

Survey reveals educators' must-have technologies

Responses feature emphasis on interactive whiteboards and free digital media

By Laura Devaney, Managing Editor

21st Century Education, Mobile and Handheld Technologies, Research, Technologies, Top News



Interactive whiteboards are the classroom technology that teachers say they most value, and though tablet-style eReader devices such as Apple's iPad haven't been around for long, they're already considered the second most useful mobile classroom technology behind laptops, according to a national survey of teachers' digital media use.

Educators are incorporating more internet-dependent technologies into their instruction, the survey also reveals—but [shrinking school budgets](#) ^[2] are prompting many educators to look for free resources.

"[Deepening Commitment: Teachers Increasingly Rely on Media and Technology](#) ^[3]," a national research report on teacher's media usage from [PBS](#) ^[4] and [Grunwald Associates LLC](#) ^[5], found that more than half of K-12 teachers surveyed reported continued cuts to school media budgets, which has led to increased reliance on free instructional content.

Teachers also reported spending 60 percent of their time using educational resources in the classroom that are either free or paid for by the teachers themselves. More than half of K-12 teachers (62 percent) say they frequently use digital media in classroom instruction. Forty-six percent of teachers cited cost as the main barrier to using fee-based digital resources, and 33 percent cited time constraints.

Declining school budgets have contributed to the number of teachers who either find free resources (35 percent) or purchase resources with their own money (25 percent). More than half of teachers (54 percent) said their school budgets have decreased over the past year.

"In many ways, nothing was completely shocking—it's an ongoing progression," said Rob Lippincott, senior vice president for PBS Education. "Digital media is a core learning support; it's a core part of a teacher's job."

Teachers are using digital tools more than ever, but "they're under the constraint of fewer resources and support from districts," he added, noting one interesting finding indicating that teachers are using more of their own money and time to find effective digital resources.

Mobile technology

When asked to rank mobile technologies with the greatest educational potential, teachers rated different technologies on a 10-point scale. Eighty-one percent of teachers rated laptops as an 8 or above, followed by 53 percent who gave tablets or electronic readers a score of 8, 9, or 10. Cell phones appeared at the bottom of the list, at 11 percent.

"As much as teachers perceive the educational value of digital resources and recognize some potential in smart, mobile devices, students' ability to use these devices at school is severely limited," the report notes. Most personal mobile technology is off-limits and must be turned off during school.

"Simply put, when teachers are asked about cell phones, right now there's a bit of a mixed reaction, at least in the U.S., because cell phones are seen by some as a potential cause of disruption as much as a tool for instruction," said Peter Grunwald, founder and president of Grunwald Associates, a market research and consulting firm. "We think that's going to change, and probably fairly quickly."

Grunwald likened the hesitation to the early years of the internet's first forays into classrooms, when it was initially met with concerns about student safety. While some of those concerns remain, it is on a smaller scale, and most educators recognize that the internet has "striking educational potential," he said.

Interactive whiteboards

Teachers reported that interactive whiteboards are the most valuable digital resource in the classroom.

Sixty-eight percent of K-12 teachers said they value interactive whiteboards, 67 percent said they value online images, 63 percent value online video content, and 62 percent said they value web-based interactive games or activities.

“Not surprisingly, use of interactive whiteboards seems to be tied to classroom availability,” the report notes. Forty percent of K-12 teachers reported using interactive whiteboards to supplement or support teaching, with 59 percent saying the technology is available in their school and 36 percent saying it is available in their classroom.

The technology also appears at the top of teachers’ “must-have” list—17 percent of all teachers report that interactive whiteboards are a resource they do not have but want.

“In some ways, part of the appeal of whiteboards is that teachers can understand pretty quickly the potential value there,” Grunwald said. “[The devices] can help do some of the same things they’re already doing, but also at the same time, with the right kind of training, allow them to do some things they aren’t doing.”

Educators are probably more comfortable using interactive whiteboard technology, and the technology offers “a way to keep a pretty strong hand on the flow of activity in the classroom,” he added.

Ninety-three percent of teachers who use interactive whiteboards say the technology helps them be more effective, 83 percent say it increases student motivation, 78 percent say it stimulates student discussions, 75 percent says it stimulates student creativity, and 70 percent say it is directly related to student achievement.

“The popularity of interactive whiteboards could be another indication of the internet’s importance as a platform for technology-based instruction, since whiteboards can be a vehicle to access online instructional and professional development resources,” the report says.

Video in classrooms

Seventy-six percent of responding teachers said they stream or download TV and video content, up from 55 percent in 2007’s survey. Teacher access to video content is changing, and 24 percent of teachers access content stored on a local server, while only 11 percent reported doing so in 2007. Twenty-nine percent said they use short video segments (three to five minutes in length) during class time.

