

VITALNews

Virginia Initiative for Technology and Administrative Leadership



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Are Blogs Changing the World?

I was reading a human interest story in my local newspaper the other day about actor Jerry Seinfeld. The writer referenced a particular episode of the show. His source? A weblog about *Seinfeld*.

Suddenly, it seems, a technology that until about a year or two ago was really the provenance of computer enthusiasts is everywhere. Blogs have been in the news quite a bit over the past month. For instance, when CBS went to the public with alleged documents about President Bush's military career, it was bloggers who broke the story that the documents were actually fake.

Several soldiers in Iraq have been using blogs to record their experiences. In fact, these "military blogs" even have their own abbreviation: "milbogs." Recently, The Weekly

Standard (no slouch when it comes to good journalism) called [Sargeant Hook's blog](#) "journalism at its finest" and recommends the milblogs as one of the best sources of information about the war.

Some commanders have demanded that several milblogs be taken down. Soldiers have always written home about the war, of course, and often those letters were censored. Now, the "letters" have the potential to reach millions of people. Do the soldiers give up some of their First Amendment rights when they join the military?

What's the lesson here for educators? We need to prepare our students for a world in which access to information is no longer an issue but rather their ability to evaluate and use that information to make decisions and solve problems. And, we need to consider how these technologies can inform and, potentially, transform teaching and learning.

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News from the VADOE

Regional Teachers of the Year Name

The Virginia Department of Education (DOE) informed eight teachers of their selection as the Virginia 2005 Regional Teachers of the Year on October 7. DOE representatives made the announcements during surprise classroom visits that morning and the eighth learned of her selection during a school division function this evening.

"The love of learning and enthusiasm for teaching of these educators fills their classrooms and touches all areas of their lives," said Superintendent of Public Instruction Jo Lynne DeMary. "All of these teachers are recognized by peers and students as educators who care about children and achievement."

To find out if a teacher you know made the list and to find out more about those educators who were chosen, [visit the DOE website.](#)

To have news like this delivered to your email inbox, you can subscribe to [eNews](#), an online newsletter from the DOE.

Board Seeks SOQ Comments

The Board of Education has scheduled a series of meetings to hear comments from citizens on the needs, priorities, and programs in public schools across the state. The purpose of the hearings is to seek comment from the public about proposed revisions to the Standards of Quality (SOQ), which define what constitutes a basic quality education in Virginia.

The Board also accepts written comment by mail, fax, or e-mail. Comments may be sent by October 15, 2004, to Margaret N. Roberts, executive assistant to the Board of Education, Post Office Box 2120, Richmond, VA 23218-2120; telephone 804/225-2924; fax: 804/225-2524; or via [email](#). Where possible, correspondents are asked to identify the standard(s) they are addressing.

Regional Workshop on Data Disaggregator

VITAL is pleased to announce a half-day regional workshop on using the Data Disaggregator, featuring Paul Nichols. The workshop will be held at the College of William and Mary on Friday, November 12th from 8:30 to 12:30. A continental breakfast and lunch will be included. Participants will have the opportunity to use their own data as they work with the disaggregator.

For more information and to register for the workshop, please contact Karen Richardson via email (karen@ivyrun.com) or phone (757-229-9969). Spaces for the workshop will be limited and will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

Registration Open for Leadership Conference

*Technology:
Turning Barriers into
Gateways* is the theme of the 10th annual

Educational Technology Leadership Conference. The conference will be held December 1 –3 at the Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center.

This conference, designed with building level and division leadership in mind, offers breakout sessions, hands on workshops as well as an excellent opportunity to network with administrators from all over the state. To learn more and to register, visit the [conference website](#). Advance registration ends November 19.

Online Journal Focuses on Education Technology

The ACE Journal (formerly Educational Technology Review), originally a print journal, has been transformed into an online publication to not only increase timeliness of content but also to enhance every issue with the current and future electronic resources and tools available on the Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE) website.

