



Jim Tiscornia, Program Manager of Northrop Grumman's Southwest Enterprise Solutions Center, speaks at the PlugGED In Kick-off Celebration in Lebanon, Virginia. Other speakers (left to right, facing the audience) included Dr. Robert Tomlinson, Vice President of Instruction at Southwest Virginia Community College; the Honorable Aneesh Chopra, Virginia Secretary of Technology; Dr. Richard Sebastian, PlugGED In Project Manager; United States Senator James Webb; Dr. Mark Embilidge, Director of The Literacy Institute at VCU; and Dr. Patricia Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Virginia Department of Education.

# PLUGGED IN®

by Dr. Richard Sebastian

**O**n a cold Tuesday evening in February, a handful of adults, bundled in warm coats and hats, braved the heavy falling snow to gather in a computer lab at the Southwest Technology Development Center (SWTDC) in Lebanon, Virginia. It was the first night of their new GED class. This was not a typical GED class, however. This class, called PlugGED In, was a new and innovative contextualized GED technology curriculum, developed in collaboration with area businesses and the local community college, Southwest Virginia Community College (SVCC). This was the pilot class. In the PlugGED In curriculum, acquiring a GED is

only the first of several significant milestones a student must achieve during the six-month program.

The PlugGED In curriculum is designed to provide learners who have not completed high school with a GED course that incorporates technical training as a means to develop the workplace skills essential for entry-level employment in global, knowledge-driven, technology-rich jobs. These skills include both "hard" skills, such as the specialized technology knowledge reflected in earned Microsoft certifications, and "soft" skills, such as communication, workplace ethics, collaboration, and innovation.

The PlugGED In curriculum was created through a partnership of educational and governmental institutions as

## Digital Literacy

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a response to the current adult literacy crisis and the increased need to prepare adults for jobs in the technology-driven economy. The idea for PlugGED In was proposed to The Literacy Institute at VCU by Virginia Secretary of Education Aneesh Chopra as an innovative way to quickly prepare high-school dropouts for available and well-paying technology sector jobs. With funds provided through The Governor's Productivity Investment Fund, The Literacy Institute joined with Southwest Virginia Regional Adult Education, SVCC, industry partners Northrop Grumman and CGI, UVA-Wise, the Virginia Department of Education, the Center for Innovative Technology, and Microsoft to create a new model of adult education

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## A Few Words on Progress

**T**hose of us who have worked in adult education for any length of time know the power of our students' stories – the trials they have endured, the challenges they have overcome, and the dreams they cling to. When four students spoke at the kick-off of the PlugGED In program in Russell County in February, they shared their stories and told of their hopes for a career in technology, further education, and a better life for their children. We know these stories well, but they never fail to inspire and humble us.

Today, more than ever, we in adult education have enormous challenges beyond inadequate funding and second class status within education. Our challenges now have to do with helping our students to be successful in a world in which many of us are ill-prepared to fully participate much less to serve as guides and mentors to others. Technological innovation creates changes at speeds that have never been experienced before. For those of us who went through 16 years or more of education without ever using or even seeing a computer, this rate of change is beyond our comprehension. We may use computers, cell phones, and iPods, but our minds and spirits often linger in another, less complex age. Yet it is in this constantly changing, ever more complex, world that our students must strive to achieve their dreams.

This issue of *Progress* is devoted to information and strategies that will help us incorporate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills into instruction, use technology in ways that effectively support learning, and begin to transform our own ways of thinking about technology and education. When Senator James Webb spoke at the PlugGED In event, he called adult education a gateway to careers and further education. That is an apt description. We as adult educators can be the facilitators of the passage through the gate, preparing our students for the world that is on the other side, or we can hinder their way because we ourselves are not ready to accept that world. Whatever we choose to do, it is our students who reap the rewards or pay the price.



## Calendar

**April**  
**12-18**

National Library Week

**18-22**

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE)  
National Conference  
Louisville, KY

**22-25**

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics  
Washington, DC

**23**

Literacy Education Advocacy Day

**May**  
**3-5**

National Adult Learner Institute and Adult Literacy Congress  
New Carrollton, MD

**16-22**

Virginia Lifelong Learning Week

**21**

Literacy Fair  
Keysville, VA

**July**  
**2**

National Literacy Day

**29-31**

Virginia Institutes of Lifelong Learning (VAILL)  
Radford & Northern VA



# VCU



# A Letter from Elizabeth Hawa, Oael Director

The State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) defines computer literacy as "the ability to use a computer and its software to accomplish practical tasks." In contrast, SETDA has defined digital literacy as "more than just the technical ability to operate digital devices properly; it comprises a variety of cognitive skills that are utilized in executing tasks in digital environments, such as surfing the Web, deciphering user interfaces, working with databases, and chatting in chat rooms."

This edition of *Progress* offers valuable information for the adult educator to

consider related to the concept of digital literacy. I believe we are moving in the right direction in Virginia with initiatives such as eLearn Virginia, our Distance Learning Center at Virginia Commonwealth University, and PlugGED In, the program in Russell County that combines GED preparation with training for entry-level technology jobs. Our goals are to increase the number of adult learners participating in the alternative, virtual classroom provided by eLearn Virginia and to expand the PlugGED In

model to other areas of the state and to other career options. It is also exciting that long-standing programs, such as the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP), have confronted the challenges of the digital divide. Moreover, our online adult learners are receiving guidance and encouragement from mentors like Letisha Harris.

In adult education we are being challenged to play a stronger role in workforce development. If this augmented role is to be a goal of our programs, the delivery of basic skills instruction should be enhanced with strategies to ensure that our adult learners are transitioned to higher levels of education and training to better

prepare them for the workforce. Perhaps part of the contribution by adult education should be through a greater emphasis on digital literacy in our programs and services. It is worth considering that adult learners who acquire digital literacy skills simultaneously with basic skills will be better prepared for the workplace. For a segment of our learners, especially younger adults who are more computer and digitally savvy, distance learning or a blended instructional program is preferred.

It is clear that adult education practitioners are facing great challenges in meeting the changing social, cultural, and economic landscapes of our nation and the globe. The options for communication are diverse in this digital age, and adult educators must step to the forefront by offering more instructional options for the learners who need our services. We must build on that which works from our traditional toolkit and develop a new kit of tools that combine the best of the past with the technologies of today and the future.

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**Welcome**  
We provide adult education and literacy resources, publications, and training for teachers of adults in Virginia.

**Our Mission**  
That the field of adult education and literacy will have the best available tools and training to help adult learners build a better future.

**Our Vision**  
To equip the field of adult education and literacy with essential skills and resources by delivering innovative and effective training, publications, curriculum design, and program development.



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## VALRC Online New Site, Same Address

The Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center is proud to announce the redesign of our website. The website continues to bring you field news and training information and to serve as your resource destination. Please check out our new look at [www.valrc.org](http://www.valrc.org) and tell us what you think by filling out the Contact Us form.

