

NEO NEWS

By Renaissance Learning™



May 2009

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

Features



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

Informative Assessment: When It's Not about a Grade

Ask a group of educators to brainstorm words associated with "assessment," and something interesting, yet quite predictable, will happen.

[Read more...](#)

NEO Feature Stories

Texas teacher uses NEOs for month-long classroom novel writing project

On the first day of November, Nneka McGee, English teacher at Dallas Environmental Science Academy, gave her eighth graders free reign as they embarked on a month-long adventure of novel writing using their NEO laptops—without editing. [Read more...](#)

NEO 2s bring surprises abound for a Wisconsin school's students and teachers

When we last heard from Judie Sage, Occupational Therapist at Arkansaw Elementary School, the school in Durand, Wisconsin had just been notified that they'd won the 2008 Renaissance Learning 21st Century Writing Grant last May. [Read more...](#)

NEO in the News

Machines provide a classroom jump-start

An article from the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* outlines how the NEO saves teacher time while impacting student learning at DeSoto Central Elementary School in Southaven, Mississippi. [Read more...](#)

NEO Best Practices: Writing and Response to Intervention

There is a great deal of talk these days about Response to Intervention, or RtI. Most of it centers around reading and math, but there are ways to incorporate intervention strategies into your writing instruction to help those students having difficulties with written expression. The following activity is designed to teach students how to monitor their word count and build motivation for writing.

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Customer Loyalty Promotion



**Get 5% off NEO 2s or
\$800 off SmartOption
Mobile Labs!**

[Click here to learn more.](#)

Product News



**What's New
with NEO 2?**

In February and March 2009 we announced a number of new enhancements to the NEO 2. These enhancements are available for download at no additional charge from our web site at www.renlearn.com/neo/downloads/. In addition, we have partnered with a number of content providers to enrich the NEO 2 experience. [Read more...](#)

Professional Development and Conferences

Professional Development

Are you looking for an opportunity to explore more deeply the features and functions of NEO 2 that make it the only laptop designed for the classroom that lets you use it all day, every day? Then attend one of our upcoming two-day NEO 2 Forums. [Click here for more information.](#)

Conference Appearances

[Click here](#) to see where we're going to be. Stop by and visit us at the Renaissance Learning booth!

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Informative Assessment: When it's Not About a Grade

By Gene M. Kerns, Ed.D. - Vice President of Training, Renaissance Learning

Ask a group of educators to brainstorm words associated with "assessment," and something interesting, yet quite predictable, will happen. Because of the many pressures they face, the words they come up with will most frequently be associated high-stakes, accountability-related, summative assessment. They will far less frequently mention more informal, formative assessments.

The effect of this perspective on student performance is profound. Stiggins states, "Because that standardized testing light has been so brilliant in our eyes, we haven't seen past it to another application of assessment in schools that promises even greater impact on student learning. This is the classroom level of assessment." It is this other application of assessment—formative classroom assessment—that is at the center of the 2Know! Toolbar, which now works on NEO 2.



Gene M. Kerns, Ed.D.

We choose to refer to this type of assessment as "informative" because it informs the learning process. Teachers are informed about how their students are doing, and learners can even get feedback that they can use on their own to regulate and adjust their learning. Researchers like Rick Stiggins and Dylan William have documented dozens of strategies. We will focus on one of the simplest. Let's look at the use of "hinge-point questions" with the 2Know! Toolbar and NEO 2.

While teachers continually present portions of content and then "check for understanding," Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, and William (2005) make that cycle more thoughtful by specifically naming and discussing the lesson's "hinge-point" – the point in the lesson when, after covering new content, you check for understanding. It is called a hinge-point, because "the lesson can go in different directions depending on student responses."

At a lesson's hinge-point, the 2Know! Toolbar is invaluable. Without sacrificing much instructional time, teachers are trying to decide which way the "hinge" is going to turn. Will their check for understanding indicate that they can move on to the next piece of content or lesson phase (e.g. let students work independently)? Or will re-teaching be in order? Or will results be mixed? With a single click to indicate question type, the 2Know! Toolbar is ready to accept and graph information for teachers.

