



# e AlphaSmart NEWSLETTER



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May 2007



## FEATURE STORIES

### [Writing Across the Curriculum](#)

When teachers provide opportunities for students to write across the curriculum, they open a conversation between the learner and the content. [Read more...](#)

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NEO projects will combine writing and science curricula. [Read more...](#)

### [Students Show Their "AlphaSmarts" at Texas Capitol Schoolhouse](#)

Newton Elementary students demonstrate use of technology in education to legislators.

[Read more...](#)

Schools nationwide are catching on to why the Neo is the "Better Laptop for Schools".

### [Neo in the News](#)

The NEO was featured in the February 2007 issue of Principal Magazine. Fifth-grade teacher Mark Dickenson wrote an article about how using the NEO has transformed his classroom at Flint Hill Elementary in Vienna, Virginia. [Read more...](#) (.pdf)

### [AlphaSmarties Best Practice Tip](#)

Have you heard of our TWIN ideas? TWIN means "Teach With It Now." Sometimes, we wonder if we need a fully developed lesson plan or instructional unit to implement technology across the curriculum. Actually, it's best to begin with a simple integration idea—especially one that is teacher-friendly and classroom tested. [Click here](#) to find out more!

### [Writing Next Report](#)

The Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools, A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York explicitly outlines 11 elements of effective adolescent writing instruction.

Want to know how AlphaSmart Solutions support the 11 elements?

[Click here](#) to download the Correlating AlphaSmart Solutions to the Writing Next Report.



## Product News



### [Microsoft Vista Installers](#)

Download free Vista Installers for use with AlphaSmart Manager. [Learn More...](#)

### [AlphaQuiz](#)

New version of AlphaQuiz now available for download. [Learn More...](#)

### [Palm™ Desktop Software](#)

Free download for use with your Dana or Dana Wireless devices. [Learn More...](#)

**Conference Appearances**

**Click here** to see where we're going to be. Stop by and visit our AlphaSmart booth.

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### Features

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## Writing Across the Curriculum

By Jan Bryan, Ed.D.  
 Director of Professional Services  
 AlphaSmart, a Renaissance Learning Brand

“Useless.”

Interesting word, “useless.” When was the last time you heard that word? It was once uttered as a famous last word by one of America’s most infamous characters.

Now that’s an intriguing thought. I wonder what other famous last words have been uttered? There’s “et tu Brute?” for one. How about, “They won’t think a thing of it,” and “I am about to—or I am going to—die; either expression is used.”

When teachers provide opportunities for students to write across the curriculum, they open a conversation between the learner and the content. Can you imagine the learning taking place when a student writes a series of “interview” questions to be asked of a negative number, or author a biopoem about the Horseshoe Crab?

Science teachers are experts when it comes to requiring writing as students learn. Anyone who has ever written detailed lab notes no doubt remembers the experiment, analysis, and results in vivid detail. Such is the power of the word.

In the *Writing Next Report*, Graham and Perin (2006) identify the eleven effective elements of writing instruction. The final element is *writing to learn*. According to the report, powerful teachers incorporate writing strategies across the curriculum as a tool for learning content area concepts.

One such strategy is the *Anticipation Guide*. Teachers send a series of plausible statements related to a reading passage to the students’ NEOs or Danas. Prior to reading, students respond to the statements—either agreeing or disagreeing with them. During the reading, students are actively engaged as they read to confirm or correct their predictions. Finally, students return to their original predictions to expound on their accurate predictions and correct those disproved by the reading passage.

Writing engages learners, reinforces concepts, and leads to greater success. As stated in the *Writing Next Report*, writing across the content areas led to significant gains in 75% of studies reviewed. Additionally writing across the content areas was equally effective in science, social studies, and math, and the affect was observed in all grade levels represented in the reviewed research.

So what’s the bottom line? There are several. First, John Wilkes Booth uttered “useless” as he lay dying, Abraham Lincoln gently assured Mary that their theatre companions would think nothing of it as she held his hand, Julius Caesar accepted his fate as he realized even his closest companion participated in his death, and Dominique Bouhours was the preeminent

French Jesuit grammarian who worked endlessly to promote high standards and purity of speech.

Next, writing across the curriculum leads to greater understanding, concept development, and knowledge retention.

