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CoSN keeps school leaders ahead of the times

Web 2.0 tools and the rise of the 'net generation' were hot topics at the group's annual conference

By Meris Stansbury, Associate Editor

Primary Topic Channel: [CoSN](#)

At the Consortium for School Networking's annual conference, held this year in Austin, Texas, March 10-12, issues such as the prevalence of Web 2.0 tools and the recession had school administrators and chief technology officers acknowledging the changing times--and what they must do not only to keep up, but to help give students the 21st-century education they deserve.

The local area's slogan, "Keep Austin Weird," seemed to come alive during CoSN's welcoming reception on March 10 as vendors in business suits mingled with the sounds of a live mariachi band, and as educators tried to balance their smart phones in one hand and homemade guacamole in the other.

From the 96-year-old blues musician Pinetop Perkins at Nuno's club on 6th Street to the South by Southwest music festival, and from the horse-drawn carriage rides on cobble-stoned streets to the architecturally innovative Frost Bank Tower, Austin gave the impression of being a city balancing the old and the new.

And that's an apt metaphor for the key challenge facing educators today, as opening keynote speaker Don Tapscott confirmed.

Tapscott--author of *Grown Up Digital*, chairman of nGenera, and adjunct professor of management at the University of Toronto--discussed how today's educators need to catch up with the tools students are familiar with, without disregarding all of the teaching principles that make for a good education.

For *Grown Up Digital*--the follow-up work to his best-seller *Growing Up Digital*--Tapscott surveyed about 11,000 students and teachers in 10 countries and concluded that young people are, in fact, more productive, and process information differently, than older generations, owing to the effect technology has played in their development.

"There's this negative view out there that young people today who are part of this digital world are the 'Dumbest Generation,' and in fact, there's a book titled just that. Funny thing is, it's not supported by any data or research, and it's completely inaccurate," said Tapscott.

In an interview with *eSchool News*, Tapscott explained how this is the first time in history that children have the upper hand on the technology that's shaping the future.

"They are the authorities on this huge cultural change. The way young people can use technology is astounding. ... Unfortunately, people fear what they don't understand, and that's why there's all this mean-spirited criticism out there," he said.

In his new book, Tapscott describes how young people today process information differently from older generations.

"If you're a young person today, you don't just watch television, you authenticate the information you're receiving," said Tapscott during the keynote.

He compared how different generations watch TV shows, saying that older generations would watch something like *Dallas*

and simply absorb the show. However, today's kids are watching 24, noticing the product placement, looking up the park at which Jack Bower was filmed, and checking out Wikipedia to see whether or not the conflict described by the show is factually accurate.

"Even the shows are different. They're fast-paced, [with] plot turns everywhere, always trying to keep the mind stimulated. Kids want info, and they want it now. They need instant gratification ... and is that a bad thing? Is it wrong for students in school to expect high-speed internet when they have it at home? Is it wrong for them to get impatient when they have to find an answer to a question in multiple books, when they're used to finding info with the click of a mouse?"

Tapscott also provided data that shows students are not getting dumber. For example, according to his data, raw IQ scores are going up, and even though there is a growing population of young people in the United States--including those for whom English is a second language--SAT scores have remained stable.

"Some people tend to think that kids today who play video games and spend their time online can't make it in the real world," he said. "That's not true."

Citing the example of his son, who plays *World of Warcraft*, he said: "They are on a mission. They organize and plan ahead. They interview people who want to be on the team to see if their skills are needed, they manage talent and formulate a hierarchy to maintain order. They are playing with kids from around the world. Any of these skills sound like something a CEO might do?"

Tapscott went on to say the digital generation is not just using the web, but changing it.

"Think of MTV versus YouTube, or Wikipedia versus Encyclopedia Britannica. This generation likes to self-organize," he said.

"I asked my son if he could use some of his web skills to help promote my book. I thought this might take at least a few weeks. He created a Facebook group, invited his friends, created a Wikipedia page, posted links in the Facebook group to the page, and posted the first few chapters of the book for them to read. Overnight, he had thousands of members--many from other countries. The next morning, I had to answer dozens of questions about my book, defend my data, and double-check my writing."

He continued: "My son managed to do what 10 years ago would have taken months through self-organization and the use of Web 2.0 tools."

Tapscott listed the norms of the digital generation: freedom, customization, scrutiny, integrity, collaboration, entertainment, speed, and innovation.

"University graduation rates are at an all-time high," explained Tapscott, "but so are dropout rates. We're not motivating our students, and we're not teaching correctly anymore."

