



NEO NEWS

By AlphaSmart™/Renaissance Learning™



Your source for news, product upgrades, and more for NEO laptops used in the K-12 classroom.

March 2008



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

FEATURE STORIES

[Less is more with NEO 2](#)

Sometimes, less can be more. And when it comes to the benefits of Accelerated Reader™ quizzing on NEO 2, less is indeed more.

[School uses grant to implement NEO 2 laptops for 1:1 computing](#)

After recent integration of the portable NEO 2 laptops, the eighth-grade students at South Beauregard High School are free to complete their classwork wherever they go with a laptop of their very own.

[NEOs are key ingredient for struggling readers at Camp Courage](#)

Camp Courage's Literacy Camp combines use of NEO laptops and nature to improve literacy skills for struggling readers.

NaNoWriMo Follow-Ups

[The sound of music to a writing teacher's ears](#)

The reverie of Tchaikovsky or Mozart may appeal to some teachers, but Doretta Patterson is entranced by the melodic rhythm of her fourth-graders typing away on their NEOs. [Read more...](#)

[NEO laptops enable high school students to write novels in one month](#)

How do you motivate a class of high school students to write 50,000 words in one month—voluntarily? [Read more...](#)

[NEO receives coveted Teachers' Choice Award](#)

Learning Magazine has awarded its prestigious 2008 Teachers' Choice Award to the NEO laptop by AlphaSmart/Renaissance Learning.

NEO Best Practice Tips

When writing in AlphaWord, it is sometimes difficult to remember which key combinations can move you through your draft the quickest. Here's a handy little



Don't forget to donate your AlphaSmart laptops by March 28th

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Product News



[Accelerated Reader and NEO 2—the Perfect Pair for Daily Reading Practice](#)

With the AR SmartApplet installed on a NEO 2 and an active subscription to Accelerated Reader Renaissance Place v7.5, you can allow students to complete AR Quizzes wirelessly from their own desks using the NEO 2. [Learn More...](#)

reference to keep by your side to help you remember and write more efficiently. [Read more...](#)

Professional Development—Regional Seminars

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Less is More!

Sue Pulvermacher-Alt, Product Line Director—Reading, Renaissance Learning

Sometimes, less can be more. Less shopping can mean more money in our pocketbooks. Less snacking on unhealthy foods can mean better overall health. Less time spent watching TV can free up more time for other activities, like reading (OK, I'm biased!). And when it comes to the benefits of Accelerated Reader quizzing on NEO 2, less is indeed more.

First a little background on Accelerated Reader™ (AR™). AR and the rest of Renaissance Learning's reading products are used in over 63,000 schools as the reading practice component of an effective reading curriculum. Research has shown that Accelerated Reader software, when combined with best classroom practices and daily reading practice, dramatically accelerates reading growth in K-12 classrooms. Now, Accelerated Reader Quizzes run on the NEO 2™ laptop, which gives you an exciting new option for assessing students' daily reading practice as soon as they finish a book.

So how can using the NEO 2 for AR quizzing offer you less?

Less time spent quizzing means more time spent practicing...actually reading. With easy access to AR Quizzes via their NEO 2 laptops, your students will spend less time waiting for a computer, which means more time to spend on reading more books and then easily taking more quizzes. As a result, you'll build even more excitement for reading and improve students' reading skills even more.

Less of your budget spent on computers means more money for books and AR quizzes to keep reading practice strong. The NEO 2 costs just a fraction of the average laptop and has almost zero maintenance costs. Using the NEO 2 for AR quizzing means you won't have to maintain expensive desktop computers solely for the purpose of quizzing which can help you lower the overall cost of implementing Accelerated Reader.

Less time spent grading quizzes and gathering data gives you more time to assess your students' reading progress in other ways and make real-time adjustments in your instruction. Data from every AR quiz taken on NEO 2 (and a desktop computer, if you have both) is compiled instantly to one database and reports can be generated immediately that let you know how well your students are understanding what they're reading. Using this information you can adjust students' reading practice and adjust your instruction. You can also use the NEO 2 to extend the understanding of what students are reading by having them respond to the literature and write about their books.

I hope you'll take time to check out the articles and ideas in this newsletter about the NEO 2 and imagine the benefits they will have in your AR classroom. Enjoy!