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Prepare Today's Learners for Advancement in a Global Economy

by Dr. Laurie A. Henry

Engagement in learning activities is being transformed today as in no other time in history. As individuals turn to the Internet and other information communication technologies (ICTs) at increasing rates to read, write, communicate, and interact with texts, they must develop new skills and strategies, or *21<sup>st</sup> century skills*, to be successful in these multimodal, intertextual, and interactive environments.

The Internet has become the defining technology for today's youth and may be the most important ICT for students to learn how to manipulate successfully. It is also found to be an increasingly important element of the 21<sup>st</sup> century work environment. The Internet requires new skills and strategies that must be acquired in order to explore the Internet effectively. These new skills and strategies are part of what some researchers call a *new literacies* framework to develop online literacy (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). These new literacies include:

- Identifying a purpose or important question to be answered
- Locating information through an interactive search process
- Making inferences about information housed behind hyperlinks
- Evaluating information for accuracy and bias
- Evaluating authors and/or sources for reliability and trustworthiness
- Synthesizing disparate information across a multitude of media formats
- Clearly and concisely communicating information that is obtained

It has been discovered that many students and teachers do not possess these skills that are required when reading, writing, and communicating on the Internet and they are not being taught in our public schools (Henry, 2007). Even basic techniques, such as copying and pasting information, identifying keywords for a search task, or locating the author of a website, separate novices

from more advanced Internet connoisseurs.

Professional development opportunities for in-service teachers at all levels, including elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educators, and preparation programs for beginning teachers need to provide acquisition of the skills needed to successfully use the Internet so that these skills can be passed on to better prepare all learners for advancement in the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills [P21], 2005). Educators at all levels need help to learn how to integrate learning activities that use the Internet into daily lessons. Innovative lessons can include webquests, Internet projects, Internet scavenger hunts, Internet-based research, interactive writing tools, or social networking sites (Henry, 2006; Leu, Leu, & Coiro, 2004). Perhaps most importantly, lessons should emphasize key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that focus on problem solving and critical thinking through collaborative learning (P21, 2005).

As increasing numbers of computers are placed in the workplace, it becomes increasingly important for educators to focus instruction on the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills needed to access and use the Internet effectively in various educational and work environments. A number of websites have been designed to help educators find ways that technology can fit into the curriculum they are teaching. Some of these include:

- The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills provides an innovative framework, curriculum maps, and other resources.  
<http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/>
- The Adult Literacy & Technology Network provides adult educators with lesson ideas that integrate technology as well as resources for learners to improve their proficiency with technology.  
<http://www.altn.org/techtrain-ing/>

## ing/teatut.html

- The WebQuest page provides webquests on an array of topics across grade levels and content areas along with a template for creating your own webquest. Over 2500 webquests are available in seven languages.  
<http://webquest.org>

- The Literacy Web is an online portal hosted at the University of Connecticut and includes a large number of new literacies resources for educators.  
<http://www.literacy.uconn.edu>

As literacy engagements change over time, teaching and learning must also evolve to better prepare our citizens for an innovative future in the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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# PLUGGED IN

curriculum, one that focuses not only on a student's immediate and important acquisition of a GED certificate, but also on the student's further employment and educational goals.

## History of the Project

As a result of an economic partnership with the state of Virginia, two technology sector industries, CGI, Inc., and Northrop Grumman, invested in the southwest region, establishing facilities in the town of Lebanon in rural Russell County. These facilities bring much-needed employment opportunities. However, many in the workforce of Russell County and the surrounding counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, and Tazewell do not possess the necessary entry-level skills to fill these new jobs. In the four-county region, 39.5% of adults aged 25 or older and nearly one quarter of 18- to 24-year-olds lack a high school credential. Less than nine percent of individuals aged 25 or older have a bachelor's degree or higher degree. Additionally, while the attainment of a high school diploma or GED certificate is an important educational milestone, these credentials alone are often insufficient for achieving success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century labor market or in many of the jobs available at Northrop Grumman and CGI.

Many of the current aptitude assessments, job inventories, and traditional educational programs do not offer an efficient and effective way to identify individuals with the potential to excel in high-tech industries or prepare them for these new technology sector positions. According to a report by the U.S. Department of Commerce, the field of education is the least technology-intensive enterprise in a ranking of technology use among 55 U.S. industry sectors. The GED Tests do not assess a test-taker's technological knowledge or proficiency. In order to add

value to the GED credential, a new type of curriculum is needed that both addresses the skills needed to successfully pass the tests and targets the cutting-edge skills needed to successfully move previously unqualified GED credential holders into entry-level technology sector jobs or further post-secondary education and training. This need, while critical for the Southwest Virginia region, is not limited to this area of the state.

## The PlugGED In Curriculum: Earning a GED certificate is only the first step.

Unlike most GED-preparatory adult education courses, in the PlugGED In curriculum, completion of the GED credential is only the first of many targeted achievements. Students will also be given opportunities to prepare for the world of work by developing professional soft skills, earning technology certifications through the Microsoft IT Academy, and learning 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills by completing several team-based capstone projects. The six-month program is divided into two distinct phases that focus on four content areas:

- GED Curriculum and Career Readiness Certificate
- Professional Soft Skills
- Digital Literacy Skills
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

Students engage in activities in all four content areas from the beginning of the program in order to maximize their interest and their motivation to learn. As they develop increased skill levels, they move from Phase One to Phase Two, focusing less on GED-related content and more on professional soft skills. This approach allows instructors to individualize instruction for each participant depending on his or her experience and beginning skill levels.

## Professional Soft Skills

The professional soft skills curriculum is based on discussion of the texts *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey and *The Etiquette Advantage in Business* by Peggy Post and Peter Post. These lessons will introduce students to the expectations and formalities of the modern workplace, from how to do a formal introduction to proper cell phone and email etiquette.

Professional soft skills, as they connect to GED and CRC content, will be incorporated into classroom activities and discussions from the start of the program. During Phase Two, application of content from the class texts will become central, with an increased focus on skills associated with professional interactions, formal presentations, and interviewing.

## Digital Literacy Skills

Technology sector employers expect new entry-level employees to have specialized technology skills. This means that most entering PlugGED In students, who may have only limited experience using computers, will need to build a solid foundation of digital literacy skills before preparing to earn more specialized technical certifications. To build this technical foundation, learners will progress through a series of digital literacy certification areas, beginning with the Microsoft Digital Literacy (MSDL) certifications, followed by the Internet and Computing Core (IC3), and then moving on to a Micro-

soft Office Specialist (MOS) or Microsoft Certified Application Specialist (MCAS) certification.

The MSDL, MOS, and MCAS are all part of Microsoft IT Academy. Preparation for these valuable certifications is provided through instructor-led activities in the classroom as well as through self-paced courses delivered over the Internet. As an individual learner successfully completes certificates in one (or more) of these courses, he or she can begin training in an additional area. During Phase Two of the program, each learner will decide whether to focus on finishing the MOS or MCAS certificate, completing the Mi-

*Continued on page 13 ...*

# Blending: Classroom & Online Learning Local & Centralized Support

by Rhoda-Jo Stress and Jason Guard

**Editor's Note:** To illustrate how eLearn Virginia works with local programs to provide learners with a best-fit mix of distance learning opportunities and local, face-to-face support, I asked eLearn mentor Jason Guard (JG) and literacy program manager Rhoda-Jo Stress (RJS) to describe their working partnership. Rhoda-Jo Stress has referred 15 learners to eLearn Virginia, who together have logged a total of 342 activity hours (an average of 26 hours per learner).