Eighty-two percent of teachers said video is more effective in the classroom when integrated with other instructional resources or content. Two-thirds of teachers (67 percent) believe digital resources help them differentiate learning for individual students, and 68 percent believe TV and video content stimulates classroom discussion.

Three in four teachers (76 percent) stream or download TV and video content, up from 55 percent in 2007. These teachers are also accessing video content in completely new ways, with 24 percent reporting that they access content stored on a local server, up from 11 percent in 2007. Their use of short video segments of three to five minutes in length increased this year, with 29 percent reporting this is the average length of video segments used.

Article printed from eSchoolNews.com: <http://www.eschoolnews.com>

URL to article: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2011/02/02/survey-reveals-educators-must-have-technologies/>

URLs in this post:

[1] Image: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/LaptopShutterstock.jpg>

[2] shrinking school budgets:

http://www.eschoolnews.com/?p=44327/?utm_source=website&utm_medium=shorturl&utm_campaign=keywordlink3

[3] Deepening Commitment: Teachers Increasingly Rely on Media and Technology:

http://www.pbs.org/about/media/about/cms_page_media/182/PBS-Grunwald-2011e.pdf

[4] PBS: <http://www.pbs.org/>

[5] Grunwald Associates LLC: <http://grunwald.com/>

The computer ate my teacher! Technology and the new face of today's classroom

By Pete Cassidy October 22nd, 2010

[Best Practices News,Featured Best Practice,The Many Faces of Blended Learning,Using Multimedia to Increase Student Engagement,Viewpoint](#)



[1]

I recently worked with a sixth grade teacher in Arlington, Texas, who was piloting a virtual science club program with her in-class students. Ms. Mueller was delighted that her students eagerly engaged with other students about their online science experiments through chat boards and discussion threads.

The explosion of technology and social media has made it second nature for students of all ages to stay connected at all times. Grammar and high school students now live in a world of instant gratification and customization in their personal lives, and they're also demanding that new technologies be integrated into their classroom experiences. With this shift in mentality, many education institutions are being challenged to expand their online learning portfolio by integrating social media or leveraging digital resources. But what impact do these high-tech tools have on learning? More importantly, as the ubiquity of technology grows, will it eventually replace teachers as we know them?

As school administrators, teachers, and parents start to turn to computers and mobile devices as tools for educating young minds, the potential to help re-focus children's basic educational needs is endless. We can now start teaching the way kids are already learning—and the way they want to learn. We know it is inevitable that we must update our approach to teaching, and that maybe, just maybe, this "technology thing" has a constructive application in learning.

As the notion of eLearning becomes more popular and more widely accepted, we need to ask ourselves: "What is the next generation of eLearning?" In fact, a recent study on online education, conducted by SRI International for the U.S. Department of Education, reported that "students in online learning conditions performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction." The web is in a place today, right now, where the popular academic goals of collaboration and immediacy have become relatively simple to achieve. I believe that there's a challenge here for those of us in education to keep our eyes on this fast moving target and keep up with the times.

What, therefore, does this further say about the current state of education? And how do we quickly catch up on the inevitable evolution of teaching and [blended learning](#) ^[2]? I would argue that the type of immediacy now available in live classroom settings can also be created by a combination of high-tech communication tools that are used today by major corporations, financial institutions, and businesses tools like Yammer, Google Apps, Facebook plug-ins, and Twitter. Moreover, these tools create an immediacy that doesn't necessarily need to be found through the traditional "synchronous" (or real-time) channels that current online educators recognize (i.e. chats, whiteboards and instant messaging).

Immediacy can be achieved with simple webmail applications that can show teachers which students are online or offline. Or, if you need a quick synchronous fix, Twitter's popular 140-character snippets allow groups of students, instructors, friends, or peers to build, respond, and add to a conversation. In addition, image and link sharing sites and creative video presentations allow learners to make fun "on-the-fly" discoveries in the classroom.

I recently shared a cutting-edge presentation software called Prezi with a group of students in a college writing course. I watched them transform their prewriting experiences with an interactive zoom-focus bubbling technique that allowed them to see the relationship between major topics and supporting ideas. The thoughtful level of outlines created out of that experience indicated to me that the addition of new technologies to the classroom (virtual or brick-based) with a clear purpose can make a huge difference.

To shift directions a bit, and with that all in mind, I'd like to also look at the content of eLearning. With a high-speed connection, a keyboard, and a mouse, it's incredibly easy to find information about, gather

instruction on, watch videos pertaining to, and join discussions dissecting practically anything anyone is interested in.