Tapscott's advice for educators is to:

- Move from broadcast (lectures) to interactive learning.
- Focus not on the ability to perform well on tests, but on other measures of success.
- Focus on students and the individual.
- Change the teaching model from teachers as sage, guardian, and dispenser of all information to teachers as an information filter and mentor.

However, Tapscott also warned there are problems with the implementation of Web 2.0 technologies in schools, such as online safety, privacy, and identity theft; a growing digital divide; and a generational firewall between students and educators.

"But students have a right to the technology of their time. To deny them this because of fear or a failure to implement correctly is unacceptable," he concluded.

To bring educators, students, parents, and professionals together in a global dialog on learning, Tapscott has created the [Net Gen Challenge](#), which asks participants to create a two-minute video that answers the question: "How can we reinvent education for relevance and effectiveness for the 21st century?"

Initiatives for 21st-century schools

To help educators and schools stay relevant in the 21st century, CoSN has undertaken leadership initiatives on:

- Green Computing, which helps educators understand the latest trends and prepare for the future by concentrating on lowering energy demand, disposal of computing equipment, reducing paper and print delivery costs, and highlighting best practices.
- IT Crisis Preparedness, which focuses on how to ensure that school networks are available during a crisis, and how technology can help users respond to a variety of disasters or emergencies.
- Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent, designed to help superintendents develop a vision around technology and how it can advance their district's mission.

CoSN has also received funding from the MacArthur Foundation to explore "Web 2.0 in Schools: Policy and Leadership," and it soon will release a study that explores how school leaders view Web 2.0 technologies in American schools.

In addition, the group is releasing a toolkit for CTOs, called "Mastering the Moment," that will include resources on budgeting with the total cost of ownership in mind, calculating the value of investments in technology, and conserving funds with green technologies, as well as the latest information on the new economic stimulus funding.

"[Having] limited state and federal resources [as a result of] the current state of our economy is challenging for educators, particularly those in charge of technology," said Keith Krueger, CoSN's chief executive. "However, through those challenges come opportunities. What educators discussed during the conference were innovative ways to plan for and implement technology projects in schools to ensure that no matter the economic circumstances, our schools are providing our children with the 21st-century skills and tools they need to be successful in the future."

News from the exhibit hall

[Alcatel Lucent](#) released a white paper called "Safe Campus Solutions: Going Beyond Emergency Notification." According to the company, it has worked with many schools and universities to implement unified communications systems and provide campus safety solutions that allow schools to leverage their existing infrastructure for voice and data, while adding video and mobility components.

[CompassLearning](#) said it's now offering schools unlimited user access to its Odyssey online curriculum. According to the company, this will increase school-wide usage for more consistency and greater student achievement, allow for campus-wide implementations that will eliminate the need to schedule or share access, and enable every student in the school to work on his or her own personalized learning path.

[CXtec](#) exhibited its equal2new pre-owned network equipment, which can help schools reduce the cost of their network infrastructure. The equipment comes with a lifetime warranty and a 99.51 percent out-of-the-box reliability rating, the company said.

The [D2SC](#) program from D2 Data-Driven Software Corp. is a fully integrated, web-based, K-12 software platform that meets the curriculum, instruction, assessment, and reporting needs of schools districts, the company said. Modules include assessment management, reporting, curriculum management, classroom walkthrough, gradebook, student and parent access, and program tracking.

[JAMF Software](#) discussed its Casper Suite, which manages Mac clients. By working with Mac administrators, the company says it has identified seven major tenets of client management: inventory, imaging, patch management, software distribution, remote control, settings management, and license management. Within each of these tenets, the Casper Suite provides features and functions that give Mac administrators best-practice strategies, according to the company.

[JAR Systems](#), which provides mobile solutions for education and training, displayed its next-generation mobile notebook management carts, powered by HP. Carts include the HP NetEducation Center 20+1, which keeps notebooks charged and turns any room into a fully equipped computer lab, and the JAR Remote Management Solution 20, which supports WoL (wake up on LAN) functionality for all charging notebooks, the company said.

[Lightspeed Systems](#) touted its Total Traffic Control solution for managing school network usage, health, and security. According to the company, users can monitor network activity, ensure that acceptable-use policies are being followed (on eMail, the web, or the desktop--both on and off the network), reduce dangerous and costly security threats, ensure that school resources are used safely and effectively, and easily view and share critical information with customizable reports.