RJS: The blended approach is a huge boost to a small CBLO program! Adding online distance education to our face-to-face tutoring sessions allows a truly interested and motivated student to make great academic progress in a short period of time. When an organization doesn't have the perfect match for a student, the blended approach can offer the flexibility that hard-to-serve clients often require. The fact that an eLearnVA student has

access to a mentor knowledgeable about the specific phase of the educational plan is the frosting on the cake.

JG: The online mentors and web-based curricula that make up eLearn Virginia comprise a distance learning model that is intended to fill gaps in Virginia's adult education services. Whether it is learners' schedules or their ambitions that necessitate additional resources, local programs and their potential clients should have access to a wider support network. GED students can study online exclusively or as a supplement to their classroom experience. Work can take place any time, day or night, but consistency is still a must if the learner is going to make progress toward their goal.

## Identifying Potential Online Learners

RJS: When students come into our CBLO's program to discover what "we

are all about," I try not to overwhelm them but, at the same time, let them know that they have options. During the interview, I ask if the student is computer literate; I immediately follow that question (depending upon the student's reaction) with the statement, "Tell me how you use the computer (at home or wherever you use it)." Once I have that answer, I have a fairly good idea of whether I am going to put online learning on our invisible list of possibilities for that student. I also have to consider the student's attitude, the other circumstances factoring into his or her life activities, and the assessment results. I try to understand the amount of time the student has to study, whether there is a computer in the home, and the results of the learning styles inventory (given during the interview process).

JG: Computer literacy is not the only criteria for referring adults to study online.

# How I Facilitate Online Learning

by Letisha Harris

It is a delight to work with people online. As a classroom facilitator, I am accustomed to face-to-face communication with my students.

Distance learning is a change of pace for me. In the beginning, it was difficult for me because I felt that hands-on assistance was indispensable. I still believe this; however, the distance and timing issues makes this approach impossible for many students.

The distance learning approach requires me to be flexible in my work schedule and construction of custom lesson plans for each of my mentees. It's also a bonus that I don't have to listen to my students saying, "I'm sorry I missed class yesterday," "I had car trouble," "I had a doctor's appointment," or "It was too cold out-

side." Instead, they study when they can and often more than they would have in a traditional classroom.

It is important for me to keep in contact with my e-learners, whether by email or telephone. I get a real feeling of accomplishment when I hear back from a learner whose self-direction is guided by my periodic emails. When I work with students who are dedicated and willing to work hard, it motivates me to work even harder for them in return. In this way, we push each other, and students often reach higher to goals beyond the GED credential. By keeping the lines of communication open, I encourage my learners to ask questions that they would otherwise have been afraid to ask. I often end up helping my mentees plan for college, figure out how to fill out applica-

tions, and explore career advancement opportunities.

Online learners are eager to communicate. They want their online mentor to be just as eager. In that role, I become the cheerleader of their progress. Sometimes, my mentees really appreciate having an additional person to support them and share in their educational accomplishments. Eager learners correspond via email at least three times a week. They keep me abreast of their outside activities, such as taking GED classes, watching *GED Connection* videos, talking with their instructor at the local adult ed. offices, and even making personal changes in their lives. Those who are really committed tend to ask a lot of questions. They are concerned about their scores on each assignment. They notify me if they

*They must be in the habit of using the Internet and communicating via email. Most communications with eLearn mentors take place via email, so learners need to be checking their accounts every other day or so. They need to understand that asynchronous support means that learners are responsible for continuing their own forward momentum while awaiting further instruction.*

RJS: A major factor in determining who is encouraged to consider the eLearnVA program is the student's enthusiasm and motivation. As I listen to a student talk, if he or she gives numerous excuses about past behaviors or if setting a future appointment is followed by a litany of excuses, that person is probably not going to be a good candidate for working online. If a student uses the phrase "put in front of a computer," that person is probably not going to be enthusiastic about an online program, no matter how good it is. The student who comes into the interview session with specific goals, immediate and long range; the student who comes in "hungry"; and the one who comes in with a good reason for being there: those are the candidates for eLearnVA. No matter how great I

think eLearnVA is, if students aren't of the mindset that computer learning will advance their studies and work toward their goal, then eLearnVA doesn't become part of those students' portfolios.

*JG: The drive to achieve clear goals on a short timeline is a great indicator of probable success in the online environment. However, be sure that enthusiasm is well-informed rather than naive. Despite many eLearn registrants' expectations, there is no technological solution to the problem of passing the GED Tests.*

## Preventive Troubleshooting / Getting Off to a Good Start

RJS: The main problems students have with the online learning are the same ones they encounter in any adult education program: some students expect the time devoted to learning to be brief, while other students don't have adequate time to devote to their studies. Some students lose out because they are "low on the pecking order" for computer use in the home. Some students' work-related responsibilities change and computer time is no longer an option;

dropping out becomes the easiest and least frustrating alternative. Trying to fit in library time to use a computer is usually not an option.

*JG: Online GED learners often piece together their Internet access from multiple sources and locations. However, this routine can be hard to maintain for any length of time. Ideally, learners will have high-speed Internet in their homes. They should also try to identify certain times when they can be reasonably sure that they can work online without distractions. Helping learners with the logistics of their learning plan is the kind of preventive troubleshooting that pays off in the long run.*

RJS: The other big problem is that some students don't like to admit that they are having a problem learning from the computer. Although students may want to use the computer to learn, computer use may not suit their learning style. Some students think it is another "failure" if computer learning doesn't work out. Good conversation between the referring agency and the student will eliminate the frustration and allow the student to gracefully become a more tra-

*Continued on page 12 ...*

want more work in a particular area or if a subject has become challenging and they need additional help.

On the other hand, when learners aren't communicative, I send an email to make sure everything is ok. After a couple of emails with no response, I try to reach them by phone. Telephone communication is often the key to getting learners back on track when they lose their focus. This is when I really have to be the cheerleader, but it pays off. My initiative compels them to take action. I think they respond to the fact that a relative stranger is showing some concern for them and their education.

In the classroom, students often hide their weak areas from the other students in the class. They will ask someone to do problems for them, or they will work in

groups and rely on someone else's answer instead of understanding how to get the answer. In slang terms, my learners call it "faking the funk." They will fake the funk until the facilitator notices they are having trouble. Working with learners to address their weak areas is much less embarrassing at a distance than in the classroom. Online learners are frequently working in isolation, and their only friends while confronting their problems are their computer, the instructor, and the online material. So, with only one person watching them, they tend to work their hardest to make improvements. Helping students get to this point is part of my job facilitating online learning. If a student is working on an activity in mathematics, then I pick out the kinds of questions he or she typically misses

or our prescriptive pre-tests automatically diagnose deficiencies. At that point, I help the learner target those kinds of problems and suggest additional lessons in those areas.

