

MEMBER profiles

Renee Peoples

Ed Tech Can Change More than Just Your Teaching

Renee Peoples, an ISTE member since 2005, says she “can’t get enough, learn enough, or hear enough” when it comes to NECC.

Four years ago, her small elementary school in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina offered to send some teachers to NECC in Philadelphia as part of a one-to-one laptop grant that included professional development. When Peoples was offered a slot, she said she only had one question: “When do we leave?”

She had been excited about using technology in her classroom for a long time. In fact, after she repeatedly applied unsuccessfully to get a grant to buy a projector for her classroom, the technology coordinator at her school was so impressed with her diligence that he bought one for her with some leftover funding.

“I wanted to learn more ways to use technology to improve instruction,” she says. “Using technology changed not just my classroom teaching, but my life. I began to use as much technology as I could beg, borrow, or write a grant to get.”

Peoples teaches fourth grade and coaches K–5 math for Swain County Schools in North Carolina. She was voted Western Region Teacher of the Year for 2008–2009, and she believes that her use of technology in the classroom was the key to winning.

“With this great honor came a gift of \$5,000,” she says. She thought of two ways to use the money: to buy a laptop or to spend it on an educational opportunity to improve her teaching.

“I was very interested in a curriculum degree, especially in math,” she says. “However, my heart and life revolved around technology.”

As she was contemplating the best use of the money, Peoples learned about an 18-credit graduate certificate program designed to prepare administrators to lead using technology. The certificate, a partnership between ISTE and Johns Hopkins University, was offered almost entirely online—except for the two face-to-face residencies at NECC. She signed up immediately.



Peoples’ favorite moments working with technology are those that include her students. She enjoys their responses to whatever she is doing, be it typing on the computer or video conferencing.

“My class has been able to participate in three experiences of video conferencing this year,” she says. “There have been so many opportunities for us to learn about other people in other places.

“Recently, a student in a class in California asked, ‘What is a snow day?’ A student answered, ‘A day when you don’t have to go to school to play in the snow, if there is any.’

This reminded me that often it is the little things we learn from collaboration.”

Renee considers Web 2.0, and now Web 3.0, the most influential tech tools. “With the current budget situation, schools are going to have to use their money very wisely and take advantage of free tools,” she says. “Only months ago we argued [In *L&L*’s Point/Counterpoint] whether free tools are worth the cost. Today we are living in a whole new world where we better make them worth it, because they are all we can afford.”

With the ever growing opportunities to collaborate, share, and create using online tools, Peoples sees students becoming lifelong learners.

Online learning will become more available, she predicts. “Both teachers and students are receiving more education without ever meeting face to face, and that is working out fine,” she says. “Teachers can receive their professional development just as well on Moodle or a wiki as they can in person, and no one has to buy gas! Students learn, research, report, and produce products for assessment just fine without ever getting on a school bus.”

—Kaya Hardin is an ISTE intern. She graduates from the University of Oregon in June.



To mark the 30th anniversary of NECC and ISTE, L&L is focusing on members who embody ISTE’s commitment to honor the past, celebrate the present, and envision the future of educational technology. In this issue, we profile Renee Peoples, a fourth grade teacher who was named the Western Region Teacher of the Year in North Carolina.