With all these distractions, how does one really learn? Well, that actually might be the point. Although formal learning certainly needs to have goals, objectives, and assessments to make sure everyone is absorbing new information, perhaps the informal learning opportunities that present themselves in life are as real and as important to us. Conceivably, "getting lost" in a topic we love on the internet, and drinking in content, and sharing thoughtful feedback about that content truly is learning. And what if that learning could be done with subject matter experts at our sides? Activities like sending students out on a scavenger hunt of great web sites or allowing a group to maintain a classroom blog or vlog are arguably more memorable, engaging, relevant, and academically nourishing to our student body today.

One prime example is Kathy Cassidy (no relation to the author), a teacher who invites the world into her classroom through [a blog](#) ^[3]. Creating experiences like these should be one of the major goals with the next evolution of eLearning. And these are the kinds of experiences I hope my own kids have during the course of their schooling.

I've been teaching online in one form or another since about 1999, and have seen a significant evolution and some significant revolutions occur over that span. One thing that hasn't changed in that time is the critical role that teachers play in a successful eLearning experience. Leading students through the joys and perils of virtual learning environments takes a crafty, thoughtful, and agile type of individual (or set of individuals, depending on development versus teaching). In the world of online learning, the "Guide by the Side, not the Sage on the Stage" term has been used and overused since the inception and introduction of computers to the classroom. This concept, however, is really about good teaching that leverages technology, rather than technology forcing a teacher to the sidelines.

I don't think that computers will ever completely eliminate the need for traditional classroom teachers. Instead, technology should motivate instructors to step up and innovate the ways in which they present subject matter—inspiring students and driving their success like never before.

Pete Cassidy is the Director of Online Programs for Champions, where he oversees all digital components of Champions' academic offerings for students in grades K-8. Cassidy has taught online learning courses for various universities and institutions since 1999. Follow Cassidy's blog at <http://www.discoverchampions.com/blog> ^[4].

Article printed from eSchoolNews.com: <http://www.eschoolnews.com>

URL to article: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/10/22/the-computer-ate-my-teacher-technology-and-the-new-face-of-todays-classroom/>

URLs in this post:

[1] Image: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/girlsoncomputer1.jpg>

[2] blended learning:

http://www.eschoolnews.com/?p=48527/?utm_source=website&utm_medium=shorturl&utm_campaign=keywordlink12

[3] a blog: http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=1337

[4] <http://www.discoverchampions.com/blog>: <http://www.discoverchampions.com/blog>

The computer ate my teacher! Technology and the new face of today's classroom

Author: 'iGeneration' requires a different approach to instruction

Today's students have grown up with constant tech access and prefer to multitask, says psychology professor Larry Rosen *By Maya T. Prabhu, Assistant Editor* April 12th, 2010



[Interactive Learning in the Connected Classroom, Top News, Using Multimedia to Increase Student Engagement, school reform](#)

Today's middle and high school students learn much differently from students just a few years older—and that's mainly because they've never known a world without the internet or cell phones, says psychology professor and author Larry D. Rosen, whose research could give educators valuable insights into the needs of today's learners.

Children born in the 1990s, dubbed the "iGeneration" by Rosen, live in a time of rapidly changing technology, in which they are constantly connected to a number of mobile technologies. Rosen said the "i" stands for both the technologies these students use—such as the iPod, iPhone, and Wii—and the individualized ways in which students use these tools.

"iGeners are growing up with portable technology. Literally from birth, these children are able to grow up using mobile technology," he said. "But I also look at the little 'i' as reflecting the individualized culture—reflecting our needs and desires."

Rosen said teenagers' desire for individualized experiences is something they expect will carry over into their education. Jody Steinglass, president of Empire Edge, responded to that need when his company designed Adapster, an SAT math study tool that differentiates and individualizes learning for its users.

Students take a diagnostics test to determine the areas in which they need to study, and the program creates a customized study guide based on those results.

"A study plan is developed with their strengths and weaknesses in mind," he said. Steinglass recognized teens' connection to their mobile devices and created Adapster specifically for iPhones and iPods, though he is currently working to create an online version as well. "People don't want to carry SAT books around with them, but kids already have their iPods with them. So when they have five minutes to kill, they can pull up the [application] and do some problems right then," he said.

Rosen agreed that iGeners are constantly connected to their mobile devices. He noted that iGeneration students don't look at the technology as a tool, the way it's viewed by older generations—even the so-called Millennial generation that preceded today's teens—but as an expectation. And this affects the way these students learn. "If we look at kids who spend their entire day online multitasking, in many ways teachers are still asking them to learn one task at a time and in an old-fashioned way," he said.