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NEO 2 use increases student motivation

School uses grant to implement NEO 2 laptops for 1:1 computing

In the small farming community of Longville, Louisiana, 30 minutes from the nearest town, many students at South Beauregard High School spend nearly an hour per day on a bus. Now, after recent integration of the portable NEO 2 laptops, the students in Debbie Keith's English class are free to complete their classwork on the bus, in the classroom, or wherever they go with a laptop of their very own.

South Beauregard High, in Beauregard Parish, introduced the cost-effective NEO 2s in November, one of the first schools to receive the newly-released laptops.

"During peak demand times, centered around the required research paper for grades 7-12, 30 traditional laptops were not enough to go around," Keith said. "When I saw the NEO 2, I just knew they would be a way to make word processing technology available to all students."



Keith's students use the NEO 2 laptops to beam their poems to each other for revisions.

With the help of state grant money, the school purchased enough NEO 2s for the entire eighth-grade class, so that each student could have a unit for the year. "They use the NEO 2s in several classes and take them home at night," she said. "They are issued just like textbooks."

Keith has found the NEO 2s to be much less distracting than laptops, and they have increased productivity in her class. "There are many times that they don't need to access the Internet. By being able to type instead of physically picking up a pencil, students are much more willing to do their assignments," she said.

Keith estimates that the eighth graders use their NEO 2s for 40-50% of the day. Each Monday, she downloads lessons to each NEO 2, to be completed for the week, including journal writing assignments and practice exercises in correcting grammar usage, spelling and punctuation.

"We go over the correction each day at the beginning of class," she said. "If a student is absent on Monday, it is so easy to tell him to just get someone to beam the work to him."

The wireless beaming feature also comes in handy for their poetry-writing unit. "My students compose their poems on the NEO 2, beaming their work to a neighbor for help in revision, and then printing out the poems for me," she said.

The increase in student motivation since the introduction of the NEO 2 is encouraging. "Several of my students have commented that they spend much more time on their journal entries than before the NEO 2 was available," she said. "Teachers in another building have told me that students who never turn in work are now doing their work with the NEO 2."

Keith is very optimistic about the future of the NEO 2s at South Beauregard High School. "As teachers become more familiar with them, I expect the NEO 2 to become as useful to all teachers as their automobiles," she said. "With the NEO 2, we can go so many more places in educating our students."

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NEOs are key ingredient for struggling readers at Camp Courage

Camp Courage, located just outside of the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area, is a unique program for individuals with hearing, sensory, and language impairments, as well as physical disabilities and illnesses. Part of Courage Center, a rehabilitation and resource center started in 1955, Camp Courage is equal parts nature, education, and fun—and a dash of confidence boosting for good measure. Literacy Camp, one of the programs designed specifically for struggling readers aged 12-18, combines use of NEO laptops and nature to improve literacy skills.

“The use of assistive technology to support literacy learning is an important aspect of this course,” said Barb Wollak, Assistive Technology Specialist, and Literacy Camp organizer. “One of the best features of the NEO is its ease of use. Because of limited time, we don’t have time to teach the use of assistive technology that has a ‘steep learning curve’.”

During the school year, Wollak works for the Saint Paul Public School District. She first introduced NEOs when Literacy Camp started in 2005. “We use many NEOs in our district. One year, I asked each educator to bring a portable word processor to camp. For those who could not access one, I brought a NEO for their use from our assistive technology library.” Now the NEOs are staples of the Literacy Camp.

Campers use NEOs and digital cameras to create their own journals or books about camp, as well as write entries for the camp blog. “We are able to bring the NEOs to the farm, on nature hikes, fishing—wherever they go—except IN the water!” Wollak said. “The campers are able to download that information and do additional writing on the NEOs during times with the educators. The use of NEOs is critical to being able to create those products.”

Based on the concepts developed by literacy experts Drs. David Koppenhaver and Karen Erickson, Literacy Camp educators spend 50 hours learning how to assess and teach literacy to individuals with disabilities, and further support campers’ developing skills in the coming school year. It is the only camp of its kind in the country.

“Many campers come from the inner city of Saint Paul and experience many ‘firsts’ such as horseback riding, tubing behind a boat, and even being able to see stars at night, as well as experiencing a positive literacy experience,” said Wollak.

The NEO’s impact on campers’ attitudes toward writing is very encouraging. Campers participated in an informal assessment before and after attending Literacy Camp to determine self-perceived attitudes toward reading and writing. Penny Hatch, from the Center for Literacy and Disabilities Studies, analyzed the data. She reported that campers had a stronger self-impression of reading and writing abilities, and a more positive attitude about spending a week of summer vacation at Literacy Camp.

