipedia*, 2007). As educators, we are emerged into a world where collaboration is a way of the classroom. We are in a world where mobile technology and text messaging has become the norm for the average teenager and though plenty of adults grumble about e-mail and instant-messaging (IM); the text messages that send teens thumbs dancing across cell phone keypads have experts insisting that teenage composition is as strong as ever (McCarroll, 2005). The explosion of writing, in its hasty forms, has actually created a generation more skillful with the written word. How can teachers can utilize this skill and learn the skill themselves? The following is a list of tools to try in the classroom to get student to use online Web 2.0 tools to collaborate, express and write.

## What is Out There?

### Document Collaboration

Web-based collaborative writing tools provide flexibility and usefulness in learning groups and educational settings. They offer a simple means to generate text exercises, research reports and writing assignments in a collaborative mode. Collaborative writing tools can vary a and can range from the simplicity of wiki system to more advanced systems (Good, 2007). Many web-based collaboration writing tools have the similar features. Features can include the typical formatting and editing facilities of a standard word processor with the addition of live chat, live markup and annotation, co-editing, and version tracking. Web-based collaborative writing tools can be used by teacher to provide feedback on student assignments, to

make suggestions and comments on a projects and highlighting required changes to a member of the project.

### Google Docs

*Google Doc*, formerly *Writely*, is probably the most popular of documentation collaboration tools. *Google Docs* allows a user to create basic documents for collaboration. Students can work on outlining concepts by adding bullet lists, images, figures and change font to emphasize concept points.

To begin using *Google Doc*, a student or teacher will need to have an email account and sign up with *Google*. Once a student logs in he or she can begin to use *Google Docs*. Simply log into docs.google.com and click on the Get started button to create a user account.

*Google Docs & Spreadsheets* is similar in format to *Microsoft Word 97-2003* and *Microsoft Excel 97-2003*. There is a basic toolbar containing the standard tools for editing documents: undo, redo, cut, copy and paste. The toolbar also contains the basic styles and alignments: bold, italic, underline, left alignment, center alignment, and right alignment.

To begin have students click on "New Document" or "New Spreadsheet". Note that students can upload files already created by clicking on the "Upload" link. Figure 2 illustrates the "Upload" link for a student to add documents from his or her computer.

Students can click on the tabs within *Google Docs* to insert image, links, comments, tables, a bookmark, a separator, and special characters, make edits, and check on the number of revisions to a document. One of the most important features to remember in any document a student creates is to save the document.

It is important to note that the first time students save a document that they know what formats are

available. *Google Docs* allows work to be saved in the following formats: HTML, RTF, Word, OpenOffice, PDF, and Text.

*Google Docs* can be used from Web browser and there is no need to install any software to a student's or teachers desktop. Students can access their work from anywhere which makes it easier to work on their. Finally the best feature is that *Google Docs* is a free service.

### Zoho Writer

*Zoho Writer* is an online word processor that allows a student or teacher to write, share, and collaborate on projects. What makes *Zoho* a collaboration tool to use in the classroom? Some of the basic features to the program are: the ability to post documents to a blog, export and import documents in a variety of file formats. Format such as Word (DOC), SXW, Portable Document File (PDF), ODT, Rich Text File (RTF), TXT and HTML; access, edit, and share (by email address) documents online from anywhere with whomever you choose and lock documents while working in shared mode.

To access *Zoho's* many tools, simply key in the following URL into your address bar of your web browser: writer.zoho.com and Sign Up as aNew User. Signing up with *Zoho* is free.

*Zoho* has a number of other products that a student and teacher can explore and use to collaborate. If curiosity strikes try *Zoho Sheet-sheet.zoho.com*, *Zoho Chat-chat.zoho.com*, *Zoho Show-show.zoho.com*, *Zoho Wiki-wiki.zoho.com* and *Zoho Planner-planner.zoho.com*. Finally, another great feature of *Zoho* is the template library. This feature can help teachers with classroom management as it has temples for quizzes, newsletters, resumes, and more.