Andy Petroski, director of the Learning Technologies Master of Science program at Harrisburg University of Science and Technology in Pennsylvania, said engagement is a key to connecting with today's students.

"These kids are highly engaged and active in their personal world. Traditional school is so far on the other end of the spectrum for them," he said. "More than any other generation, they are pleading, 'Engage me,' ... because to sit and listen and do one thing for long periods is so foreign to their daily lives."

Petroski agreed that designing multidimensional lessons that take advantage of how students live and work outside of school is a much-needed change in K-12 education.

"Encourage multitasking, [both] computer-based and physical, [by] having them switch from one activity to another quickly, or trying to solve multiple problems simultaneously," he said. "This relates to their working style, but [it] can also help to emphasize that there are times when you need to concentrate on one thing at a time."

Not everyone would agree that multitasking is a healthy attribute of today's students. A Stanford University study released last year found that high-tech jugglers have problems paying attention, controlling their memory, or switching from one job to another as well as those who prefer to complete one task at a time.

The study, "Cognitive control in media multitaskers," published last August in the academic journal [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#) ^[1], found that heavy media multitaskers performed worse on a test of task-switching ability.

Rosen said there are a few things about that study that bothered him. First, it was a laboratory study that asked participants to perform tasks no one would do outside a laboratory setting. Second, it used a relatively small sample size (41 students).

"This is quite a small sample to be drawing general conclusions about multitaskers," Rosen said, adding: "What is needed is in vivo studies." He said other research has suggested multitaskers take slightly longer to learn information but do not necessarily perform worse on exams.

In his book, *Rewired: Understanding the iGeneration and the Way They Learn*, Rosen suggests, among many other things, that teachers should begin to use cell phones as tools for mobile learning.

"If I were going to do a lecture on [President] Chester Arthur in a room full of kids where most likely all of them have cell phones and many of them have some type of smart phone, I would split them into groups and ask the students to find information about him," he said. "I would let the kids get engaged with the information. Then I would ask them to do something like create a Facebook or MySpace page based on that information."

Petroski also recommended encouraging group work, because social networking is such a large part of students' daily lives. "Encourage group work ... in the classroom through collaborative group work that supports individual activities. Use games as teaching and learning tools," he added. "Yes, review quizzes can be engaging, but consider using games and simulations as a way to teach concepts through hands-on learning, not just as a way to review concepts taught in a traditional sense."

Other recommendations that Rosen makes in his book include allowing students to generate original content online as part of lessons; encourage writing in various forms, including allowing "textisms" such as acronyms and emoticons; teaching students which media sources to trust and which to avoid; and using the internet to help provide a global perspective.

One problem with today's multitasking iGeners "is that they spend more time gathering information in breadth rather than depth," Rosen acknowledged, "and I think this is an issue for educators." Teachers must teach media literacy and the difference between superficial gathering of information and deeper understanding, he said.

"But after all," he added, "isn't that the challenge for all educators?"

Links:

[Rewired: Understanding the iGeneration and the Way They Learn](#) ^[2]

[Adapster](#) ^[3]

[Harrisburg University of Science and Technology](#) ^[4]

Note to readers:

Don't forget to visit the **Next Generation Collaboration** resource center. The ability to work together on group projects is seen as an increasingly important skill for the 21st-century workplace, and a growing number of schools are rewriting their curriculum to include opportunities for such collaboration as a result. Go to:

[Next Generation Collaboration](#)

Article printed from eSchoolNews.com: <http://www.eschoolnews.com>

URL to article: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/04/12/author-igeneration-requires-a-different-approach-to-instruction/>

URLs in this post:

[1] Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences: <http://www.pnas.org/>

[2] *Rewired: Understanding the iGeneration and the Way They Learn*: <http://us.macmillan.com/rewired>

[3] Adapster: <http://www.adapster.com/>

[4] Harrisburg University of Science and Technology: <http://www.harrisburgu.net/>

Teaching in a socially networked classroom

Today's students are always plugged in and ready to learn—so why not take advantage of this trend inside the classroom? *By William Kist*



[Curriculum, Interactive Learning in the Connected Classroom, Top News, eClassroom News, social networking](#)

Social networking expands learning and teaching opportunities for students and teachers.

Let's face it: Social networking is here to stay. Whether it is Facebook or Twitter, or the next web application waiting to become a phenomenon, social networking is a part of our students' lives. The only place where it isn't usually present is in our classrooms. And yet, how many of us haven't sensed our students itching to reconnect as soon as class is over? The moment they leave the classroom, the cell phones come out and the air is abuzz with various versions of, "Where are you?" or "What are you doing?"