Finally, to learn more about Biopoems, Anticipation Guide, writing across the curriculum, or the *Writing Next Report*, and how AlphaSmart solutions support all eleven elements of effective writing instruction, visit <http://www.alphasmart.com>.

Useful!

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2005) A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York. *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools*. Available from the Alliance for Excellent Education. <http://www.all4ed.org>.

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## 2007 AlphaGrant Recipients Announced NEO projects will combine writing and science curricula

We're proud to announce the two winners of the 2007 AlphaGrant Program! We'd like to thank all of the educators who submitted applications for this year's grant. Choosing two winners from all of the wonderful entries we received was difficult.

This year's winners will each receive one NEO SmartOption Mobile Cart with 30 Neo units, one day of on-site professional development, and three one-hour professional development webinars.

Read on to learn about the worthy recipients:

### Summerfield Elementary School

Riverview, FL

#### Environmental Studies Gardening Project

Marcy Ringdahl, Network Administrator & Media Specialist, had used the Neo at a previous school and loved them. "The AlphaSmart Cart was the most sought-after piece of tech equipment at our site," she said. When she came to Summerfield Elementary, she was disappointed that the school didn't have the same equipment.

But that's changed now that Ringdahl applied and won the AlphaGrant to receive a NEO SmartOption Mobile Lab. "I never dreamed in a million years we would win this grant," she said. "I think it was probably the best day of my professional life, thus far."

Ringdahl applied for the grant to incorporate the NEO into an all-encompassing community project that would enable the school's third and fourth graders to conduct onsite environmental studies in gardens, starting next fall.

"Students will be given the opportunity to make authentic world connections to writing, fostering an understanding of the environment in which they live," Ringdahl wrote in her application. "The classes will experience the benefits of a garden as it relates to reading, science and writing. The students will use the technology to journal data and personal reflection of the project."

Through portability of the NEOs, Summerfield students will be able to record data from the garden onsite where the learning is taking place.

Ringdahl is excited about the possibilities. "This grant will mean access to technology that was previously unavailable. The

classroom will become high-tech...aligning itself more to the kind of technology these kids may have in the home," she said. "The AlphaSmart units are the way to create and assess authentic writing and to provide collaboration between teacher and student, and student-to-student. It provides a means of instruction unequal to any other product that I know of."

## **Iowa School for the Deaf**

Council Bluffs, IA

### **Roots & Shoots Global Environment Project**

"Non-auditory technology in any form is beneficial and serves as a lifeline to our language-delayed students, providing them with a tool that serves as a communication link to a hearing world," wrote Sue Purcell, the IEP/Transition Coordinator for The Iowa School for the Deaf in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

So school officials were thrilled to discover that they'd won the AlphaGrant to receive a Neo SmartOption Mobile Lab with 30 NEOs. "We are a small school, so to be chosen as a recipient of one of the two grants was indeed a very pleasant surprise," Purcell said. "It certainly ended our day on a high note!"

Because deaf students are very visual learners, the NEOs offer them the ability to review assignments and critical information with the touch of a finger.

"Hearing loss leaves our students with an inability to learn incidentally, which adversely affects their educational performance," Purcell wrote in her application. "With an average language level of fourth grade, our high school students must learn more at a faster rate than their hearing peers if they are to succeed in their post-secondary lives and live independently in the community."

The 30 NEOs will enable the school's high school students to partake in a learning adventure that will incorporate their language curriculum with Jane Goodall's Roots and Shoots global environmental program. Students will be able to take downloaded information on their Neo with them to their project site, record ideas and take notes onsite while they work on their projects.

"As our students grow in their knowledge of the environment and their responsibilities to it, their vocabulary, writing skills and confidence will develop and progress as they experience success," Purcell wrote. "By using the NEOs, students will also have the advantage they need to become motivated to develop their writing skills to make the Roots and Shoots project success, and to become more confident young adults, ready to face the future."

Purcell said that the addition of this technology is exciting, because both the students and the teachers stand to gain from the benefits the Neo will offer. "If the NEOs can help our students become successful in the classroom, this award becomes priceless to all of us."

