

VITALNews

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What Can We Do With All This Access?

As I write this month, I am listening to the headlines from *The New York Times*. In about 45 minutes, I'll be caught up on US and world news, financial issues, as well as sports and entertainment. I subscribe to this service through Audible.com and can also download books, speeches, and other spoken-word files. Once I've got the file, I can put it on my iPod, burn it to CD or listen on my computer.

I have been thinking about how this technology might be used in the classroom and also some of the questions that it raises for educators.

The first thought I had was of getting newspapers delivered to my middle school for use with my language arts students. Each Friday, large stacks of newsprint arrived at my school, containing much more information than I wanted or needed. And at

the end of the day, they ended up in the recycling bin. I can imagine that now I could have students tune into Audible to listen to just a few important articles.

And while listening to a novel is different from reading it, every middle schooler I knew had a CD player (often outlawed in school), and I think it would be appealing to them to be able to pop in a CD and listen to a book. Of course, we would have to reconsider that rule banning CD players!

I'm not suggesting that we abandon reading instruction, but listening to a good story has a long history (remember Homer?) and can help students with their own writing as they get to hear the rhythms and patterns of the English language that are not often evident on the page. Plus, students can turn their own writings into audio files for others to listen to and reflect on their own style and language use.

*Happy Listening,
Karen*

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Assistive Technology Software Can Aid All Students

Three software programs from Don Johnston, often found in special education classrooms, offer features that regular classroom teachers will love as well. The programs include Co-Writer, Write Out Loud, and Draftbuilder.

Co-Writer provides word prediction capabilities and can be used alone or in conjunction with a word processing program. As students write, they are prompted with suggestions. The program is customizable for each student and even accommodates flexible spelling options that work with invented spelling.

Write Out Loud is a talking word processor that speaks words and sentences as students type them. The program includes all the options of a regular word processor as well.

Draftbuilder incorporates support for all the steps in the writing process from concept mapping to note taking. Rather than skipping from Inspiration to Word, students can do all their work in one program.

To learn more about any of these software programs, [visit the Don Johnston website](#). While you're there, check out some of the other products they offer. The company has been a leader in assistive teacher for many years.

In addition, you might want to check with your division's special education coordinator to see if a license is available. Both regular and special education students can benefit from using this software.

USDOE Guide Offers NCLB Information

A new guide from the United States Department of Education offers facts and figures to help educators and others understand the No Child Left Behind legislation. The guide is available online.

The USDOE also offers several free newsletters of interest to educators that can help keep you up to date on what's happening at the federal level.

Registration Open for VSTE Conference

YOU are invited to attend the Virginia Society for

Technology in Education's 19th Annual Statewide Technology Conference.

The two and one-half day program (beginning Sunday afternoon) includes breakout technology presentations (Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday), optional workshops (Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday), vendor exhibits (Monday and Tuesday), keynote presentation, dinner and entertainment, extravaganza and award ceremonies. This is a true two and one-half day conference including breakfast, lunch, and snacks on Monday and Tuesday.

Learn more by [visiting the conference website](#). While you're there, if you don't already belong to VSTE, consider joining, especially since the price is right: it's free!

DOE Hour Schedule Online

The DOE Hour, sponsored by the Virginia Department of Education, offers professional development opportunities for educators across the state. Broadcast on Tuesdays from 2:00 to 3:00 PM on many PBS stations in the state, these telecasts can become the basis for discussions and learning in schools and divisions.

This month, the November 16th telecast features a conversation between Governor Mark Warner and Superintendent of Public Instruction Jo Lynne DeMary. They will be discussing the administration's Education for a Lifetime initiatives, including programs to enhance the teaching profession.

Learn more about these telecasts by [visiting the website](#).

Virtual AP School Part of Initiative

The Virtual Advanced Placement School is part of the Senior Year Plus component of Governor Mark Warner's Education for a Lifetime initiative to broaden educational opportunities for all Virginians. This online high school offers students access to 13 Advanced Placement courses via satellite and the Internet, allowing qualified high school students anywhere in the state to earn up to a full semester of college credit before the end of their senior year.

