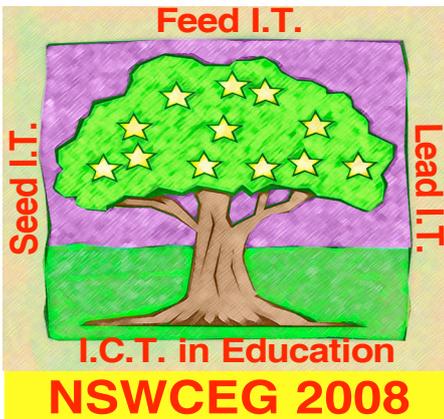


# NEWSLETTER

Nsw Computer Education Group Conference issue

Term 2 2008



## The 24<sup>th</sup> NSWCEG State Conference

This years state conference will be held at Panthers, Newcastle on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> July to Monday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2008.

*Check the website for updates and further information*

[www.nswceg.org.au](http://www.nswceg.org.au)

### Professional Development Courses

Again check the website for further updates and information.

#### D-Link WiFi Course

This course was postponed. New dates will be available shortly.

We will also be running this course on Saturday 5th July in the lead up to the State Conference.

#### 21st Century Leadership in Technology

*This is a repeat of the 2007 workshops that was so well received. Don't miss it this time.*

**When:** Saturday 7th June and Sunday 8th June

**Where:** Mercure Hotel, 106 Hassall St. Rosehill NSW 2142 (Paramatta)

**Time:** 9am - 4pm

#### Critical Technology Issues for School Leaders

A two day workshop With Susan Brooks Young, to be held in Sydney. A Brochure is enclosed in this mailing.

## Web-Based Tools for Educators: Bringing Collaboration Alive

### Susan Brooks-Young

The internet was once a static resource where users visited sites to find information controlled by webmasters who created and maintained online pages. Recently developed web-based applications, often referred to as Web 2.0 tools, now enable internet users to find information and make contributions to the sites they visit. The level of interactivity is controlled by the webmaster and ranges from limited, monitored comments to full editing rights for all site visitors. Why do educators need to concern themselves with this shift from passive to active use of the internet?

U.S. employers report that new entrants into the workforce are woefully unprepared to meet the demands of today's jobs. According to a recent survey of 431 human resources officials across the nation, new employees must have two skill sets. The "3 R's" are still fundamental, but survey participants view applied skills such as team work, critical thinking, and communication as equally, or even more important. The results of this survey, published by the Conference Board, are available in a report entitled "Are They Really Ready to Work?" (<http://www.conference-board.org/publications/describe.cfm?id=1218>).

Although Web 2.0 tools such as blogs (e.g. MySpace) and video sharing sites (e.g., YouTube) have received a great deal of bad press, for every problematic tool, there are dozens that educators can use safely and productively. Web 2.0 tools are a perfect vehicle for teaching fundamental literacy skills in environments that support collaboration, problem-solving, and communication at levels that were difficult to achieve in the past. This column spotlights several of these tools.

#### Online surveys

While test scores, grades, and other academic assessments provide important information for teachers, less formal ongoing data collection is equally important when making instructional decisions. Teachers who conduct short surveys to assess students' prior knowledge about a topic or to gather student input about how an instructional unit is going are able to make adjustments in the content or design of a lesson when needed. But paper surveys can almost be more trouble than they're worth.

An easy, inexpensive way to gather this kind of information is by using web-based survey tools. Creating an online survey doesn't save time at first. You still need to develop and add questions. However, once a survey is created, data collection and analysis is a snap and existing surveys can be used again as-is or modified. Survey tool sites provide easy-to-use templates to guide

you through creating a variety of questions, administering the survey, and working with the results. Several reputable sites provide this service and each offers at least a limited free subscription.

Tools I use regularly include: SurveyMonkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com))

Zoomerang ([www.zoomerang.com](http://www.zoomerang.com))  
Add-A-Form ([www.addaform.com](http://www.addaform.com))

Because these surveys are web-based, students may access them from any internet-connected computer using a link provided by the teacher. The link can be posted on a class website or emailed to each student. Results are available just to the survey creator, unless s/he decides to make them visible to survey-takers.