Imagine if we could harness this drive to connect for the purpose of learning. Is it possible to use social networking to further learning?

While doing research for my book, *The Socially Networked Classroom: Teaching in the New Media Age*, I spoke with dozens of pioneering teachers across the country and even around the world about how they are figuring out ways create a new media classroom while keeping their students safe and focused on learning. Their responses covered a range of examples, from social networking in a low-tech environment to teaching at the most advanced levels of technological innovation.

The result is a real-world chronicle of their attempts to navigate the socially networked classroom and their struggles against the barriers that we all encounter—lack of technology, lack of support, lack of time, and, of course, standardized curriculum and testing. Their experiments weren't always successful, but each attempt gave them insights that helped them further refine their methods.

Take, for example, Rachele Ring, a sixth-grade teacher at West Branch Elementary in West Branch, Ohio. She took advantage of an intranet setup at her school to set up blogs for all her students. She monitors all student blog comments and admits that she has trouble keeping up.

"It's difficult when I need to get around the room to answer questions or supervise students who may be off task," she said.

However, Ring said she feels it is worth the trouble; she has noticed quite a jump in student engagement with writing as she has added blogging to her classroom. She plans to add online literature circles with another teacher in the building and have students collaborate and communicate about the literature they are reading through blogging rather than traditional classroom writing.

Elizabeth Helfant, a former chemistry teacher who is now the instructional technologist at the Upper School of the Mary Institute and Saint Louis Country Day School in Missouri, shepherds a variety of [Web 2.0](#)^[1] projects in her school. She described how the science teachers in her school use wikis to assess lab reports.

"The wiki allows the teacher to see exactly who did what part and when it was done, and the wiki also offers students a discussion area to negotiate the lab results. Teachers can watch as the lab report is created and can also offer students feedback during the process using the discussion tab," said Helfant.

She views the wiki as helping the teacher monitor work levels of various group members.

"Keeping track of student progress may also be aided by using Google Notebook with the 'Clip to Notebook' add-on," said Helfant, allowing the teacher and librarian to monitor the research that the

student is doing. "Everything that they collect electronically, text and images, can be highlighted, and when the students right click, they get an option to send it to their notebook."

There is also a space for the teacher to make comments and potentially guide further research.

"It provides a means for assessing the skill that is being taught while it is being taught," she said.

Even Facebook can be used for educational purposes, though most schools still filter access to the site as well as to similar social networking platforms. During my research for *The Socially Networked Classroom*, only one teacher I interviewed admitted to using Facebook unfiltered within the school day in a K-12 setting, but I've since heard of several more. The uses of Facebook are too powerful to ignore, even though—as the teacher I found said—his project "flew under the radar screen" of his school's administrators.

Brett Moller is head of learning and educational technologies at a private school in Queensland, Australia. He was working as a media teacher at his previous school when he used Facebook in a project with another teacher who taught religion. The religion teacher expressed a desire to use media more in his classroom, so Moller showed him Facebook. For several years, Moller had his students post their final films on Facebook. Brett connected with a group of media professionals who gave his students positive feedback about their films, all of which was done through Facebook.

"I showed this teacher, and he got excited," Moller explained. "The idea was to get students who were doing a unit on theoretical ethics and ethical issues to learn a small amount of the content well enough to teach it to the rest of the class in a creative and effective way."

Each student was given a prompt related to an ethical issue, such as slavery in the cocoa industry, for example. Students were expected to research both sides of the ethical situation and then communicate their own ideas in blogs and podcasts.

"Facebook was used to connect the group members with the experts in the given fields, most of whom were professors in areas of ethics or philosophy," Moller said.

As each group began to blog and produce podcasts about its issue, some local university professors played a crucial role. The professors, who were "keen about the project," Moller said, began to generate some critical thinking on the site by posting some "devil's advocate" arguments, trying to suggest, for example, that stopping slavery would mean the end of candy bars as we know them.

When I asked about security issues, Moller responded that the Facebook group was set up in a completely secure way, allowing only the students and the university professors to comment. Moller said he only had one parent complaint about the project, and when he showed her that it's impossible for an outsider to log into the group, she was satisfied with the project's safety. He did admit there were some challenges to this project.

"You still have to be a vigilant teacher," he said. "At the beginning, kids were more interested in checking their own Facebook profiles."

These are just a few examples of the possibilities and challenges of using social networking for learning. The teachers I've interviewed each take a different approach to the tools available to them, but they all believe passionately in what they do and in opening up a new world for themselves and their students.