My online learners are not looking for me to give them answers. They want guidance from someone who supports their goal of passing the GED Tests. Some learners have not been supported by their parents, spouses, or their circle of friends. When they discover that I am willing to listen and support them along their journey, their self-worth improves and motivation increases greatly. ■

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*Letisha Harris is an online mentor with eLearn Virginia and a GED teacher in Richmond and Chesterfield's adult education classrooms.*

# REEP Battles the Digital Divide

by Michele Cona

The sign on the door of my local public library reads: "We will no longer send overdue notices by regular mail." As an adult English language educator, signs like that give me pause, and I wonder:

- How many of our students with library cards have email addresses and check them regularly?
- Do they know where and how to access the Internet outside of class?
- What other necessary services are only available online, and are our teachers and students able to keep up?



REEP students use a variety of language software during weekly computer lab class. (photo courtesy of REEP Program)

In the United States today, computers and the Internet are mainstays of our personal and professional lives. From offices, agencies, and schools to supermarkets and subways, the social transactions of our lives are going *digital*, and at a rapid pace. Yet, while computer ownership is increasing, the *Digital Divide* – the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' – is barely closing. As our society increasingly conducts its services, schooling, and even socializing online, the *Digital Divide* is being re-defined and expanded to include many more factors, including online skills and autonomy and freedom of access, which contribute to greater *digital literacy* and *equality*.<sup>1</sup>

So, we ask ourselves: what does this

expanding digital landscape mean for an adult ESL program?

It's widely accepted that computer-based instruction provides both benefits and challenges for adult ESL instruction and programs. It can motivate learning, build self-esteem, address different learning styles, and develop study skills. It also has the potential to transform learning as it helps to nurture community building through collaboration and inspire new ways of dealing with life's challenges. Experience has also shown us that integrating technology can create significant hurdles for a diverse population of learners and instructors with varying technical abilities, interests, and needs. Add also to the list of hurdles: content accessibility<sup>2</sup> and reliability, meaningful and relevant usage, and equipment availability and cost.

At the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP), we provide adult ESL instruction within the context of life skill objectives, recognizing for over two decades – in principle and in practice – that technology skills are crucial to surviving in the modern world. The focus, at first, was to increase access to computers and provide meaningful activities for language learning.

In 1989, REEP established its first computer lab offering technology-based language instruction, which has since been incorporated into every class's weekly schedule. In 1999, we consolidated years of lessons learned and best practices for integrating technology in adult ESL instruction in *Technology and the ESL Classroom: Equipping Students to Function in the Modern World*.<sup>3</sup> This publication remains relevant today and offers guiding questions and practical solutions for program managers, trainers, and teachers who are trying to develop technology integration strategies.

As we continue to focus on equipping our students with the necessary skills to participate in their communities, how can we adapt as life skills increas-

ingly go online?

As true today as it was in 1989 and 1999, we believe that using computer-based tools effectively in adult ESL in-

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*Teacher enthusiasm, comfort level, skill sets, and willingness to lead others in tech use are crucial to creating a positive computer experience for students.*

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struction depends on how well we align technology integration with our program philosophy, life skills curriculum, and accepted best practices. Therefore, teacher enthusiasm, comfort level, skill sets, and willingness to lead others in tech use are crucial to creating a positive computer experience for our students, and one that reflects the changing reality in which those life skills transpire.

The REEP Technology Curriculum was developed in 2005 with professional development in mind and as a complement to our ESL Curriculum for Adults. The Technology Curriculum assists in planning for weekly computer lab instruction, blending basic computer, word processing, and Internet navigation skills instruction with TESOL methodologies. As well, our computer labs offer teachers and students a diverse inventory of language software to support instruction in an environment conducive to a communicative approach. To support self-directed learning, we offer an Open Lab for students every Friday evening, and our website REEPworld.org provides free interactive lessons for beginning level students as well as a growing list of language practice websites. Classes regularly take fieldtrips to the local library where they can access a computer lab. Furthermore, teachers receive a technology orientation and can participate in monthly technology sessions, regular tech-focus meetings, an annual technology exploration work-

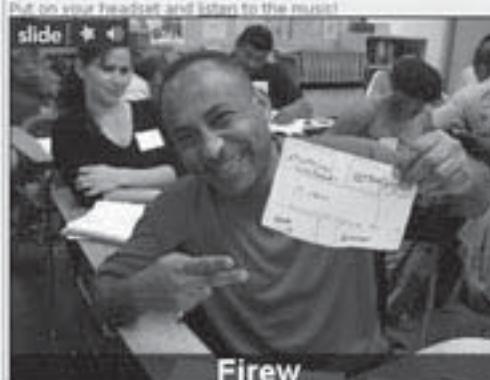
shop, and individual coaching.

Providing professional development to a part-time staff, across multiple sites, with staggered schedules, is challenging, to say the least. Not unlike most adult ESL programs, we must constantly stretch our ability to share practical ideas and deliver training in a timely and cost-effective manner.

To this end, the rapid pace of change on the Internet can work to our advantage as we try to adapt our practice and program operations to an increasingly *online* world. The advent of Web 2.0 tools – in particular, the *wiki* – has brought about a major paradigm shift on the Internet toward collaborative and democratic usage, with the added benefits of a user-friendly interface, security controls, and low- to no-cost registration for educators. With just word-processing skills, users can manage a wiki as both a platform for and portal to learning. Two example wiki hosting services are *PBWiki* and *Wetpaint*, both of which offer support specific to educators and technology integration in instruction.<sup>4</sup>

Wiki usage is gradually increasing at REEP within instruction, professional development activities, and program operations.<sup>5</sup> Some teachers use a wiki to showcase student-led projects and presentations online. Others have posted materials for collaborative assignments. In one instance, a teacher developed a repository of links for self-directed study to be done outside of the classroom, responding to students' needs for differentiated learning, links to community information, and even requests for English music videos. These first forays into wiki usage have motivated students to participate in online communities of learning. We have seen that wikis have the potential to deliver, support, and enhance instruction. If we provide meaningful activities that are relevant to the roles students play in their lives, wikis can also serve to extend and personalize learning, and begin to develop the participatory skills needed for students' community involvement both online and offline.

In most cases, however, teachers at REEP are getting their first taste of using



Put on your headphones and listen to the music!

slide \* ▶

These Friends of Mine by Rosie Thomas

These friends of mine live their lives  
Spend their time, hoping to find  
But who they are and how they are made  
They may be there, hope you find your way  
These friends of mine, they have wives  
They work hard to live and write  
And when they laugh, it makes me high  
To take a trip ten thousand miles before they fly  
These friends of mine, they feel alone  
When the shows are over, don't know where to go  
In Philadelphia at Christmas time  
They question those, wonder why they try  
And when the show is over  
How I hope that they discover the joy that they bring  
And I hope they remember this bond we have together  
And oh, they love to sing  
These friends of mine, they are from New York  
There were raised in Michigan  
They don't know things, they don't hold hands  
They guard their hands the best they can  
And when the show is over  
How I hope that they discover the joy that they bring  
And I hope they remember this bond we have together  
Oh, they love to sing, they sure love to sing  
Maybe I needed this time to be reminded for myself  
Maybe I needed this time to be reminded for myself  
How I love to sing.