Students may also use online survey tools to gather data for assignments and projects. In addition to being a vehicle for data collection, this provides an excellent opportunity to teach writing, mathematics, critical thinking and communication skills.

#### Wiki sites

A wiki is a website that allows visitors to add, remove, and edit content. Public wikis such as Wikipedia, a web-based encyclopedia, allow anyone to make changes and contributions. However, other wiki tools allow the wiki owner to limit visitors' ability to view and edit pages. Because a wiki is easy to build and maintain, some teachers are now using this tool for classroom sites rather than more traditional site-building tools. For example, elementary teacher Elise Mueller has created Portable C's Wikispace (<http://portablec.wikispaces.com/>) for her classroom in Bellingham, WA. Mueller protects each page on the wiki so that editing rights are restricted.

Teachers are also creating wikis for student use. Canadian mathematics teacher Darren Kuropatwa's students use wikis to create glossaries and collaborative solutions manuals. Here's a link to a wiki developed by his students last winter: <http://pc40s.pbwiki.com/>. This wiki is also password protected. It can be viewed by anyone, but editing is restricted to viewers who have the password. Students are able to access the wiki using any internet-connected computer, making it possible for them to make contributions or use it as a resource 24/7. Elementary teacher Sally Tippet's students [Staffordshire LEA (UK)] are using a wiki to write an interactive story called What Will Happen to Sylvia? The link is: <http://kingston.wikispaces.com/>.

eMail: [nswceg@ozemail.com.au](mailto:nswceg@ozemail.com.au)

Ph: 1-800 002 083

Fax: 1-800 002 085

There are several free wiki tools designed specifically for use by educators. Here are two of my favorites:

- pb wiki ([www.pbwiki.com](http://www.pbwiki.com))
- wikispaces (<http://www.wikispaces.com/>)

#### Web-based application suites

We're accustomed to using word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation programs that are installed on a hard drive. Web-based application suites make it possible for teachers and students to create, edit, and store these kinds of files online making files available anywhere you have internet access. Files may still be saved to a hard drive in case it's necessary to work without an online connection. Perhaps the most exciting feature of these web-based applications is the ability to invite specific individuals to view and edit your documents simultaneously. This means that invited collaborators are also able to view and work on documents anytime, anywhere.

There are at least four benefits to using these applications. First, software compatibility becomes a non-issue. It no longer matters what applications are installed on individual computers. Second, whether working on a personal computer, a school computer, or a borrowed computer all collaborators are able to access files simply by logging on. Third, the need to email updated files to other collaborators is eliminated because the most recent version is always available online. Several of these applications will even email a notification whenever a file is updated. Finally, collaborators are able to work on files without having to physically be in the same place at the same time. This is particularly useful for student groups working on long term assignments that used to require study group meetings outside the school day.

Three free web-based application suites I use are:

- Google Docs & Spreadsheets (<http://docs.google.com/>)
- ThinkFree (<http://www.thinkfree.com/>)
- Zoho (<http://www.zoho.com/>)

You may be wondering why I use more than one of these application suites. Primarily it's because each suite offers different programs, so I use a combination of the available applications.

Let's look at each suite individually.

#### Google Docs & Spreadsheets

Currently, Google Docs & Spreadsheets offers tools for web-based word processing and spreadsheet files. There is an online Help

Center (<http://docs.google.com/support/>), but experienced users of computer-based applications have little or no difficulty making the switch to the web-based tools. New documents are created with the click of a button and each individual user is provided online storage for up to 1000 documents and 100 spreadsheets.

Word processing documents may be edited and formatted using tabs found in a horizontal tool bar near the top of the screen. While there are some formatting limitations, most commonly used word processing features such as adding pictures, live links, and tables are available. It is possible to preview and print pages from here, but files may also be saved in a variety of formats (e.g., Word, Open Office, or PDF).