Article printed from eSchoolNews.com: <http://www.eschoolnews.com> URL to article:

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/05/20/teaching-in-a-socially-networked-classroom/>

URLs in this post:

[1] Web 2.0:

http://www.eschoolnews.com/?p=44795/?utm_source=website&utm_medium=shorturl&utm_campaign=keywordlin
k15

Microsoft, ePals team up on collaborative tools

Alliance could spur use of education technology for communicating and sharing online

By Dennis Pierce, Editor



[Business News, Communication and Collaboration, Communication and Collaboration for More Effective School Management, Engaging Students through Online Collaboration, Interactive Learning in the Connected Classroom, Technologies, Top News, eClassroom News](#)

ePals users will have access to online versions of popular Microsoft software within a secure learning environment.

In a move that could spur more widespread use of online tools for communicating and collaborating within K-12 education, software giant [Microsoft Corp.](#) ^[1] has announced a strategic partnership with [ePals](#) ^[2], which provides a safe online platform for teachers and students to share information and work together on projects.

Under the terms of the alliance, ePals this fall will add Microsoft's [Live@edu](#) ^[3] eMail and calendaring software to the services it already provides for some 600,000 educators in 200 countries through its ePals Learning Space platform.

Sometime early next year, ePals users also will have access to the web-based versions of Microsoft Office programs such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint within the ePals Learning Space, the two companies say.

The deal seems to make sense for both companies, and it could benefit schools as well.

ePals customers will be able to take advantage of popular productivity software and can access their Word documents and other files—all from within a single, shared, and secure education technology environment.

"Students and teachers have wanted their documents to reside seamlessly alongside them," said ePals co-founder Tim DiScipio. He added that his company's partnership with Microsoft is "a real solution to eliminate ... web sprawl," which occurs when internet users' documents are hosted across multiple platforms and systems.

For Microsoft, the deal helps it address several key concerns—[such as security](#) ^[4]—that have kept some educators from using "cloud-based" software, which is hosted on a company's servers and delivered to users via the internet.

"ePals will help take us to the next level [in making] the cloud come alive in a learning scenario," said Anthony Salcito, vice president of worldwide education for Microsoft.

The idea behind the partnership, Salcito said, is that "schools aren't risking their safety and security, or compromising on the kind of software they're using, when they're using the cloud."

Integrating Microsoft software into the ePals Learning Space will involve adding the kinds of policy-management tools to these applications that have made ePals so popular among educators, the two companies said. These tools let educators define features such as document workflow and permissions, giving them more control over the educational environment.

For instance, a teacher using the online version of Microsoft Word within the ePals Learning Space could set up a policy rule specifying that when a document is created, it should be routed automatically to another student for his or her peer review, then passed along to the teacher for grading. Or, the teacher could specify that he or she must review any documents before they can be eMailed or shared with another class across the globe.

Adding these kinds of policy-management capabilities to Microsoft's ubiquitous productivity software could facilitate communication and collaboration in K-12 classrooms dramatically, DiScipio said.

He estimated that fewer than 10 percent of schools in the United States have given their students tools for communicating and collaborating online—but that could change if educators and students are able to store and share online resources more securely and efficiently.

And that, in turn, could help foster the kinds of 21st-century skills that today's employers say they're looking for when hiring. It also could help increase the amount of writing that students do in class.

DiScipio said he has heard from several ePals customers who say their students are writing much more often now that they're using collaborative tools in their classes. "This is one of the truly amazing bi-products" of implementing a digital collaborative environment in education, he said.

The ePals Learning Space provides safe virtual workspaces for schools that include eMail, blogs, wikis, shared portfolios, media galleries, and language translation in 35 languages.

Live@edu is a free suite of online tools, based on the familiar Office applications many people use today, that give users access to information anytime, anywhere, from any desktop, laptop, major web browser, or mobile device. Live@edu is Microsoft's answer to [Google Apps for Education](#) ^[5], and its partnership with ePals could give Microsoft a boost in its competition with Google for school users of web applications.

Integrating Live@edu into its platform will bring additional capabilities to ePals' SchoolMail and other services, ePals says—such as a familiar Outlook interface on both mobile phones and computers, as well as dynamic distribution groups.

From an IT perspective, the solution will allow schools to set up sophisticated policy-based controls that regulate which students and teachers can eMail and share information with each other for security purposes, and what level of filtering and monitoring is desired for sent and received eMail.