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## Students Show Their "AlphaSmarts" at Texas Capitol Schoolhouse

Recently, Newton Elementary in Newton, Texas, participated in the 2007 Texas Capitol Schoolhouse, a legislative event to give students and teachers from across the state of Texas the opportunity to showcase how technology is being used to improve public schools. Legislators, other state leaders, and the general public had a chance to see how advanced technologies and best practices are improving the way teachers teach and students learn.

Sherrie Leach, Assistant Superintendent at Newton Independent School District, reported that her students told her that it's easier to complete assignments using their AlphaSmart laptops and, as one student put it, it's "really cool to be able to beam work to another classmate or to the printer."



**Newton Elementary student Shadow Stephens completes work on the AlphaSmart Dana during the Texas Capitol Schoolhouse event to showcase technology in public schools.**

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### AlphaSmarties Best Practices Tip

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## Thesaurus TWIN Ideas

Have you heard of our TWIN ideas? TWIN means “Teach With It Now.” Sometimes, we wonder if we need a fully developed lesson plan or instructional unit to implement technology across the curriculum. Actually, it’s best to begin with a simple integration idea—especially one that is teacher-friendly and classroom tested. For example, try this set of TWIN ideas when working with the built-in NEO or Dana thesaurus.

### TWIN IDEA 1: Understand the Pledge

Send a file with the words to The Pledge of Allegiance. Instruct students to highlight unfamiliar words, and use the thesaurus to replace with more recognizable words.

#### Pledge of Allegiance

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

#### Student’s version

I promise *loyalty* to the *logo* of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one *country*, under our *Maker*, *unified* with *freedom* and *fairness* for all.

Now ask students to write a brief explanation of what they recite each morning at school. If appropriate, send a set of open-ended questions for students to answer or discuss. Questions, such as, “What does it mean to promise to be loyal?” and “In what ways does America try to show fairness to all?”

Generate a “silent discussion” as students beam responses to one another.

### TWIN Idea 2: Wake me up when the verbs get interesting!

Students develop voice in their writing with exciting verb choices. Send a set of rather boring sentences to students. Instruct them to “wake up” the sentences using the thesaurus to generate better verb choices and combine sentences. For example:

1. “I ate cereal. Then I walked to school.”  
becomes  
“I feasted on cereal and cold milk this morning and leisurely ambled to school.”
2. “The dog ran across the yard. She chased a small squirrel.”  
becomes  
“Pursuing the puny squirrel, the hound sprinted across the yard.”



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### Product News

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#### Vista Installers

Have you recently upgraded to Windows Vista™ or purchased new computers that include the latest Vista operating system from Microsoft? If so, then you'll want to download our Vista installers so that you can continue to use AlphaSmart Manager and AlphaSmart Manager for Dana with your computer.

There are two scenarios that you should consider:

1. If you have recently installed AlphaSmart Manager but have not yet connected to a NEO, Dana or AlphaHub (for example, you're a brand new installation), then you need only download and run our free Vista Installers. This will install the proper drivers to work with Windows Vista.
2. If you have installed AlphaSmart Manager and have used it to connect your PC to a NEO, Dana or AlphaHub, then you should first remove your XP driver and then run our Vista installer. Instructions for safely uninstalling the XP drivers can be found on the AlphaSmart website.

For more details about uninstalling XP drivers and downloading and installing the new Vista installers, check our website at <http://www.alphasmart.com/support/downloads.html>.

#### AlphaQuiz

A new version of AlphaQuiz has been posted on the AlphaSmart website for download. This version improves the performance of the QuizManager component when sending and receiving large quizzes. It is also compatible with Windows Vista. To download the latest version, visit the downloads page at <http://www.alphasmart.com/support/downloads.html>.



#### Palm™ Desktop Software

You can now download the Palm™ 4.1 Desktop Software for use with your Dana or Dana Wireless devices. Access the free installers on our website at <http://www.alphasmart.com/support/downloads.html>

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**YES! I would like to learn more about Writing Next Report, the better laptop for my students. Please send me the FREE information packet.**

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## Conference Appearances

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Name	Dates	City	State
International Reading Association Convention	May 14-16, 2007	Toronto, Ontario	Canada
National Educational Computing Association Conference	June 25-27, 2007	Atlanta	GA
National Conference on Differentiated Instruction	July 15-18, 2007	Las Vegas	NV
25th Annual Closing the Gap Conference	October 17-20, 2007	Minneapolis	MN

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