Spreadsheet documents are also edited and formatted using tabs in a horizontal tool bar. A nice feature offered here (that doesn't exist in Docs yet) is the ability to click on Discuss and engage in a live chat with other collaborators currently working on the document. Again, there are some limitations when compared to Excel, but all the basic features are available here.

Inviting collaborators for Docs and Spreadsheets is done by clicking on the Collaborate tab and entering individual email addresses. You have the option of allowing these people to view or edit the file and both applications allow you to review all revisions. Once a person has been invited to collaborate in one document, it's possible to invite him/her into additional documents by selecting his/her name from a drop-down list of your existing collaborators. Although you can publish your files to the web, or post them in a blog, it's not necessary and not publishing alleviates security concerns.

#### ThinkFree

ThinkFree offers three applications: word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation. An online tour is available as well as a support area. Once you've established an account, log in and click on My Office to access the applications. Whenever you create a new word processing or presentation file, you are offered two editing options, Quick and Power. Quick editing is fine for most basic use although it is not yet available for spreadsheets. Power editing requires downloading Java plug-ins onto your hard drive, but the end result is an environment that looks nearly identical to Office applications. Every user is permitted to store up to 1 GB of files.

Once a document has been created and

saved, click on the Share button to invite additional collaborators to view or co-author the document. Again, it's possible (but not necessary) to publish files on the web for anyone to view. Another nice feature of ThinkFree is that the file you're working on will be saved to your hard drive if the application quits unexpectedly.

#### Zoho

Zoho offers word processing, spreadsheet and presentation applications. The toolbars resemble Office applications, but there are differences that may take a few minutes to figure out. Most experienced Office users will not have difficulty doing this, and Help can be found in a Forum area. Like Google Docs & Spreadsheets and ThinkFree, users may share files with invited collaborators and save files on and off-line.

In addition to the applications mentioned above, Zoho also offers several other Productivity Tools and Utilities. For example, registered users have access to project management software, an online data base application, a simple polling program, and more. Creative teachers and students will find multiple ways to use these additional tools in classwork.

This column just begins to scratch the surface of useful Web 2.0 tools for teachers and students. If you'd like to learn more, please visit a wiki that I have created called Web Tools for Educators. I've posted a link to the wiki in the Resources section of my website at <http://sjbrooks-young.com/id13.html>.

When you access the wiki, click on the Today's Catholic Teacher article link in the Sidebar. All resources mentioned here are listed on that page. In addition, feel free to review other pages in the wiki that provide even more resources.

**Bio:** A former Catholic school teacher, Susan Brooks-Young spent 23 years as a teacher and administrator. She now works as a professional consultant and author. Her latest book is **Critical Technology Issues for School Leaders** (Corwin Press, 2006). Susan invites your comments at [SJBrooks@aol.com](mailto:SJBrooks@aol.com).

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Conference Keynote: Susan Brooks-Young

## Educating the MySpace Generation: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Come to School

We give lip-service to transforming classrooms by introducing tools and strategies that support 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and then balk at actual implementation. But how can we prepare our students to thrive in the Digital Age if we aren't prepared to challenge some basic assumptions about the role of education in a global society?

In this audience-participation keynote address, Susan Brooks-Young encourages educators to consider critical issues impacting today's schools by exploring three key questions:

- Is it our job to enthrall or to engage our students?
- Why do adults and students view technology in such different ways?
- Are mobile technologies distractors or 21<sup>st</sup> century tools for learning?

The talk concludes with a call for action based upon five specific steps audience members can start taking immediately to strengthen their own growth as a 21<sup>st</sup> century learner and educator and to provide support to their colleagues.



# Harnessing the Potential for Wikipedia in the Classroom

Susan Brooks-Young

Imagine you are offered two free sets of up-to-date encyclopedias for every student in your school, one for use in the classroom and one for the home. Aside from the obvious problem of classroom storage space, would you be tempted to accept this generous gift? Say that the encyclopedia is in electronic format on a CD-ROM or DVD, eliminating the need for book storage at school and making it backpack portable? Does the proposal become more appealing? Let's take this scenario one step further. You learn that the encyclopedia is Web-based, freely accessible both at school and home. In addition, it is updated nearly instantly when events such as the declassification of Pluto as a planet make paper or CD files outdated. What would you do?