The Virginia Virtual AP School was developed to ensure that a wide variety of college-level courses are available to every Virginia public school student, regardless of location. The Department of Education will reimburse school

divisions for tuition and fees for online virtual AP courses taken by students participating in the Early College Scholars program, which supports the Senior Year Plus component of Governor Warner's Education for a Lifetime initiative to expand educational opportunities for all Virginians. Students in the Early College Scholars program sign agreements promising to maintain a "B" average or better, pursue an Advanced Studies Diploma, and complete college-level course work.

Students enrolled in online AP courses through the virtual school also must agree to take the corresponding AP examinations to qualify for college credit. A student who completes all the terms of the agreement will be recognized as an Early College Scholar and receive a certificate from the Governor.

Virginia Virtual AP School courses transmitted by satellite are tuition-free for all Virginia public school students. All students who take AP courses are encouraged to take the associated examinations to qualify for college credit.

Learn more about the program by [visiting its website](#).

Karen's InBox

A monthly feature in which we get a peek into Karen's InBox for items of interest to the VITAL community

Reflective Teachers

From Classroom Connect's Library Hot Five email list: [teaching English](#), a website sponsored by the BBC and the British Council, provides a variety of resources for educators.

[This article](#), in particular, focuses on developing reflective teaching practices and offers ideas for journaling, getting student feedback, doing peer observations and engaging in action research. Some of the ideas could be employed as professional development within a school or division. For instance, rather than having teachers turn in lesson plans, why not have them write reflective pieces AFTER the lesson is over? And, if you've been reading the newsletter carefully over the past year, you know that a blog would be the perfect place for teachers to do this.

To subscribe to this and other Classroom

Connect mailing lists, [visit their website](#).

Thirteen Ed Online

[Thirteen Ed Online](#) is the website sponsored by WNET, PBS' flagship station in New York. The site provides monthly themes for teachers as well as a wide variety of other educational resources.

This month, they salute journalist Bill Moyers, who after 30 years in journalism, the last two as host of a weekly series, has announced he will leave the show, NOW WITH BILL MOYERS, after the November elections. In particular, they focus on his contribution to active citizenship with the theme GET ACTIVE - THE JOURNALISM OF BILL MOYERS. Each theme has lesson plans and related information created by educators, for educators. There is also a letter from Bill Moyers' to students encouraging them to be active citizens.

NECC in Philadelphia

The National Educational Computing Conference (NECC), sponsored by the International Society for Technology and Education, will be held in Philadelphia in June of 2005. This is the closest to Virginia it has been for a long time and is a

great opportunity for local educators to participate in what can only be described as a celebration of technology and learning.

It's a chance to hear nationally and internationally recognized leaders in the field of educational technology, wander through a vendor hall that seems to go for miles, and, maybe most importantly, meet educators from all over the world to share experiences, ideas, and information.

Registration and the hotel reservation system are already open so it's not too early to think about sending a few people to this one-of-a-kind conference. You can learn more by [visiting the website](#).

Of course, closer to home, registration is now open for the VSTE conference. See the article on page 2 for more details.

Quicktakes

Links to websites of interest to educators

[50 Uses of Inspiration and Kidspiration](#)

This website accompanies an online course from the University of Wisconsin and offers project ideas for using Inspiration and Kidspiration.

[Cool School Award](#)

From Education World, the Cool School website honors a different school website each week. Schools can nominate their website for the weekly honor and winning schools receive a certificate and some goodies for the school.

[Cool Kids Zone](#)

From Woodlands Junior School in England, a website chock full of stuff for kids. The school is for students aged 7 to 11 and they provide both content and web design help with this site.

[PBS Kids](#)

Here's the place to go to find information, games, and other resources related to your favorite PBS kids' shows.

[Discovering Dinosaurs](#)

From Encyclopedia Britannica, a well-organized site about dinosaurs. Lots of great graphics bring these ancient creatures alive. It includes video clips from the IMAX film about dinosaurs. *T-Rex: Back to the Cretaceous*.