AACEJ continues to provide a multidisciplinary forum and focal point for AACE members to exchange information between

disciplines, educational levels, and information technologies.

The purpose of this exchange should result in the growth of ideas and practical solutions that can contribute toward the improvement of education and learning through information technology. You can find the journal online at <http://www.aace.org/pubs/AACEJ/default.cfm>.

Lucas Sponsors Edutopia Website and Magazine

By Chris O'Neal

The George Lucas Educational Foundation (GLEF) is a nonprofit operating foundation that documents and disseminates models of innovative educational practices from around the country. Their [Edutopia](#) website hosts an array of free video streams, articles, professional development modules, etc. In addition, the foundation produces videos, DVDs, interviews with practitioners, and a newly launched free magazine called *Edutopia*.

From the Edutopia website: *What is "Edutopia"? The word conjures up an ideal educational landscape, where students are motivated to learn and*

teachers are energized by the excitement of teaching. In these schools, parents and other professionals from the community -- architects, artists, physicians, and writers, among others -- contribute their expertise and resources. Technology is readily available and enables students, teachers, and administrators to seek knowledge and expertise beyond the school building. "Edutopia" is a vision of powerful teaching and learning -- and the good news is that the vision is being realized today in our nation's best schools.

I was able to visit Mr. Lucas's "Skywalker Ranch" recently where a team of educators focused on what those critical innovative best practices are, and how they can best be shared in ways that are most meaningful and practical to those out in the field. We spent extensive time pouring through the current GLEF resources, talking about plans for future projects, and evaluating the contents and structure of the new magazine.

The organization is a nonprofit, and the staff are genuinely focused on trying to spread the word about the good things going on in classrooms across the country, even in

spite of all the challenges educators face.

I would encourage everyone to take just a few minutes to browse the website if you haven't been in a while, and to subscribe to the free magazine. The resources are just incredible, and you can't beat the cost!

Karen's InBox

This month, we're starting a new monthly feature called "Karen's InBox." We'll highlight timely news, information and resources of interest to educators that showed up in my email or, since they forward stuff, in the email of my colleagues for the past month. To give credit where credit is due, I have to disclose that I am borrowing this idea from Joyce Faye White who shares her Inbox on the [FYI page](#) at the VADOE.

Drawing the Masters

From Classroom Connect's Library Hot Five email list: [The Drawing Board](#) is a website that allows students to either draw freehand or use the Tracer to copy famous paintings by Picasso and others. To subscribe to this and other Classroom Connect mailing lists, [visit their website](#).

The Blank Stare

The featured story in the Teachers' College Record this month is by Stanley Pogrow. He discusses student blank stares and how to overcome them in *The Missing Element in Reducing the Learning Gap: Eliminating the "Blank Stare."* Published by Teachers College at Columbia University, TCRecord features scholarly writing related to education. [Visit the website](#) to read Pogrow's article, browse past issues or participate in online discussions with other educators.

Speak Up For Students

NetDay is hosting the second annual Speak Up Day for Students on October 20, 2004. Help students' voices be heard by joining this online event where students across the country speak out about using technology and the Internet. NetDay, a national non-profit organization, is launching a revised survey with an exciting goal to collect input from 500,000 students on the issues that matter to them and to educators. The survey will be open for student input from October 11-29.

School may register now by visiting

<http://www.netday.org/>

Best Websites Named

More than 40 of the best and most innovative K-12 and Higher Education Web sites and online applications have been named by the Center for Digital Education in its 2004 Best of the Web (BOW) contest and Digital Education Achievement Awards (DEAA) program.

Two of the top five BOW winners in the K-12 category were Virginia schools. The [Richmond Public Schools website](#) came in 4th while the [Fairfax County Public Schools website](#) came in 5th.

Visit the [Center for Digital Education website](#) to learn more.

The Final Word

Of course, we can't forget that there's an election going on. For news, information and history, I recommend the [American Presidency website](#) created by Grolier and Scholastic that has lots of great info as well as video clips of past presidents.