In essence, this last example is what Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)) offers educators and students. But schools frequently shy away from Wikipedia, blocking access to the site. In addition, teachers and library media specialists often discourage student use of Wikipedia even when the site is accessible at school. What are the major objections to use of this site in schools? This column provides an overview of Wikipedia, highlights three major concerns expressed by educators and explores ways educators may use the site effectively.

## What Is Wikipedia?

One of several projects sponsored by the Wikimedia Foundation (<http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Home>), Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)) is an online encyclopedia. But unlike traditional encyclopedias authored and edited by paid staff, Wikipedia is a collaboratively written project that invites anyone to contribute entries. At this time, Wikipedia contains more than 7.5 million articles in 253 languages, making it the largest encyclopedia in history. The English edition of Wikipedia, which was launched on January 15, 2001, includes 1.84 million entries covering an increasingly diverse range of topics. In June 2007, the web site ranking service Alexa ([www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com)) rated Wikipedia the ninth most popular site on the web.

## How Does Wikipedia Work?

Wikipedia uses the MediaWiki platform, an open source online tool that allows virtually anyone to add to or edit the website's content. Original articles may only be posted by registered site members, but then can be edited by anyone who visits Wikipedia. There are two exceptions to these editing privileges. Individual entries may sometimes be locked to prevent open editing. For example, an article on a controversial topic will be protected to avoid inaccurate or biased modifications. And, as was the case with a school in Canada recently, users may lose editing privileges due to persistent online misbehavior such as intentionally vandalizing entries.

Registered members who contribute articles may publish under their own names, using pseudonyms, or anonymously. Contributors are often experts in their field, but this is not a requirement. The Wikipedia community has established the expectation that all writers will contribute unbiased work that is appropriately cited. When articles fall short of these expectations, the community

relies on peer-review and editing to bring sub-standard articles up to par.

Contributors and editors are sometimes called Wikipedians. More than 4 million volunteers worldwide assume a variety of tasks including posting their own work, making factual corrections in other articles, or cleaning up grammar and spelling mistakes. Some Wikipedians have the authority to remove pages that do not meet community expectations (usually related to presentation of biased information) or to block users who regularly vandalize entries. Disputes about content and/or editing are resolved through online discussions.

## *teachers and library media specialists worry about accuracy*

### Why Is Wikipedia Controversial?

Three major concerns are commonly expressed about Wikipedia. First and foremost, teachers and library media specialists worry about accuracy. There have been several well-publicized incidents in which articles included patently false statements. However, there are also studies showing that misinformation in Wikipedia articles is the exception, not the rule. For instance, in 2005 *Nature*, an international weekly journal of science ([www.nature.com](http://www.nature.com)), conducted a review of 42 online science articles from Wikipedia and from Encyclopedia Britannica. *Nature's* reviewers found that Wikipedia articles averaged about four inaccuracies each, while Britannica's average was three. Just eight serious mistakes were identified overall: four each in Wikipedia and Britannica articles. A few reviewers commented that some Wikipedia articles were more difficult to read, but that was attributed to poor writing quality rather than factual mistakes.

## *articles may be edited at any time*

A second objection to use of Wikipedia is the fact that articles may be edited at any time, creating discrepancies between the content that existed when an article was originally cited and later reading(s) of that same article. For example, shortly after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf region, references to the largest city in Louisiana were updated to mention Baton Rouge, not New Orleans. Wikipedians recommend circumventing this problem by including the date the article was accessed in the citation. With this information, teachers and other readers may access the article's history and view the cited version. By the same token, some educators view these quick updates as a strength, pointing out that Wikipedia users are not relying on old, inaccurate information.

