



## VITALNews

Virginia Initiative for  
Technology and  
Administrative Leadership

Editor:  
Karen Work Richardson  
Regional Director  
[karen@ivyrun.com](mailto:karen@ivyrun.com)

## Finding the Soft Spots

Recently, I wanted to make digital versions of some clips from vhs tapes so I could play them on my computer during a presentation. I tried out a new gadget called a Dazzle that allowed me to hook the VCR up to my Windows computer and record the video as it played. It was impressively easy: in about 10 minutes I was creating digital versions of these tapes.

But my glee was premature. Problems began when I was ready to save the videos in a format that other computers would recognize. After about three hours of work, I discovered the right format. What's the point? Dealing with technology takes time.

It takes time to learn, to plan, to develop, to set up, to use, to tear down, and to troubleshoot. If there are problems at any of these steps along the way, technology integration probably won't happen. I figured it out, but that's my job. I don't face a class of

fourth graders every day! Most teachers, if they can't get it to work pretty quickly and they don't have someone close by who can help immediately, will probably go to plan B that usually involves more comfortable strategies and tools.

Thus, teachers need support at every phase of the process, and the best needs assessment you can do is to look for what I call the "soft spots," or those places in the system where support is not available when needed.

Where are your soft spots? Just ask a teacher who has used technology in the last few months. What worked? What didn't? What might have made it better? Walk around your building to see how teachers are actually using technology. What are they doing? What would they LIKE to do that they can't? The answers to these questions can help frame the issues related to integrating technology and provide guidance for long-range planning and implementation.

*Happy surfing,  
Karen*

## Googling the News

I took sailing lessons with the editor of the local newspaper recently, and we talked about the difference between reading the “real” newspaper or a “virtual” one. What’s the biggest difference? According to him, you lose the visual clues given by the page layout. What do you gain? According to me, the ability to browse by topic, search by keyword, and save articles in digital format. Who has room for all that very real newsprint?

I read [The New York Times](#) and the [Washington Post](#) every day online. I have recently begun monitoring two websites—[AACE](#) and [Converge Online](#)—for the [School Technology Leadership Blog](#), a volunteer effort by a variety of authors who keep track of instructional technology related websites.

But, by far, my favorite place to get the news is from [Google](#). You know the search engine but have you tried [Google News](#)? Articles come from news outlets all over the world so readers get an international perspective on world events. Try searching on education or instructional technology. Or click on Top Stories and see headlines in

all the categories. You can customize this page by rearranging content or adding specific queries. If you want to get the headlines fast, try Google News!

## Netfiles Available Through United Streaming

If a picture is worth a thousand words, what about a video? For helping teachers use technology better, priceless! And there is no better resource for videos related to instructional technology than [United Streaming](#).

[Netfiles](#), a television show produced by Hampton Roads’ public broadcasting station WHRO, is part of the United Streaming database. Each television show includes some technical information, but in terms of helping teachers integrate technology, the most valuable parts are the videos that highlight specific projects or instructional strategies. Just do a search on “Netfiles” in United Streaming to get a list of available episodes. Since WHRO was the producer, many of the teachers featured are from Virginia!

## A Project-Based Learning Toolkit

There seems to be a general sense in the instructional technology community that technology will never realize its fullest potential unless it is part of project-based learning. We’ve collected several resources that will help you understand project-based learning and provide examples of its use that you can share with your faculty.

**GLEF:** Start at the [George Lucas Educational Foundation](#). Project-based learning is one of their favorite topics, and you can find videos, articles, online radio programs, and other resources about how different schools are implementing this strategy. While you’re there, you might want to check out their instructional module called [“View of the Principal and the Job.”](#) This web-based tutorial includes articles, videos and PowerPoint presentations related to the role of the principal in supporting instruction.

**Global School Network:** The [clearinghouse for online, collaborative projects](#). From writing Santa letters to boiling water to exchanging grocery lists, students around the world are working together using

the Internet as their medium. GSN has a [good introduction](#) to project-based learning. You can also [search their Projects Registry](#) to get a jump start on the fall.

