

MEMBER profiles

Roland Gesthuizen



Harnessing the Power of the Network

Roland Gesthuizen says his favorite ed tech moment was in 1992 when his school, Syndal Secondary College, became the first in Victoria, Australia, to connect to the Internet. Gesthuizen's class joined a mailing list called Project Kidlink, designed to connect kids to peers around the world. Within a few months, Gesthuizen discovered the power of international collaboration when an e-mail came to the list from U.S. President Bill Clinton.

According to an archived post from 1993, the fifth grade classes at Stewart Elementary School in Oxford, Ohio, were planning a bake sale to raise money to donate to the U.S. government to reduce the nation's deficit. They announced the event via Kidlink to let the other kids know what they were doing and to ask them to help. News of the effort made it to the White House, prompting Clinton to send a personal message to the kids at Kidlink. Although there was a strict rule forbidding anyone over the age of 15 from using Kidlink, moderators made an exception for Clinton.

In part, Clinton wrote, "I wanted to thank you for paying attention to the work we're doing here in Washington to get our country moving again. I'm very impressed by your concern about our country's deficit—and your decision to try to do something about it. And a bake sale is certainly the sweetest way I can think of to reduce the deficit."

The message was reportedly the president's first public online message.

Gesthuizen says he was impressed by the power of the Internet to make connections never before possible. "Over the years, we went on to establish accounts for many students, precious cultural links with other schools overseas," he says.

Some of those links included projects with the Texas Education Network; the Weather Underground project, which brings weather information via the Internet to K–12 classrooms; and a girls-in-technology club.

Gesthuizen is the e-learning coordinator and IT educator at Westall Secondary College in Victoria. His commitment to educational technology led him to join ISTE three years ago. "This small step is very much part of my lifelong professional journey as an IT educator," he says. "I was looking for a chance to develop a professional network beyond my classroom and across the world."

Gesthuizen also values the networking opportunities at ISTE's conference. "I can now put a friendly face to the people whom I read about and follow in professional journals, blogs, tweets, and online courses," he says.

His choice for the most influential technology tool might surprise die-hard techies. "Whilst some might reckon that I am old fashioned, the technology tool that drives the biggest change for any community is still the

plain old telephone," he says. "Having said that, the ed tech tools that have influenced change for me in the classroom have been the Web 2.0 tools of blogging and Twitter."

During the bush fires in Victoria in February 2009, Web 2.0 tools helped students and teachers make sense of the disaster.

"Instead of just being passive consumers of the media storm blowing around them, our staff and students had a chance to read, write, reflect, and directly help in the healing process that followed by directly engaging in some of the issues," he says.

In the future, Gesthuizen sees a world where digital content and local authoring will help people record cultural treasures, preserve languages, and reconnect children with their elders' wisdom. "We can use these new ed tech tools not just to better understand each other, but also to better grasp who we are and where we want to be, making the world a better place for us all to live in."

—Kaya Hardin is an ISTE intern. She graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon.



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. Roland Gesthuizen of Victoria, Australia, is one of the many educators who has helped make ISTE a diverse, global organization.