

MEMBER profiles

Karen Connaghan

Changing the World ... One Educator at a Time

Karen Connaghan is fighting resistance to change among educators, which she says is the biggest obstacle facing education today. “Our system is outdated, created for an era that has long passed. Yet many educators continue to hold on to these old paradigms even in the face of evidence that they no longer work. We’ve had two societal revolutions in our history: the neolithic revolution and the industrial revolution. We are in the midst of a third societal revolution: the information revolution. ... Life will be different and education must respond to this new way of living,” Connaghan says.

This desire to modernize education is what drew Connaghan to ISTE. She joined in 2001, she says, “to network with other professionals and learn

from their experiences.” She “became active in SIGTC,” ISTE’s Special Interest Group for Technology Coordinators (<http://www.iste.org/sigt/>) “to be more involved with educational reform. ... It provides me with opportunities to change the world, one educator at a time.”

Connaghan is an educational technology and enrichment consultant at the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit in Norristown, Pennsylvania, and online event coordinator and secretary for SIGTC.

She fondly remembers the moment she saw “the power of technology to engage students in learning and to



transform education.” She was working with “a group of seventh graders who were participating in an online blended learning component for a history project. Through online dialogue the students interacted with each other and began to recognize the power of learning from each other.

One student commented in the discussion forum, ‘Wow Thomas! This is really good stuff. I’m going to go back through and read all your comments.’”

Connaghan is very interested in podcasting and video blogging as tools to engage students. In fact, you can find her educational podcasts at her Web site, Collective Thoughts (<http://www.collectivethoughts.org>).

ISTE SIG

New SIG Traces Its Roots

Although ISTE’s new Special Interest Group for Innovative Learning Technologies was launched in October 2005, its roots go back to the late 1990s. Robert McLaughlin, SIGILT’s founder and president, explained that the U.S. Department of Education invited project directors funded by the department’s Technology Innovation Challenge Grant (TICG) Program to share their most promising learning technology innovations.

McLaughlin, who facilitated the TICG consortium’s meetings, says TICG project directors became convinced that they should work with

ISTE to form a permanent group on innovative learning technologies to enable them and innovators worldwide to share promising innovations.



<http://www.iste.org/sigilt>

SIGILT offers a variety of resources—a moderated mailing list, professional development sessions on emerging technologies at NECC, a free portal on promising technology applications for learning at <http://applications.edreform.net>, and an annual awards program that will begin at NECC 2006 to recognize leaders who foster innovation in K–12 learning technology.

SIGILT’s long-range goal, according to McLaughlin, is to deepen practical collaborative initiatives with state, national, and international organizations committed to research, development, teacher preparation, staff development, and advocacy efforts that promote promising learning technologies to energize teaching and learning for all students, especially those in economically distressed communities.

President: Dr. Robert T. McLaughlin (mclaughb@nici-mc2.org)

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Partnerships Are the AlphaSmart Thing to Do

Founded in 1992 by a pair of Apple engineers, AlphaSmart specializes in “computer companions,” low-cost, rugged, portable tools that allow students to perform tasks in the classroom that don’t require a full-fledged desktop or laptop computer. Manish Kothari is the executive vice president of AlphaSmart, which recently became a division of Renaissance Learning.

“From our point of view it’s a great match,” Kothari says. Renaissance is about “accelerating learning through assessments. They collect data from periodic assessments, and are able to track and trend it to understand where the child and school are.” The challenge, he says, lies in having children tied to a desk or a laptop to



<http://www.alphasmart.com>

collect the data. “The cost of connecting the devices, maintaining them, is more than the price of the machines. Simpler devices are less prone to problems. Because of the total cost of ownership, AlphaSmart brings an

extension beyond computers and laptops. We see a co-existence between desktops, laptops, and our devices. It’s not one thing fits all.”

According to Kothari, the educational technology landscape is changing. “Decision makers are buying hardware and software based on what it is doing for them; they’re becoming results oriented. Purchasers are creating a trend of accountability, and as a result pure software players are suffer-

ing.” What educators are looking for is a combination of things to improve student scores, he says. “That’s where the funding is coming from. Providing a breadth of solutions.”

Kothari stressed AlphaSmart’s commitment to K–12 education. “We don’t claim that we can solve all the problems, but we will listen and see what the need is. ISTE is an organization that influences thinking people, and because of that we respect it a lot. We like the group of educators ISTE reaches,” Kothari says. “It helps us reach an audience that on our own would not be easy to do. With your best practices, the Web site, your conferences, these people come to you. Not one or two or five people can do this. Having the organization is very valuable.”



Join Our Worldwide Network of Education Technology Professionals

ISTE supports professional outreach and advocacy efforts of more than 70 organizations worldwide that function at a grassroots level to improve teaching and learning through the use of technology.

Looking for global reach?

ISTE Affiliates are nonprofit member organizations who share our mission to improve education through the use of technology. The overarching goal of the ISTE Affiliate Network is to create a collaborative community whose combined efforts advance the education technology mission in measurable ways. Leveraging opportunities that enable the network to proactively respond to issues impacting education technology at a local, regional, and international level is our primary focus. Are you part of an organization looking for global reach? Learn more about ISTE Affiliate membership at <http://www.iste.org/affiliates/>.

Are you involved locally?

ISTE’s Affiliate Network provides outreach to more than 85,000 education and technology professionals including teachers, administrators, technology coordinators, teacher educators, media specialists, and other professionals at all levels of education and government. By joining an ISTE Affiliate, you extend your professional development experience and increase opportunities to participate at every level in the global ed tech community. Join an ISTE Affiliate member in your region. Find one at <http://www.iste.org/affiliates/>.