Firew

Slide.com is a free tool that puts music to a slideshow. REEP students took pictures of each other on the first day of class and the teacher embedded the slideshow on a free wiki in time to view it during their first computer lab class. (photo courtesy of REEP Program)

a wiki through professional development activities, which plant the seed for use in instruction. They access self-directed tutorials, which are created to support their instructional needs or develop their technical skills. In March, we launched two pilot projects that involve teacher collaboration with staff using wikis: an online reflective practice group and a portal to local community services and information, such as job applications and government assistance forms.

Whether it be through wikis, email, discussion forums, chats, surveys, web-quests, blogs, podcasts, Google apps, social networking sites, or countless other free tools, by integrating more online activity in instruction and program operations we can help to nurture the skills our students need for more meaningful and relevant participation in an ever-changing world, both online and offline. ■

## Endnotes

1 Myth About the Digital Divide. Brian L. Hawkins and Diana G. Oblinger. EDUCAUSE Review, vol. 41, no. 4 (July/August 2006): 12–13 Available online at: <http://connect.educause.edu>

Hargittai, E. (2007). The Digital Divide and What To Do About It. In D.C. Jones (Ed.), New Economy Handbook. San Diego, CA: Academic Press. <http://www.webuse.org/file?id=digital-divide-and-what-to-do-about-it>

2 Lower-Literacy Users. Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox, March 14, 2005. <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20050314.html>

3 Technology and the ESL Classroom: Equipping Students to Function in the Modern World. (1999). The Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP), published by the Spring Institute for International Studies. <http://eric.ed.gov>

4 <http://pbwiki.com/>, <http://www.wetpaint.com>. A brief video by Common Craft explaining wikis is available on Teacher Tube: [http://www.teachertube.com/view\\_video.php?viewkey=51aeb480ecbd988cd8cc](http://www.teachertube.com/view_video.php?viewkey=51aeb480ecbd988cd8cc)

5 Examples of REEP wikis can be found by visiting the Student Links page within REEPWorld.org for Students.

## Websites of Interest

REEP World: <http://www.leepworld.org>  
Larry Ferlazzo's Websites of the Day for Teaching ELL, ESL, & EFL:

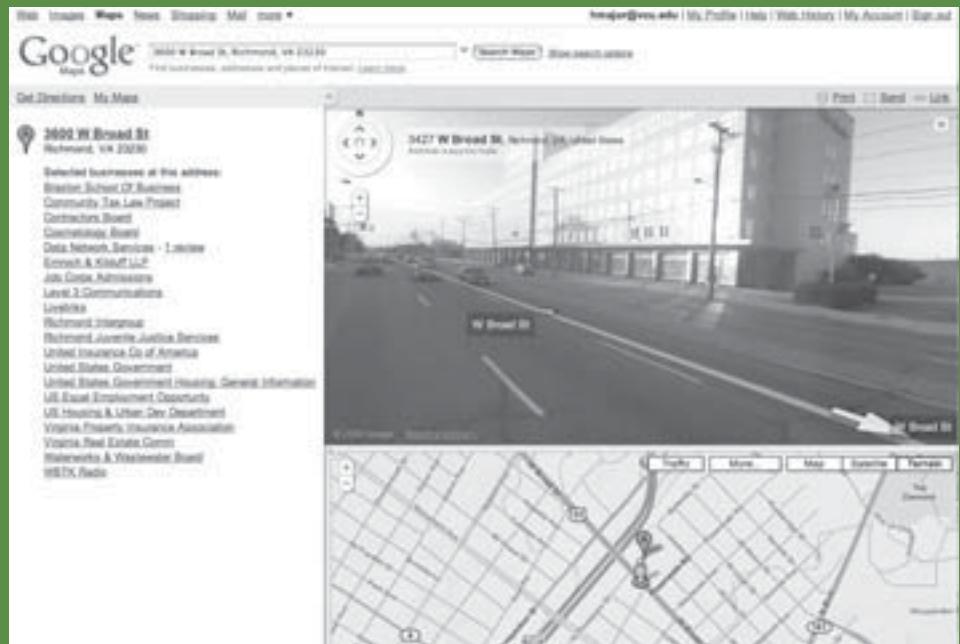
<http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org>  
Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN): <http://www.otan.dni.us>  
OTAN's Web 2.0 Tools in Adult Education wiki: <http://webtwo pointohinadulted.wikispaces.com>

Classroom 2.0 wiki:  
<http://wiki.classroom20.com>

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# The Magic of Google

by Lauren Ellington



In these days of budget cuts and inflation, free resources are of even more importance to the effectiveness and survival of adult literacy programs. One such is what I like to call the Magic of Google. According to Google's website, "Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." Not only can you access the world's information easily, but you can also use it to help make your own information universally accessible to your program and students and make information more useful for you.

## Google Search

<http://www.google.com>

Google Search is the most widely used search engine in the world with 59.3% of all Internet searches being done through Google as of May 2008. This number has steadily grown each year since Google was founded in September 1998.

Not only can you plug in a search phrase, such as "adult literacy lesson plans," but you can type in dictionary definitions with the phrase "define" before the word you would like to define,

e.g. "define androgogy." You can also do complicated calculations, such as  $5^*9+(\sqrt{10})^3=$ , by just typing into the search engine box. Check out <http://www.google.com/help/features.html> for

a list of types of searches.

## Google Docs

<http://docs.google.com>

Google Docs allows you to create and share documents, presentations, and spreadsheets online. No more need for pricey versions of Word, Powerpoint, or Excel! What makes this Google product so wonderful for your program is the ability to share files with your colleagues and students easily over the Internet. You can upload files that you have already created or just create new ones through Google Docs. Google also has an extensive collection of templates to help you get started. You can upload a file that you have on your home computer and then later access it at work on your work computer. This article was begun on my work computer and saved to my Google Docs. I was then able to work on it at home and, finally, access the final version at work, all through Google Docs. No zip drive needed! Google Docs really makes sharing and collaborating a breeze.

With the ability to invite individuals to view your files or keep them private, you can easily complete that collaborative writing project with your students or send a document to all of your staff for review and comment. To learn more about Docs and take a tour, go to: <http://www.google.com/google-d-s/tour1.html>.

## Gmail

<http://www.gmail.com>

Gmail is Google's powerful email client. Not only do you have less spam, but Gmail makes organizing your emails much more user-friendly by using labels and displaying emails and their replies as conversations. Gmail is Internet-based email, which means that you won't have to change your email address when your cable company gets sold again. It also gives you the ability to access your information from any Internet connection.

Gmail allows the ability to create multiple email addresses and have them all enter one inbox. This way, you can manage your personal and professional emails all in one location! To learn more about Gmail, go to: <http://mail.google.com/mail/help/about.html>.