Article printed from eSchoolNews.com: <http://www.eschoolnews.com>

URL to article: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/04/22/microsoft-epals-team-up-on-collaborative-tools/>

URLs in this post:

[1] Microsoft Corp.: <http://www.microsoft.com/education/default.aspx>

[2] ePals: <http://www.epals.com>

[3] Live@edu: <http://my.liveatedu.com/>

[4] such as security: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/03/23/schools-beef-up-security-for-web-applications/>

[5] Google Apps for Education: <http://www.google.com/a/help/intl/en/edu/index.html>

Microsoft, ePals team up on collaborative tools

Four things every student should learn ... but not every school is teaching

Education technology consultant Alan November reveals key lessons that today's students must know in order to thrive in the Information Age

By Dennis Pierce, Editor

[Curriculum](#), [FETC](#), [Interactive Learning in the Connected Classroom](#), [Top News](#), [eClassroom News](#)



Schools are missing out on important opportunities if they fail to teach these lessons, says ed-tech consultant Alan November.

An awareness of the views of those in other countries, an understanding of how Google ranks the results of a web search, a knowledge of the permanence of information posted online: These are some of the lessons that every student should be learning in today's schools, says education technology consultant Alan November—but not every middle or high school is teaching these lessons.

November was the featured speaker at a Jan. 14 [luncheon session](#) ^[1] during the [Florida Education Technology Conference](#) ^[2] (FETC) in Orlando. Although the session focused on how to balance safety and learning in the digital age, during the course of the discussion November also revealed several topics that he said every member of the Net Generation should learn:

1. Global empathy.

November said he was talking with a senior executive at a global investment bank recently, and he asked the executive: What is the most important skill for today's students to learn so they are prepared to succeed in the new global economy?

"Empathy," the executive replied—the ability to understand and respect different points of view.

Most of today's companies do business with customers all over the world, and several also have branches in multiple countries. Chances are good that when students enter the workforce, they'll be working with—or doing business with—someone from another nation, with its own culture and its own unique perspective, at some point in their career.

It's not hard to find people who are smart, the executive said. What *is* hard to find are employees who have to ability to empathize with, and be sensitive to the needs of, people from other countries.

Fortunately, November said, technology makes it easy for today's students to learn global empathy. Students can discover the current social and political conditions of other nations online, and they can interact with their peers from abroad and learn their perspectives on issues firsthand through web conferencing or eMail.

2. Social and ethical responsibility on the web.

Topics such as cyber bullying and sexting have made frequent headlines in recent years, and often with tragic consequences. The [latest example](#) ^[3] occurred in western Massachusetts last month, when a 15-year-old freshman at South Hadley High School committed suicide after being harassed online.

With several states passing laws to address cyber bullying, and a new federal law requiring schools to teach internet safety in order to receive e-Rate funding, many schools now highlight the dangers of inappropriate online behavior as part of their lessons.

November weighed in on the importance of these lessons, calling out schools that neglect to teach online responsibility.

By blocking access to social tools in the classroom, and not teaching students what constitutes socially and ethically responsible behavior online, schools are shirking a key responsibility, he said, adding: "Facebook might be blocked in your schools, but kids are still going to go home and use it."

3. The permanence of information posted online.

Students are often careless about what they post on the web, November said, because they mistakenly believe that once they delete the information, it no longer can be found online.

But that simply isn't true. To demonstrate, November opened a page on his web site, [November Learning](#)^[4], and showed participants that it no longer contained an article from a few years ago. He then surfed over to the [Internet Archive](#)^[5], a nonprofit initiative that indexes the internet for posterity, and typed the expired web address of the missing article into its Wayback Machine. Up popped the missing web page, preserved for anyone to see.

"When I show this to students, I get a collective gasp," he said. "They don't know the web is archived every few days."

If you don't show this tool to students yourself, November warned the assembled educators, "you are missing an important lesson" that could save them from ruining their lives.

4. Critical thinking about the information found online.

How many students understand how Google sorts and ranks its search results, November asked? Many students assume that the web links appearing at the top of their search results are the best, most reliable sources of information about the topic, but that's not necessarily true.

The two main criteria for whether a web site appears at or near the top of Google's search results, November said, are (1) whether the search term appears within the web site's URL (web address), and (2) the number of links coming in to the source from other web sites.

"In other words, it's nothing but a popularity contest," he said. That might lead to a reliable source at the top of the results page—or it might not.

Today's students too often accept the validity of information on web sites that appear within the first few search results, November said, without thinking critically about these sources. If you're going to teach anything in the Information Age, he said, shouldn't it be how to find, evaluate, and use online information critically?

"I think we've missed the information revolution in this country," he said. "I can't think of a single more important skill than being able to tear apart information on the web."

(Editor's note: For additional insights from Alan November's presentation at FETC last month, click [here](#)^[1]. And for more news and information from this year's FETC, click [here](#)^[2].)