### WriteBoard

*Writeboard* is a collaborative writing tool that students can use to use as a way of working together and providing evidence of their collaborative writing process. The tool provides students with a place to "write without fear of losing or



overwriting a good idea” (Fried, 2007)

Simply log into [www.writeboard.com](http://www.writeboard.com) and key in the title of the name of the writeboard, assign a password and an e-mail address.

Students begin by creating a name for their *Writeboard*, then assign a password and add their email address. Be sure to have students click on the “I agree to the terms” and click on “Create the Writeboard”. One of the disadvantages of using Writeboard is that student do not get a “What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) editor for formatting. It does not contain any toolbars like *Google Docs* and *Zoho*. Instead, *Writeboard* provides a simple text area that allows a student to simple text formatting by their set formatting codes. For example, *\_this text\_* would be italic because of the underdashes before and after the text. Figure 10 shows the basic layout for a student to compose his or her work for collaboration. You will find it easy and fairly intuitive to use.

### ThinkFree

The final writing collaboration tool is *ThinkFree*. The Web 2.0 tool uses both asynchronous javascript and XML or better known as AJAX and Java technology. In short *ThinkFree* is Office without the Microsoft. It is a collection of free online applications that support and contain most features found in *Word*, *PowerPoint*, and *Excel*. *ThinkFree* provides a user with up to 1GB of online storage and more importantly they offer online collaboration so students and teachers can edit files at anytime on his or her own computer.

The first step to using *ThinkFree* Online is to log in to the site at [www.thinkfree.com](http://www.thinkfree.com) and click on the Sign Up button to create an account.

*ThinkFree* has three major components. The blue icon is for *ThinkFree Write*, the green icon is for *ThinkFree Calc*, and the orange is for *ThinkFree Show*.

Once a student click on the *ThinkFree Write* icon, the application requests a file name and the option to use a *Quick Edit* or *Power Edit mode*. After a student or a group of students have finished a collaborative writing

assignment, it is important for them to save the document. In addition to saving files in a number of formats, student can also upload document from variety file formats such as MS Office. So if a student does not have access to the Internet they can use MS Word to edit.

The developers of *ThinkFree Online* indicate that it will be free as it is supported by banner ads, contextual ads based on what’s in your document (similar to *Google’s Gmail* ad strategy), and search ads. *ThinkFree* developers also hope to entice users into upgrading to premium services like additional storage and ad-free operation for a fee. Finally, *ThinkFree* offers a section titled “Are you curious how others make use of *ThinkFree* online?”. This section provides examples of how other teachers are using *ThinkFree* in the classroom.

### Conclusion

In short, online, web-based collaborative writing tools such as *GoogleDoc*, *Writeboard*, *ZohoWriter*, and *ThinkFree* offer flexibility and usefulness in an educational setting by providing an easy way for students to generate text for reports and other writing assignments.

### References

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## Wireless Laptops Motivate Students

Notebook PCs increase student motivation while encouraging technology skills, according to a recent report.

Students are self-directed and get highly personalized instruction with their own computers and Internet access, according to The Center for Research in Education Policy at the University of Memphis, which released results of a report on the subject at the National Educational Computing Conference.

The report is backed by HP and based on observations of Michigan’s Freedom to Learn program in 2004 and 2005. It also reflects surveys of teachers, students, and administrators.

About 23,000 students and 1,500 teachers in 100 Michigan school districts are participating in the program. Students get their own wireless HP notebook PCs and are allowed to learn at their own pace. Teachers, meanwhile, receive comprehensive training and curriculum guidance through a centralized learning portal. HP technology hosts the statewide portal, which runs on a Microsoft Class Server.

A survey of 279 teachers from 77 schools showed increased confidence in integrating the PCs into lessons, aligning notebook use with curriculum standards and greater overall computer skills. More than 90 percent of teachers designated as “leaders” said the program improved student proficiency and comfort, and more than 85 percent said it increased student motivation. More than 90 percent of teachers who participated in professional development reported that the program increased student motivation and student-teacher interaction.

Of the 4,245 students (mostly sixth graders) who completed the survey, more than 60 percent said the notebooks increased their interest in learning. More than 87 percent said they want the computers next year, and nearly 60 percent said notebooks make schoolwork easier.

Achievement data and parent perceptions are currently under analysis. Previous results, from the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, demonstrated improvements in math and reading scores.