Hatch concluded, “Given that all of the adolescents who attended Literacy Camp struggle with reading and writing, this increase in perceived skills over such a short period of time should be seen as quite an accomplishment. Many positive and powerful steps were taken during this single week of Literacy Camp to help these adolescents become better readers and writers.”

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The sound of music to a writing teacher's ears

Use of NEO laptops helps fourth-grade class compose their own novels

The reverie of Tchaikovsky or Mozart may appeal to some teachers, but Doretta Patterson is entranced by the melodic rhythm of her fourth-graders typing away on their NEOs. "The sound of 32 keyboards quietly tapping is a fantastic sound for any teacher!" Patterson said.

This past November, Patterson's class participated in the National Novel Writers' Month (NaNoWriMo) Young Writers' Program, which challenges students to write a novel in 30 days. Patterson said the experience has transformed her students' attitude toward writing.

Patterson originally learned about NaNoWriMo from her daughter, after she participated in the 2006 program using her own NEO. As fourth grade students are assessed on their writing skills for standardized testing, NaNoWriMo fit well into Valley View Elementary's curriculum. "I love to teach writing, and I thought the contest would provide a fun opportunity to practice their skills," Patterson said.



Patterson transfers her student's work to the PC for editing.

Though many of her students were initially reluctant to attempt novel writing, the introduction of the NEOs sparked their interest in writing. "I can't begin to describe the change I saw in my students," Patterson said. "In the beginning of the program, several students asked if they had to participate. I tried to give an enthusiastic 'Yes!' but I could see the students were not exactly motivated."

It was a different story, once the students received their NEOs and word-count goals. "Once they began the process of writing their stories, they became more excited," Patterson said. "Two of my 'unenthusiastic' students ended up writing almost 6,000 words. I was simply amazed! Most of these students had never written more than two or three pages of hand-written work. These students were now producing novels that were well over ten pages of typed text."

Patterson was amazed at her students' dedication to their novels. "Students tapped away at their keyboards with a deep resolve. When they finished other assignments, they would reach for their NEOs and type away," she said. "There was not one student who did not participate and work toward meeting their goal. They loved having their own word processor at their desks that contained their novels."

Patterson and other teachers hope to participate in NaNoWriMo next year. As a memento, Patterson had her students' NaNoWriMo novels bound. "It was such a positive experience for us. I was amazed at how dedicated the students were to their stories," Patterson said. "I rarely had to redirect students to the task, as they wanted to meet their writing objectives. The NEOs made the process so easy."



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NEO laptops enable high school students to write novels in one month

Question: How do you motivate a class of high school students to write 50,000 words in one month voluntarily?

Answer: Use NEO laptops during National Novel Writing Month (a.k.a. NaNoWriMo).

Students at George Henry Corliss High School of south-side Chicago were challenged to write a novel in one month, and as a result, some of the students will even get their work published!

Kelli Rushek, a writing workshop teacher at Corliss, had heard about the month-long NaNoWriMo writing challenge, but didn't consider participating until after she received an email from the director of the NaNoWriMo Young Writers Program offering use of NEO laptops.

Renaissance Learning donated 25 NEO laptops for NaNoWriMo's Young Writers Program so that a deserving classroom could have the opportunity to participate. "I had wanted to be a part of NaNoWriMo with my students the year before, but we couldn't participate due to lack of technology," Rushek recalls. "I thought that this would be the way for my students to experience writing a novel in a month. Luckily, my classroom won!"



Rushek's class rose to the challenge of writing a novel in just one month using the NEOs.

In a predominantly African-American neighborhood, where 95% qualify for free/reduced lunch, Corliss High students face challenges everyday. "Many of the students struggle to overcome the harsh realities of the streets. But these students are still so creative and positive," Rushek said. "Many of the students just want someone to listen. I've found that writing is a great way for them to tell their stories and to have someone listen—to get the attention they require."

Rushek was excited to witness her students' enthusiasm for novel writing blossom and was surprised to see their natural talent shine through. "I had students who surprised me every day. I gave out 'most improved' awards in each class period during our final ceremony, and I really had a tough time narrowing it down," she recalled. "I thought I was going to have to pull teeth with some of my young men, but they were the ones who got competitive with their word counts and ended up writing some really entertaining fiction."