[Thinkronize](#) announced that users of its netTrekker kid-safe search engine now can search more than 300,000 educator-selected digital resources, organized by grade and readability level aligned with state standards. Users can also access resources from the web, including lesson plans, video, audio, images, learning games, podcasts, and manipulatives from authoritative sources like PBS, National Geographic, Smithsonian, NPR, and the Library of Congress.

[Promethean](#) displayed its ActivClassroom solution, which includes a wireless slate, wand, pen, interactive whiteboard, student response system, sound system, online resources, and lesson content. According to the company, the ActivClassroom creates a 360-degree educational environment by connecting teachers to their colleagues, their students, and to various methods of instruction. It's an integrated system of hardware, software, training, and resources designed by educators, for educators, Promethean said.

[Revolution Linux](#) is an open-source infrastructure service provider that specializes in large-scale mandates. It is certified ISO 9001:2008 for IT services and selects the technologies and solutions that a school system proposes using an open-source maturity model. The company also specializes in large-scale, open-source thin client deployments, integrating thousands of client machines into existing infrastructures.

[RM Learning](#) introduced its Honeycomb suite of Web 2.0 tools for K-12 schools. The RM Honeycomb allows users to incorporate wikis, blogs, and other Web 2.0 technologies into the curriculum with an integrated set of online creativity and collaboration tools that work through the internet. The online tools are delivered through a single interface that students can use together to create an online presence. It also offers text, image, video editing, spreadsheets, graphing, mapping, drawing, a podcast player, and photo sharing capabilities.

[SAFARI Montage](#) released its new algebra'scool teaching system, which covers a full year of Algebra I instruction. This new series presents content through video animations, graphics, concrete examples, and real-world explanations. Algebra'scool was developed by BestQuest Teaching Systems. The curriculum includes operations and expressions, linear equations, inequalities, functions, polynomials, quadratic equations, rational and radical equations, probability, and statistics.

[SANYO](#) is now offering to loan an XC series projector to any school district that has the budget for 25 or more projectors for the balance of this school year. Upon approval of a loan application, SANYO will loan the qualified education customer one XC series projector for 120 days. If the customer buys 25 or more XC series projectors within the 120-day period, SANYO will allow that customer to keep the loaner unit.

[SAS Curriculum Pathways](#), which provides content aligned to state standards in English, math, social studies, science, and Spanish, is now free to all educators and their students in the United States. The company said the move comes in response to an education system in crisis and in need of resources that engage 21st-century students. SAS has more than 200 interactivities and 855 ready-to-use lessons that enable technology-rich instruction and engage higher-order thinking skills, the company said. It is primarily used in grades 8-12, though middle school content is in development.

[Stoneware Inc.](#) touted its webOS, a desktop virtualization solution that is designed to integrate the growing number of online, Windows, and hosted applications that are being deployed in the enterprise each day, the company said. webOS is built from web technology and based on AJAX. It's designed to give users access to a virtual web-based desktop anytime, anywhere. A single server can scale to more than a thousand users, requiring only an internet browser.

[TICAL](#) (the Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership) is a statewide educational technology service sponsored by the California Department of Education. Portical.org is TICAL's web portal, which provides a range of categorized annotated tools and resources relating to 21st-century educational leadership. All TICAL resources are matched to National Educational Technology Standards for Administrators and California's Principals Training Program.

[UniServity](#) demonstrated its UniServity cLc (connected learning community)--a safe and secure K-12 global learning community. The cLc equips learners and schools with a suite of safe social learning tools that support and enhance collaboration, communication, and administration, according to the company. These tools include online forums, blogs, podcasts, wikis, and a range of administration and management tools for teachers, scalable from a school to a school district or region.

[Verizon Business](#) discussed its conferencing service that can help accelerate learning, improve efficiency and productivity, and reduce travel costs and carbon emissions, said the company. Schools can broadcast a video feed concurrently with desktop sharing in real time, offer distance learning options to those who could not attend class, and host live interactive education for faculty and staff with chat functionality.

[Xirrus](#), a Wi-Fi network provider, discussed its Wi-Fi Array, which reportedly delivers two times more range, four times more coverage, eight times more bandwidth, and 14 times more throughput per cable drop--using 75-percent fewer devices, cables, and switch ports and with a fraction of the installation time of any other offering, said the company.

Links:

[Video interview with Don Tapscott](#)

[Consortium for School Networking](#)

[Net Gen Challenge](#)

[Grown Up Digital](#)

eSchoolNews

7920 Norfolk Ave, Suite 900, Bethesda Maryland, 20814

Tel. (866) 394-0115, Fax. (301) 913-0119

Web: <http://www.eschoolnews.com>, Email: WebAdmin@eschoolnews.com