



Jeff Utecht

## Conference 2.0

This year at the National Educational Computing Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, blogs showed the power of communication and connections. According to Technorati.com, a Web site that tracks more than 85 million blogs, the bloggers at NECC posted more than 2,000 entries about the sessions they attended (search: NECC07). At the same time, the popular photo hosting site Flickr.com shows more than 1,700 pictures taken by conference attendees (search: NECC07). Between these two Web 2.0 tools, you can get a feeling of what this year's conference had to offer.

This is just one example of how conferences are taking on a new persona. With bloggers taking notes and talking about sessions on their blogs, they open up the conference to educators around the world. Many educators who could not make this year's conference were able to follow along online by accessing these blogs and pictures and tapping into the thoughts of bloggers at the conference.

Another format bloggers used during NECC 2007 involved an instant messenger service. This format was dubbed *chatcasting*, and it uses an IM service to connect people together in a live chat during a presentation. The chatcasters create a chat room where they can bounce ideas off each other

during a presentation, ask questions of each other, and create powerful conversations around the presented material that can easily be saved and archived as a learning resource. This model could be replicated in a one-to-one classroom environment.

These Web 2.0 tools, along with podcasts and wiki handouts, are ushering in a new kind of conference. No longer are technology conferences only for those who can attend in person, they have become accessible to those who want to attend virtually as well. NECC also saw Second Life (<http://www.secondlife.com>), a virtual world where you can meet with other avatars from around the globe, used during the conference. Anyone with a free Second Life account can join in on the presentations and conversations.

By using Web 2.0 tools to extend conversations beyond the walls of the conference, you have the opportunity to pull in resources and talented people from around the world. Just like School 2.0 (<http://www.school20.org>), this conference saw the focus revolve around the conversations taking place and not solely on the presenters. These new conferences center on the participants through their blog posts, podcasts, and wiki entries.

By connecting and conversing with people through these new tools, we

get a new perspective on what is happening during a conference. Not only do we get the perspective from the presenters, we also get the perspective of those in attendance. If there are two presentations you want to see at the same time, you can now virtually attend one presentation through the blog entries and photos taken during the presentation while attending the other in person. If you are planning a conference or even a professional development opportunity for your staff, think about using some of these tools as a way to receive feedback, a reflective assignment, or as a record of what you learned or taught. Allow these tools to give you feedback, to get into the thoughts and minds of your audience and allow the conversation to flow.

Web 2.0 tools can be a powerful addition to any conference or professional development opportunity. Allow the tools to do what they do best: connect people, communicate happenings, and create opportunities for learning.

**(Editor's Note:** To read NECC blogs, you can start by clicking on Blogging NECC at <http://www.iste.org/necc>.) ■

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