



Start the Conversations

ISSUE ORIENTED

Welcome to a new volume of *Learning & Leading with Technology*. One topic we cover in this issue is instructional strategies. Differentiated instruction is one compelling instructional strategy that is well supported by technology. My favorite aspect of this strategy is that it starts with knowing your students' interests, backgrounds, and content knowledge. Empowered with that information, teachers can motivate students by appealing to their interests with content aligned to their abilities and prior knowledge. But first they need to start the conversation with each student to verify and fine-tune the data they have collected.

The importance of the conversation also sums up NECC 2005 for me (<http://www.iste.org/necc/>). In the opening keynote, Harvard fellow and Internet marketing author David Weinberger talked about knowledge as an unending conversation. According to Weinberger, the nature, use, ownership, and purpose of knowledge are changing in our Web-connected world. Although knowledge was formerly an asset owned by a few, it is becoming a property of conversations in which ambiguity and differences are sought to encourage further conversation.

Speaker Deneen Frazier Bowen effectively dramatized the conference's special emphasis on student voices and the importance of listening to them in her one-woman play, *The Natives Are Restless*. As her character Dr. Priscilla Normal concluded after listening to the student stories Bowen enacted, "the data points are simply an invitation to a conversation with the students in my world ... my classroom, my school, my

district, my state, my country. If I try to connect those dots without talking deeply and honestly with the digital natives, all my efforts won't make a bit of difference."

One of Bowen's student characters, Edy, preferred communicating through a written blog. Another one, Maria, preferred more verbal forms such as cell phones and podcasts. Some of the hottest discussion topics at NECC involved these tools for having conversations and communicating with students. Tech coordinators and administrators need to provide as many tools as possible for expression and conversation and teach educators how to use them with students. Teachers need to use as many tools as possible to listen to students and clarify through conversation.

E-learning entrepreneur Marc Prensky enlightened us about the educational value in the games students play. He acknowledged that current infrastructures may prevent students from playing these games in the classroom, but he encouraged us to at least have conversations with students about the games they are playing outside of school to better understand their interests and the possible educational value of gaming.

L&L hopes to engage you in conversations this year. Our columnists Glen Bull and Don Hall are ready to share their latest thoughts on educational technology. Doug Johnson and new columnist Marilyn Brooks will be joining the conversation in the October issue. We hope that the new formats for these columns will help us start a conversation with you by e-mail, letters to the editor, and other forms of communication.

By Anita McAnear

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