The final major concern for many educators is whether or not the content of some articles is appropriate for youngsters to access and read. Wikipedians are firm in their resolve that unbiased articles will not be censored based on topic alone; however, they do recognize that some articles may not be appropriate for K-12 classrooms. Because of the site's design (entries are

accessed using a Search feature) in most instances where students find inappropriate material it is because they have intentionally used keywords that led to the article(s) in question. In these cases, Wikipedians suggest that adult supervision and instruction in acceptable use are the best strategies for insuring that students do not seek out unsuitable material.

Given these concerns, does Wikipedia have a place in the classroom?

### Strategies for Classroom Use

Despite the potential drawbacks, Wikipedia has a lot to offer teachers and students. Most schools cannot afford to provide the number of up-to-date encyclopedias needed to insure that all students have classroom and home access to resource materials, but Wikipedia makes this possible. Although the accuracy rate of contributions is slightly less than Encyclopedia Britannica, it is still respectably high. And, unlike errors made in print, mistakes in a Wikipedia article can be corrected in the time it takes to type the revisions.

Wikipedia can be used to teach students a variety of Information Literacy skills. Let's take a look at reliability from a different angle. When I was a student, my teachers did not permit students to cite encyclopedia articles in term paper bibliographies. We were taught that an encyclopedia was a starting point, but that we needed to verify the facts presented there in at least two independent resources, which *could* be cited. Students today also need to learn healthy skepticism about the materials they read, understanding that all sources must be verified. Allow students to begin with Wikipedia, but insist that they explore further to find confirmation of the facts presented. The best-written Wikipedia articles include extensive citations that can easily be verified, but what can students learn from articles that are not well-cited?

## *Students today also need to learn healthy skepticism about the materials they read, understanding that all sources must be verified.*

Andy Carvin, founding editor of the Digital Divide Network ([www.digitaldivide.net/](http://www.digitaldivide.net/)), suggests that teachers lead students through the following exercise. Divide students into small groups and allow each group to choose an article of interest to them. Ask each group to read its article, identify facts that need to be checked, and then verify these facts. When fact-checking is complete, create a classroom Wikipedia account and help students post their findings on the talk page for the article and to make appropriate edits. This activity helps students acquire skills for evaluating the accuracy of all kinds of text-based information, not just Wikipedia.

Teachers may also want to have their students write and publish original Wikipedia articles. Wikipedians are willing to help teachers set up a classroom account (instead of individual student accounts) that can be used to post student articles. Remember that the same community writing requirements apply to students: they are expected to



contribute articles that are unbiased and well-cited. They may also publish using a classroom pseudonym or anonymously to protect their privacy.

Not comfortable allowing students to contribute to the

site? Even when students' use of Wikipedia is confined to searching for existing articles, make this an opportunity to teach effective search strategies and instruct students on how they should handle problems related to accessing inappropriate material. Nothing replaces adult supervision. As mentioned earlier in this column, students who encounter articles about controversial topics have typically used specific keywords to find the entries. Educators and parents need to have a plan for how they will deal with this behavior. Students may also accidentally encounter a vandalized article that hasn't been caught and fixed by a Wikipedian. Take the time to explain how you want students to handle this problem. The best strategy is to let the closest adult know right away so s/he can report it or revert back to an earlier version (registered members may do this).

Educators who are willing to give Wikipedia a try, but are nervous about granting students full access to the site may prefer using the 2007 Wikipedia Selection (<http://schools-wikipedia.org/>). This free collection is comprised of 4,625 articles selected specifically because of their suitability for students and alignment with curriculum in many English-speaking countries. These articles have been checked and edited with K-12 students in mind and are not available for open editing. Educators may access the site online, download the full selection, or order a DVD from the SOS Children's office ([www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/children-charity.htm](http://www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/children-charity.htm)).

As mentioned early in this column, Wikipedia is just one of several projects sponsored by the Wikimedia Foundation. Visit the foundation's site to learn more about additional free tools such as Wiktionary, Wikiquote, Wikibooks, and more. In his article "Look Who's Using Wikipedia," ([www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1595184,00.htm](http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1595184,00.htm)), Bill Tancer of Hitwise points out that "...the majority of top [search] terms [used on Wikipedia] bear a close resemblance to elementary school homework and research projects."