## Reader

<http://reader.google.com>

Think of Reader as a newspaper that brings you only the stories that you want to see, when you want to see them. Reader is an RSS feed aggregator (RSS stands

for Really Simple Syndication) that brings all of your news and blog content into one, easy-to-read format. All you have to do is tell it which blogs or news sites you'd like to read; this can usually be done through your browser while you are on a website by choosing Bookmarks or

Favorites and then selecting Subscribe. If a website has an RSS feed, Reader can bring that content to you!

To watch a tutorial video about Reader, go to: <http://www.youtube.com/GoogleReaderHelp> and read the Getting Started tutorial at: <http://www.google.com/support/reader/bin/answer.py?answer=113517>.

## Calendar

### <http://calendar.google.com>

Google Calendar is the last online calendar that you will ever need. You have the ability to create as many separate calendars as you need, so perhaps you have one for personal use and one for work use that display in different colors to allow you to easily tell what's what. Calendar is shareable, which makes it ideal for groups/organizations, families, and classes. Like Google's other features, Calendar is available from any computer with an Internet connection so you can always check what's next on your schedule.

## Blogger

### <http://www.blogger.com>

Blogger is, you guessed it, Google's blogging application. Blogs are like online journals that allow the world to see what you want to share. Blogger makes it easy for anyone to set up a blog and get going. It is very user-friendly and requires no special skills: if you can type, you can blog. Teachers around the country are using Blogger to create blogs for use in their classrooms. Students are making blogs, teachers are making blogs. For some wonderful ideas for how to use blogs in the educational setting, take a look at the graphic included here: <http://www.edtechpost.ca/gems/matrix2.gif>. If you'd like to learn more about how to create a blog, check out BloggerHelp's Channel on YouTube (another Google product, by the way) at: <http://www.youtube.com/BloggerHelp>.

## Sites

### <http://sites.google.com>

If blogging isn't quite the thing for you, you can still have a presence on the web with Google Sites. Never has it been

easier to create not just a webpage but an entire website! You can also use Sites collaboratively with your classroom, giving students the ability to create and publish content. Privacy is available with settings to make your site available to just yourself, a group, or the entire world. Sites also offers the use of templates to make it easier to get up and running with your website. I even use Sites in my trainings. Look here to see a training site that I created in about 15 minutes at: <http://sites.google.com/site/valrctechtraining/>. If you can use a word processor, you can use Sites. To learn more, go to: <http://www.google.com/sites/overview.html>.

## Translate

### <http://translate.google.com>

Google Translate can help you make contact with others who do not speak English. If you have a new student to your program who has no English skills at all, Translate can be an initial lifeline. Translate currently has the ability to translate 34 languages other than English, including Vietnamese, Hindi, and Croatian. Translate allows you to translate from or into English; you can also do translations between other languages. Not all translators are 100% accurate, so if you feel that you know a better translation than the one offered, Google puts in the ability to easily send that feedback straight to them. So, sige, at makakuha ng pagsasalin (that's go ahead and get translating in Filipino)!

## Maps and Earth

### <http://maps.google.com> and

### <http://earth.google.com>

Google Maps has made getting directions and finding locations so much easier. Not only can you get directions to and from a location that you've searched, but you can search around the location for businesses, you can save the location to your own list called My Maps, or you can send the location through email to someone else. Google has also introduced street view to many locations: perhaps you might see your house on the Google Map. If you search for "3600 W. Broad St, Richmond, VA" and select street view,

you can even see the building where the Resource Center is housed. You can also choose to see the map as a satellite view or a terrain map. And the feature that I love best about Google Maps is the traffic view, so I can find my way around that big traffic jam on my way home. To learn more about Maps, go to: <http://maps.google.com/support/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=68259>.

Google Earth is like Maps on steroids! You can adventure through any country in the world and even explore the earth's oceans. Using guided tours from such reputable sources as National Geographic, you can open videos that give more information about the areas being explored. You can even go back in time and see satellite projections of what a location looked like years before. To learn more about what Earth unveils about the world, go to: <http://earth.google.com/tour.html>. Please note that this is an application that requires downloading.

## Goog-411

### <http://www.google.com/goog411>

Goog-411 is Google's completely free 411 information service. No more paying exorbitant prices for information! Just dial 1-800-466-4411 from any phone, give your location (or type a zip code), identify the business name or type, and then select from the options given.

## Labs

### <http://labs.google.com>

As you've probably realized, Google is constantly working on new projects. You can find out about and get in on the testing of these cutting edge projects through Google Labs. Some current projects are Google Mars, Google Moderator, and Google Sets. Once you are more comfortable with Google, you might find it interesting to check out what's on the horizon.

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*Lauren Ellington is VALRC Specialist for Online Training and Learning Disabilities.*

# Blending Classroom and Online Learning, Blending Local and Centralized Support

(continued from page 7)

ditional learner. The computer is a great learning tool with much to add to learning, but the computer is not for everyone.

*JG: Whether learners are intent on pure distance learning without classroom or tutor help or embrace the blended approach, we aren't putting all of our eggs in one basket as we manage their study plans. If online learning isn't doing the trick, then we recommend that eLearn clients try enrolling in classes and we often ask the local program to get in touch and offer services. Likewise, we have many online learners who have been frustrated by the classroom. This kind of flexibility keeps the client flush with learning opportunities and, hopefully, making forward progress.*

RJS: I have eliminated some frustration by only recommending students to eLearnVA after I have spent a good deal of time interacting with them. Generally, when a student has problems using the online educational programs themselves, it is because the student didn't read the directions. What I have found works best to address this is to sit with the student in front of the computer and ask her to repeat what she had been doing. As we go through the work, step-by-step, that's when the student will admit, "Oh, I didn't read that!" I have found that when students go into a new application or program, it is best to walk through the program with them; that way we both learn about the program and how to avoid any pitfalls.

*JG: During the intake process with potential eLearners, I often explain to them that their mentor is going to be waiting in the wings to provide support and feedback, but, essentially, "the computer is your tutor." The responsibility is primarily on the learners and the resources are at their fingertips. Most of your learners' questions can be answered by going back into their email records, re-reading instructions from you or on the educational websites, filling in gaps in their knowledge with GED Connection videos, and, in the near future, post-*

*ing their question to a forum site or blog to receive suggestions from their peers. It's a tough adjustment for some of our clients to make, but it's also rewarding.*

*ing, seeking second and third opinions on their education, we want to make sure that they get the best advice.*

RJS: One of our (1001) goals in the new program is to make sure that the tutors who work with learners are familiar with eLearn Virginia. There needs to be a more intimate association made between the tutor and eLearnVA in order for tutors to be able to converse about the program and the learning opportunity with students. The tutor has to believe in the

**"The mentor is the difference in the eLearnVA program."**

No matter how much or little time I spend with the enrolled individual, the eLearnVA program is worth its weight in gold! We are a small program with very limited resources and eLearnVA provides our learners with such a variety of learning opportunities: all kinds of skills are extended.

The mentor is the difference in the eLearnVA program. Students know that there is someone who will answer a question about their work. When some students have tried other online learning opportunities in the past, they felt abandoned! In fact, that negative experience can turn some students off when eLearnVA is first mentioned to them. Knowing that the mentor is there to help when help is needed makes the difference.