Article printed from eSchoolNews.com: <http://www.eschoolnews.com>

URL to article: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/02/08/four-things-every-student-should-learn-but-not-every-school-is-teaching/>

URLs in this post:

[1] luncheon session: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/01/28/november-to-educators-let-students-use-online-social-tools/>

[2] Florida Education Technology Conference: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/02/02/new-ed-tech-tools-and-techniques-mark-fetc-2010/>

[3] latest example: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/01/26/teens-suicide-prompts-study-of-cyber-bullying/>

[4] November Learning: <http://www.novemberlearning.com>

[5] Internet Archive: <http://www.archive.org>

November to educators: Let students use online social tools

Blocking access to these tools in classrooms discourages student-centered learning, leading education technology consultant says

By Dennis Pierce, Editor



FETC, Safety & Security, School Administration, Technologies

Ed-tech consultant Alan November believes in the power of student-centered learning.

The most important change that technology brings to education is that it enables students to take charge of their own learning, said education technology consultant [Alan November](#)^[1]. Yet, this is happening in too few classrooms, he said—and a key reason is that schools are blocking access to the very tools that

allow such activity.

November was speaking at a Jan. 14 session during the Florida Education Technology Conference in Orlando. Sponsored by [Lightspeed Systems](#)^[2], the session focused on how to balance safety and learning in the digital age.

If you were to ask teachers or administrators what one indicator they would look for to show that real learning was occurring in a classroom, most people would say they'd like to see that students were engaged in the lesson, November said.

But in most classrooms where educators would describe students as engaged, there is still a dependency on the teacher to direct the learning, he said—rather than the students themselves.

"I think we have to redefine what it means to have engaged learning," November said.

One of the resources that companies value most in this new global economy is a workforce that is self-directed, November said. He proposed two questions that school leaders should ask to determine if a class is engaged in student-directed learning:

- (1) Are students adding value to the learning of other students?
- (2) Is information flowing out of the classroom to the larger community—and not just in?

"The real power of the web is that it enables global collaboration," November said. "Yet this isn't going on in most schools. We're blocking all the social tools that enable this."

November recommended that school leaders give their teachers access to Skype, which is software that lets users make free phone calls over the internet. A former history teacher himself, he described how teachers could use Skype to engage students in a lesson about the American Revolution, for example.

If you use Google to search for information on "American Revolution," November said, and you add the phrase "site:sch.uk" in the search bar, you'll get a list of results that are limited only to web sites with the domain "sch.uk"—which is the domain used by British schools. Perusing these results will allow American students to see what their peers in the United Kingdom learn about this pivotal event in U.S. history.

After reading British accounts of the American Revolution, he said, American students could reach out to their peers in the U.K. and arrange to debate them using Skype.

"What's going to get kids more excited about learning and drive them to prepare more thoroughly?" November asked. "Telling them: 'You're taking a test on the American Revolution on Friday,' or saying: 'You're debating British students about the American Revolution on Friday?'"

Members of the audience in this give-and-take session seemed intrigued by what November was saying, although they noted that many school leaders block students' access to online social tools because schools are responsible for what goes on in the classroom. If a student misuses a social tool such as YouTube, and the press hears about it, the resulting publicity could ruin a school leader's career.

November responded: "You're blocking access to YouTube because it's bad—but have you taught your students to use it correctly?"

If you teach every student how to use YouTube for lifelong learning, showing students how to find valuable educational information that is also appropriate for the classroom, then you're giving them invaluable life skills, he said. If you don't, then by default students will use YouTube only for entertainment purposes.

By blocking access to social tools in the classroom, and not teaching students what constitutes socially and ethically responsible behavior online, schools are shirking a key responsibility, November said. He added: "Facebook might be blocked in your schools, but kids are still going to go home and use it."

A Lightspeed executive suggested another solution for school leaders to consider: Monitor, rather than block, students' use of online social tools.

Lightspeed's software can block access to certain web sites, but it also captures and reports on students' online behavior. The company executive suggested that educators apply a different set of rules for different types of web sites: Block access to sites that have no educational value whatsoever, but take advantage of monitoring and reporting tools to keep students in line when they use sites that have some educational value but also inappropriate content or uses.

Making students aware that their online behavior is being recorded, and that they will be held responsible for this behavior, can discourage students from using social tools inappropriately, the executive said. He likened this approach to the discipline used in classrooms every day.

"Johnny can't say the 'F' word in the back of the class," he said. "Well, he can—there's now way to physically stop him—but he knows he's going to get punished if he does."

Article printed from eSchoolNews.com: <http://www.eschoolnews.com>

URL to article: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/01/28/november-to-educators-let-students-use-online-social-tools/>

URLs in this post:

[1] Alan November: <http://www.novemberlearning.com>

[2] Lightspeed Systems: <http://www.lightspeedsystems.com>