***If elementary students are, in fact, regular Wikipedia users, we need to do our part to ensure that they are using this tool appropriately.***

Bio: A former Catholic school teacher, Susan Brooks-Young spent 23 years as a teacher and administrator. She now works as a professional consultant and author. Her latest book is **Digital-Age Literacy for Teachers: Applying Technology Standards to Everyday Practice** (ISTE, 2007). Susan invites your comments at [SJBrooks@aol.com](mailto:SJBrooks@aol.com).

## From the Laptop of the President

Two things:

1. Reminder about the conference in July at Newcastle Panthers also check the website for other PD activities.
2. Below is my response which was posted onto the NSWCEG list. I am still investigating the DET's approach to the funding and I will keep you informed when I have more details.

Enjoy!

Tah! Cathie

## Future Rounds of the National Secondary Schools Computer fund (NSSCF)

Meeting held on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2008

Group Manager - Evan Arthur spoke to the meeting with assistance from other Federal government officers.

As one of the stakeholders, ACCE directed an email to me as the NSWCEG representative to attend this meeting.

We were briefed about what has already happened and how the first round was undertaken.

Broadband is to be rolled out to ALL schools (all government and non-government schools) including those schools which have satellite connections may go cable if this is possible. Apparently there is a lot of cabling around Australia but has been unused and could be connected to schools to increase the internet speed in schools.

First round: Neediest schools were found first to reduce the 1:8 or worse to a 1:2 ratio. These schools were identified by the survey. 2967 schools across Australia were identified having Yr9-12 students and 947 schools were selected and have applied for funding.

New applications for Round 2 will open to schools in July 2008, they are unsure when they will close. The funds must be expended by the schools within 2 years.

Parameters for round 2 include \$1000 per computer unit. For example, school A receives \$100 000 (this figure I have pulled out of the air just for the example with what they explained). With this funding, they can negotiate the price per unit which may end up being \$800 per unit. The school then can use the \$200 per unit to provide infrastructure, computer accessories i.e. printers, or training and development of staff.

Criteria for this round and future rounds needs to be based on documentation from MCEETYA Website and Curriculum corp. It hasn't been released and not sure when it will be and based on British findings. It has about 9 dimensions which include Training and development. This document is the foundation of the proposal you put together as it needs to align with it, your school's management plan and with the school community.

We were introduced to "The Guide" for school leaders. It will be digital version (1<sup>st</sup> version in June 2008) eventually web based which will contain material to assist school leaders in developing management of technology in schools. (Looked very much like a Computer Coordinator Guide).

The proposal for funding must connect with

school expenditure, school management plans and school communities. They emphasised that the School council or similar body needs to approve the application before it would be accepted.

The meeting discussed managing and planning for the proposal as well as managing and planning what hardware, software and infrastructure will be needed in schools. Online content will be available as well. They are looking at online training courses.

Broadband is separate to this issue even though part of it. The funding for NSSCF is for everything else. Schools who currently have satellite connections MAY have fibre to upgrade their internet speed but would only happen if economically possible.

Question posed and not really responded to: How do you ensure that an educational commitment is made by schools? Discussion discussed that subsequent rounds, schools would have to have a level of "readiness". I asked what they mean by readiness and they said they hadn't come up with a definition only that it should be a "whole school approach" to the funding. Therefore, the proposal would have to be very thorough and demonstrate a "readiness" for making this change to the school.

How will the applications be judged? – based on how well the schools apply and their planning and management.

They said there was no model for Professional development. They still need to look at this element but they suggested that there is funding available through the Quality Teaching Funding for Professional Development – through the Minister's portfolio (MCEETYA).

Summary by Cathie Webber, President NSWCEG

## FaceBook Users

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

Sign up and then go to groups and join the NSWCEG group and I suggest you join the ISTE group. Join us in exploring this application as a communication and Professional Development tool.