"NaNoWriMo would be impossible for us without the loaned NEOs. I couldn't expect the students to hand-write for 46 minutes," Rushek said. "Plus, part of the glory was how much their typing skills progressed!"

Though the NaNoWriMo program ended on November 30, there's still much to be done. For 12 lucky—and talented—students, their dreams of getting a novel published will become a reality, thanks to a local publishing company that donated their services.

“Many people couldn’t believe that we were doing such a huge undertaking—these kids wrote a novel in a month!” Rushek said. “I knew they’d never have that much leniency to write whatever they wanted for the rest of their matriculation. Now that we’re on to the structure of persuasive writing, they’re itching for that opportunity to write again!”

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NEO receives coveted Teachers' Choice Award

Learning Magazine has awarded its prestigious 2008 Teachers' Choice Award to the NEO laptop by AlphaSmart/Renaissance Learning.

The Teachers' Choice Awards for the Classroom, sponsored by Learning Magazine, are given for exceptional classroom products. The NEO was selected for this honor based on evaluations from teacher teams across the United States.

"Renaissance Learning has an established history of providing quality educational programs for children," said Anne Sumpter, publisher of Learning Magazine. "It's great to see NEO recognized for its contribution in today's classrooms."

"The NEO is enabling student writing practice in classrooms across the country," said Greg Wright, Sr. Vice President and General Manager of Renaissance Learning's Electronics Division. "We are honored to receive this award, in light of our mission to make NEO the teacher-preferred tool for increasing student writing enthusiasm."



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With easy access to AR Quizzes via their NEO 2 laptops, your students will spend less time waiting for a computer and more time reading and taking Accelerated Reader Quizzes. As a result, you'll build even more excitement for reading and improve students' reading skills even more. It can also lower your overall cost of implementing Accelerated Reader Enterprise in your school or district.

So how does it work? It's as easy as 1-2-3.

1. Set time aside for daily reading practice.



2. Once students complete a book, let them log in to Renaissance Place from their NEO 2 and retrieve the quiz they want to take. As each question is presented, the student selects the answer that they think is correct.

3. When they've completed their quiz, their TOPS report is sent wirelessly from their NEO 2 to the printer.





For more information about Accelerated Reader on NEO 2, please visit
http://www.alphasmart.com/k12/K12_Products/neo2_AR_K12.html

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NEO Best Practice Tips

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NEO Cursor Cheat Sheet

When writing in AlphaWord, it is sometimes difficult to remember which key combinations can move you through your draft the quickest. Here's a handy little reference to keep by your side to help you remember and write more efficiently.

	Left Arrow	Right Arrow	Up Arrow	Down Arrow
(none)	1 character left	1 character right	1 line up	1 line down
cmd	Start of line	End of line	1 screen down	1 screen up
alt /opt	1 word to left	1 word to right	1 line up	1 line down
ctrl	Start of next sentence to left.	Start of next sentence to right.	Start of next paragraph up	Start of next paragraph down.

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Literacy Across the Curriculum

Houston, Texas—3/26 | Leesburg, Virginia—4/16

This seminar offers teachers eight instructional strategies to implement NEO 1™ and NEO 2™ across the curriculum, and further develops NEO and NEO 2 skills. The instructional strategies presented in this seminar are appropriate for Intermediate, Middle, and High School teachers.

While NEO and NEO 2 technology is integrated throughout the curriculum in this seminar, teachers new to NEO and NEO 2 benefit from learning the strategies and how to apply them effectively to positively impact student achievement.

According to the Literacy Across the Content Areas*, reading assignments beyond the elementary grades become longer, tend to include more content, and are increasingly varied in style, depth of vocabulary, purpose, and audience. In order to address these challenges, at this seminar, you will:

- Understand the challenges related to comprehension in the content areas
- Learn how to access the Literacy Across the Content Areas report
- Further develop AlphaSmart™ Manager 2 skills to more efficiently manage student writing.
- Develop NEO and NEO 2 skills to manage student writing
- Learn new ways to publish NEO and NEO 2 student writing
- Explore three strategies to help students learn new vocabulary
- Examine two pre reading strategies that activate prior knowledge, set purposes for reading, and provide a framework for active, engaged reading.
- Learn three reading comprehension strategies designed to promote long-term knowledge retention

* Heller, R., and Greenleaf, C. (2007). Literacy instruction in the content areas: Getting to the core of middle and high school improvement. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

To register, visit <http://www.renlearn.com/Profdevel/PD/seminarlist.asp#SeminarSchedule>.

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