*JG: To make sure that the teacher, tutor, mentor, and program manager are all on the same page about each learner's goals and progress, eLearn provides a secure online database. The mentor updates each student's profile with activity time and comments as needed and the local program can pull up that information at any time. Just like our learners, we're not using technology to solve our problems. We're addressing community needs from multiple angles, with multi-media and multiple perspectives. As our learners become more discern-*

benefits, just as staff would, in order for the program to work for the students and the organization. Tutors need to have the opportunity to participate in online learning (such as online tutor training). Once they have had a successful experience, the tutors' personal enthusiasm for online learning will be contagious and students will be more likely to expand their horizons for personal learning.

*JG: Supporting an adult learner's online education experience makes all the difference in the success rate. We hope our learners will be at least somewhat self-directed, but they rarely start out that way. Regular emails and/or phone calls from eLearn's online mentors are crucial, but it is the teamwork, or net effect of the support from the local program and learners' relationships with their mentors, that we see as the most significant aspect of our approach. Additional people offering encouragement can really propel adult learners toward their goals.*

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Rhoda-Jo Stress serves as program manager of Adult Literacy on the Middle Peninsula. She is a former program manager of Literacy Volunteers of Gloucester, Inc. Jason Guard is the GED Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center; he manages the eLearn Virginia program.

# PLUGGED IN

(continued from page 5)

crosoft Certified Desktop Support Technician (MCDST) training, or taking the Customer Service Representative (CSR) training. The intent of this approach is to maximize individual learner potential based upon the unique needs of learners at varying skill levels.



## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

Throughout the PlugGED In program, learners will engage in activities that emphasize the development of essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, which are broken down into four integrated areas:

1. **Life and Career Skills**, including skills such as flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, and productivity and accountability
2. **Learning and Innovation Skills**, including skills such as creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, and communication and collaboration
3. **Information, Media, and Technology Skills**, including skills such as information literacy, media literacy, and information communications technology (ICT) literacy
4. **Core Subjects and Themes** such as reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as important subjects such as financial and health literacy

Initially, learners will be provided with a framework for these skills that integrates the five essential knowledge areas from the GED curriculum. Then, learners will begin applying these skills as they engage in collaborative group activities and capstone projects; participate in online communities, such as blogs, dis-

cussion groups, and social networks; and complete individual digital portfolios using the *LinkedIn* networking platform.

## Capstone Projects

Capstone projects will help learners integrate and apply knowledge and strategies learned from the PlugGED In core content. To successfully provide learners with the needed skills, Phase One will include a mini-capstone project. Learners will explore and investigate issues that challenge the local community or relate to future jobs in the targeted workplace environment. For the mini-capstone, a topic will be selected by the entire group of learners; then, small groups will work collaboratively to complete a project related to this topic. This approach allows for high levels of scaffolding and modeling by the program instructor. Learners will also develop a better understanding of how different perspectives can influence solutions to the same problem as each group presents different results.

For the Phase Two final capstone project, each team will focus on a different topic of interest, following the same process used in completing the mini-capstone but working with less oversight from instructors. Additionally, each group will prepare and deliver a formal presentation of their project. PlugGED In staff and learners, personnel from partner businesses, and other stakeholders may attend these presentations. Capstone projects will require learners to:

1. Identify an issue that is a challenge to the local community or related to future jobs in the targeted workplace environment(s).
2. Locate information from multiple resources and in multiple formats related to the identified challenge.
3. Critically evaluate information to determine that which is the most relevant, reliable, and accurate.
4. Synthesize information from multiple perspectives across multiple formats into a clear and concise presentation that will be delivered in both textual and oral formats.
5. Communicate the results, addressing the challenge with a strategic plan.

## Conclusion

The PlugGED In curriculum was created to help address the significant challenges facing both adult learners and the field of adult basic education in Virginia. Since the project's inception last spring, these challenges have become even more pronounced and the task of addressing them given more urgency by the bleak economic realities currently facing the United States and the world.

To effectively meet the grave challenges facing our nation, it is essential that every adult be prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century by being provided opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in today's complex global economy.

The students in this first PlugGED In class have been given this opportunity and, over the course of the next six months, will embark together on a challenging educational journey that, by July, will give them new skills and new experiences and prepare them for entry-level work at a local tech sector company like Northrop Grumman or further education at a college like SVCC in nearby Richlands. One day, perhaps, as the success of the PlugGED In program spreads beyond Southwest Virginia, all adult Virginians will be given the same opportunity.

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*Dr. Richard Sebastian is Project Manager for PlugGED In and eLearn Virginia and Instructional Technology Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.*



**U.S. Senator James Webb speaks to PlugGED In student Kenneth McGlothin (top left). Above, PlugGED In students Brenda Stigge, Callie Fuller, Dayton Musick, and Christie Hartsock prepare to share their stories at the PlugGED In Kick-off Celebration in Lebanon.**  
**(photos courtesy of Dreama Campbell)**

# The Global Achievement Gap

written by Tony Wagner / reviewed by Hillary Major

Tony Wagner begins *The Global Achievement Gap* with “some facts we need to face” about education in the United States. Among them:

- The U.S. high school graduation rate is about 70 percent, with a smaller percentage of students graduating in the U.S. than in Denmark, Japan, Poland, or Italy.
- A post-secondary education is required for “an estimated 85 percent of current jobs and almost 90 percent of the fastest-growing and best-paying jobs” (p. xx).
- Two-thirds of high school graduates are not “college ready,” and 40 percent of all college entrants are required to take remedial courses.
- In surveys of employers, neither today’s high school nor college graduates are considered to be well-prepared for the workplace.

Wagner quotes Thomas Friedman’s *The World is Flat* when he explains that, in the global economy, any blue or white collar job “that can be broken down into a routine … can now be exported to other countries” (p. xiv). After interviewing numerous employers to research the skills needed in today’s workplace, Wagner presents a list of “Seven Survival Skills” that he believes are vital for students, workers, and citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, stressing that these skill sets are increasingly expected by all employers:

- Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving
- Collaboration across Networks and Leading by Influence
- Agility and Adaptability
- Initiative and Entrepreneurialism
- Effective Oral and Written Communication
- Accessing and Analyzing Information
- Curiosity and Imagination

After describing the need to equip all learners with these seven skills, Wagner describes why “even our best schools” are not meeting this need today. He takes a closer look at both troubled and outwardly successful schools, discovering that

most fall woefully short in the teaching of critical thinking and communication and barely address skills such as initiative, adaptability, or collaboration. Instruction hasn’t changed, but workplaces have. (Schools aren’t failing, Wagner quips; rather, they are obsolete.) Wagner attributes some of the blame to how we evaluate learning, criticizing most American standardized tests for rewarding rote memorization rather than application and repetition over problem-solving. He finds that other countries’ tests tend to incorporate far fewer multiple choice questions and demand instead “real world” applications. Wagner finds that most American classrooms need more academic rigor even while questioning what constitutes rigor. “In today’s world,” he writes, “it’s no longer how much you know that matters; it’s what you can do with what you know” (p. 111). Wagner also spends considerable time discussing the different motivations of a younger generation of learners.