Webquests are a particular type of online activity structure that generally follows project-based learning practices. Created by Bernie Dodge, they have been around for nearly a decade. Start at the [Webquest Portal](#) and then check out Tom March's [bestwebquests.com](#) as well. Consider having a "Create a Webquest" professional development where teachers work together to locate and develop their own webquests.



## Gardening on the Web

May is, appropriately enough, National Gardening Month. [KidsGardening!](#), a website about gardening

with kids from the [National Gardening Association](#), offers information and resources for both schools and families.

There are monthly teaching units and an online course for teachers, a primer for parents on gardening with their kids, and a directory of schools with gardening projects. In addition, the organization offers grants and awards to schools and community organizations that have gardening programs.

For those of you who prefer to look at gardens rather than plant them, just type "gardens" into Google and you'll get links to all the famous ones, starting with [Kew Gardens](#) in England.

I quickly found links to two of my favorites: I used to live close to [Longwood Gardens](#), in southeastern Pennsylvania, which was created by industrialist Pierre DuPont. I visited [The Butchart Gardens](#) in Victoria, British Columbia a few years back. It was created from an old mining operation and was just beautiful!

Of course, I am fortunate to live near Colonial Williamsburg with their renowned gardens. They offer [slide shows of Williamsburg](#) throughout the seasons and the spring pictures are just wonderful, full of daffodils, tulips,

pansies, and flowering trees. And [Mr. Jefferson's famous garden](#) can be visited online as well.



## It's SOL Time Again!

Coming home yesterday afternoon, I passed a middle school with a sign out front that wished everyone good luck on the SOL tests. Is it May already? So, as you prepare for the tests, here are just a few sites you might want to visit one last time.

The Department of Education's [Division of Assessment and Reporting](#) is the nerve center for the Standards of Learning tests. You might also want to review the resources at the [Division of Instruction's SOL page](#).

And just in case you missed it, [Jefferson Lab's SOL page](#) offers practice tests as well as lots of great learning games. Who said test review can't be fun?

## What Are You Going to “Read” This Summer?

I don't know about you, but I have a pile of reading that I want to do this summer and at least some of it is work related. And a lot of it is on the Web.

For instance, I'm going to spend some time poking around the [Education Leadership Resource Library](#), sponsored by The Wallace Foundation. The library has collected links to a variety of web resources related to educational leadership and offer reviews and links. Each of the resources has been submitted by a user of the site, and you are encouraged to share your favorite leadership resources.

I am constantly in awe of all the World Wide Web has to offer. For instance, just browse the [Website Index](#) of the Smithsonian Institution. Any one of them—from the [Air and Space Museum](#) to the new [National Museum of the American Indian](#)—offers access to extensive online collections. And speaking of gardens...you

can take an [interactive tour](#) of the Smithsonian's Butterfly Habitat garden.

The reason “read” is in quotes is because I'm including multimedia on my summer “reading” list, audio and video, all available on the web.

A road trip is a great opportunity to listen to a book. If you haven't tried it yet, check out [Audible.com](#). You can download Stephen Covey's latest or listen to a series from the Library of Congress about the digital future. Always wanted to learn a foreign language? Then you'll be interested in the series entitled “Learn Spanish in Your Car” or “Rush Hour French.”

For language learning, there is no place better than [United Streaming](#), it seems. For that matter, there are videos on almost every topic, including movies made from novels. If your school doesn't own a license, it should, but you can get a 30-day free trial.

For my video entertainment, I'm going to spend some time browsing [Apple's education website](#) that includes lots of student-made videos. Just click the link and choose a content area from the list at the right to see the available videos. The [interviews with World War II veterans](#) conducted by high school students are particularly moving. You may need the Quicktime plugin to view the videos.

I'm also going to learn more about [assistive technology](#) by watching the videos offered online by the International Do-It Center at the University of Washington. The center empowers disabled persons to reach for their dreams and shows the many ways that technology can help.

But summer can't be all work, can it? For fun, I like spending time at [The Daily Show's website](#). There are video clips and web-only headlines. Go ahead...laugh a little! You deserve it.