Wagner spent ten years as a high school teacher, two as a K-8 principal, and several working for nonprofits including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Wagner’s personal story will seem familiar to many educators. He acknowledges how unprepared he felt after completing his undergraduate teacher preparation program and describes both his nervousness facing a principal’s observation as a new teacher and his disappointment in the feedback process afterward. These experiences inform Wagner’s arguments when he emphasizes how important professional development is for both teachers and administrators and how rare opportunities for meaningful PD can be in a typical school year. Wagner is a strong proponent of using video to record instruction and bring teachers together to provide meaningful feedback for each other. He anticipates the recent National Staff Development Council report by noting that teachers in most countries outside of the U.S. spend considerably more of their working time in planning,

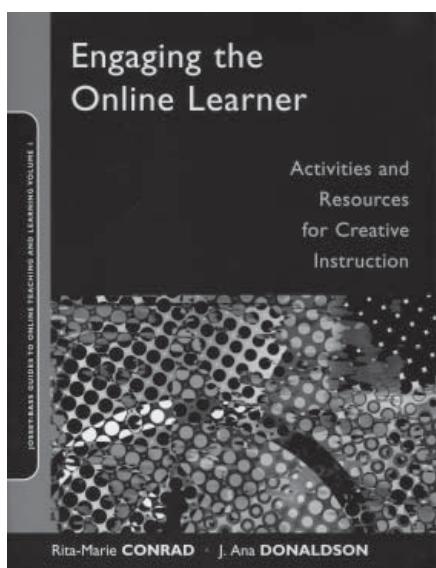
group planning, and other development activities and that these teacher investment strategies seem to be paying off.

Toward the end of the book, Wagner describes several model programs. One of these is High Tech High, where instruction, often led by teamed teachers, is informed by the inquiry process and focuses on facilitating project-based learning. Students research current events, create Rube Goldberg devices to illustrate the laws of physics, and write in-depth position papers as part of a mock trial accusing Harry Truman of war crimes. Students also intern in the community and are responsible for creating products ranging from a business manual for an engineering firm to an interactive museum display to a storage and shelving system for a local nonprofit. While Wagner mostly profiles newer high school programs, most can point to measurable positive results that are relevant to adult education. Wagner challenges educators at every level to think more deeply about the impact technological, economic, and social changes have (or should have) on schools and classrooms.

Many of the educational solutions Wagner proposes in *The Global Achievement Gap* would require serious commitments from multiple stakeholders; in fact, Wagner believes this dialogue is critical in addressing an ongoing crisis. Some of his recommendations, however, can be implemented with little cost at the classroom level: “I have consistently found,” writes Wagner, “that the kinds of questions students are asked and the extent to which a teacher challenges students to explain their thinking or expand on their answers are reliable indicators of intellectual rigor in a class” (p. 53). Wagner makes a compelling case for change in the ways we teach, think about teaching and learning, and evaluate learning gains; he aims for a book that will speak to (and bring together) educators, business leaders, and policy makers. *The Global Achievement Gap* is a volume worth reading and sharing.

# Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction

written by Rita-Marie Conrad and J. Ana Donaldson / reviewed by Judy Zimmerman



For the last twenty years or so, American secondary and higher education has experienced a paradigm shift that emphasizes a learner-centered approach to education. Teachers now ask questions about how students *learn* and how to *engage* them in the process of learning, rather than focusing on how to *teach* students. Another paradigm shift taking place is the introduction of technology and the myriad ways it can be integrated into teaching and learning. Technology, and more specifically online learning, is revolutionizing the ways in which we deliver our strategies to help students learn. The more technology evolves and our finesse in using it grows, the more we need to think about how our students learn within the realm of technology and how to engage them in the learning process.

Long-time professionals of online learning Rita-Marie Conrad and J. Ana Donaldson address these very issues in their book, *Engaging the Online Learner*. For some readers, the authors' coupling of "engaged learning" and "online learning" may seem contradictory. The interface of an online course might seem destined for passive consumption and disengaged, even alienated learning in an online environment. But the authors argue that success in online courses demands that students "be active knowledge-generators who assume responsibility for constructing and managing their own learning experience" (p. 7). Towards that end, the book offers a structured approach to developing independent, active learning spaces where teachers serve as creative "activity architects" (p. 12).

The book is divided into two parts, the first one providing a brief theoretical background of engaged learning, including a helpful checklist of its key elements in an online environment (p. 8). A framework of "phases of engagement" in online learning (p. 11) is also presented, along with descriptions of each of the four phases and the attending roles of the

learner and instructor in each phase. Correlated to these – the phases of engagement and the progressive roles of student and teacher – is a basic framework for organizing activities along the continuum of engagement (pp. 14-15). Using these constructs, online instructors can develop or plan activities appropriate to each phase and thus help learners, with time, take responsibility for their learning. As the authors note, "engaged learning does not simply happen. It requires 'architectural engineering' by the instructor" (p. 13). There is also a brief discussion on how to choose appropriate online tools and a useful discussion on incorporating assessment.

Part II, which contains the bulk of the book, offers 50 or so practical activities collected from teachers throughout the U.S. The activities are widely adaptable games and icebreakers arranged according to levels of facility and models of engagement. For example, the first activities provide games for learning basic skills such as mousing and elementary principles of library research before progressing to activities designed towards developing motivated, independent, and engaged learners. Similarly, the exercises ascend from "authentic activities" to "reflective activities" and finally to "learner-led activities." Each exercise is organized according to task, objective, author, and method, followed by instructions and the activity author's note. Some contributors even included the potential pitfalls of an activity. Most of the exercises are clearly presented and easily adaptable.

Whether you are teaching web-based or web-augmented classes, *Engaging the Online Learner* should prove to be a useful resource. Overall, this slim volume is an easy read and a good reference book to have on hand.

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# PROGRESS

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In 2007-2008, Interface Media Group, a television, film, video production, and post-production company in Washington D.C., created eight videos for the Virginia Literacy Foundation to use in the Resource Center's Online Tutor Training Workshop (<http://adultliteracytutor.blogspot.com/>). This in-kind contribution is worth over \$9,600 in filming and editing. The videos follow a tutor and student as they go through the steps of creating a language experience story. The actors, all amateurs, were two

Americorps volunteers from the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia, and the images in the opening and closing credits used actual tutors and students from the organization.

Each video is short (from 30 seconds to 2 minutes in length) so that volunteers with outdated computer equipment can still easily view them. The LEA steps illustrated by each video are:

1. Preliminary discussion;
2. Activating prior knowledge and using a K-W-L chart;
3. Further discussion after the student learns more about the topic;
4. Creating a story using a graphic organizer;
5. Dictating the story;
6. Reading the story using echo reading;
7. Using word skills activities; and
8. Transferring reading strategies.

The eight videos are accompanied with a transcript, samples of graphic organizers, and detailed information about the Language Experience Approach (LEA). Designed for volunteer tutors, they can be used by adult education teachers as well. You may also view the videos at this YouTube link:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/vsanbor>

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