If a high percentage of students answer a hinge-point question correctly, the teacher clearly can move on. If less than 50% answer correctly, re-teaching is clearly needed. If the results are inbetween, the path may be less clear, and the information from the Toolbar is even more valuable.

Fogarty and Kerns (2009) note that "the most difficult turn of the hinge to manage is when student responses are mixed. " They note, however, that "at this point, the teacher has a unique opportunity to involve students in peer instruction."

You see, if more than 50% of the students answer correctly but overall success rate is still not high enough to move ahead (e.g. 90% of better), this is a great time for peer instruction. Let the students discuss their answers with one another.

Discussing this peer teaching opportunity, Fogarty and Kerns (2009) note the following advantage:

When peer instruction is used in this informed manner, everyone benefits. The students who grasp the content at the hinge point will gain deeper understanding through explaining the content in their own words to their peers. Their peers who were struggling at the hinge point will be brought up to speed. Additionally, many teachers report that in these instances, peer instruction is far superior to anything they might have offered in re-teaching because, when teacher their peers, students translate the content into more kid-friendly terms.

This is just one example of how formative assessment strategies "inform" teachers at key instructional moments and how these strategies are more easily implemented with NEO 2 and the 2Know! Toolbar. When we're informed, our practice becomes more precise and efficient, and student performance improves. Black and Wiliam (1998) found that "students taught by teachers who integrated assessment with instruction could achieve in six or seven months what would otherwise take a year" because each decision these teachers made was informed.

References

Black, P., and D. Wiliam. 1998. Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment. Phi Delta Kappan, 80(2), 139-144, 144-148.

Fogarty, R. and Kerns, G. (2009 – in press) Informative Assessment: When It's Not About a Grade. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Leahy, S., C. Lyon, M. Thompson, and D. Wiliam. 2005. Classroom Assessment: Minute by Minute, Day by Day. Educational Leadership 63(3) 18-24.

Note: Renaissance Learning offers onsite "Informative Assessment" training as well as a NEO2/"Informative Assessment" hardware and training bundled package.

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Texas teacher uses NEOs for month-long classroom novel writing project.

Everyone has an "Inner Editor"—that nagging little guy who sits on your shoulder, dissecting every plot, every written word; telling you to hit spell-check (just do it...you know you want to); trying to convince you that you can't write.

On the first day of November, Nneka McGee, English teacher at Dallas Environmental Science Academy (DESA) in Dallas, Texas, gave her eighth graders permission to hit the "Inner Editor Containment Button," thereby vacuuming the creativity-draining beast for the entire month. Unrestrained, students embarked on a month-long adventure of novel writing using NEO laptops—no editing allowed.

Each November, the National Novel Writing Month—or NaNoWriMo for short—challenges writers of all abilities to write a 50,000-word novel in one month. "I've known about NaNoWriMo for several years," McGee said. "I thought it would be a great way for our students to learn about writing."

Sponsored by The Office of Letters and Light, NaNoWriMo Young Writers' Program lends NEO laptops, donated by Renaissance Learning, to encourage student participation—particularly in schools where lack of technology might hinder those budding novelists from reaching their word goals.

"Unfortunately, we don't have a computer lab at DESA, so in the interest of fairness, last year my eighth-grade students wrote their NaNoWriMo projects in spiral bound notebooks," McGee said. "Students were excited about the project at first, but in the end, many complained about writing by hand. When I read about the opportunity to borrow NEOs for NaNoWriMo, I knew I had to take a chance for my students. They really appreciated it."

Students could hardly contain their enthusiasm, once they found out that their class would be using the NEOs. "Everyday, I heard, 'Are they here yet?' When the NEOs arrived, the students cheered—we were all very happy," she said.

Using the NaNoWriMo's Young Novelists' Workbook for middle schoolers—a comical, no-nonsense how-to guide to novel writing—McGee's students developed in-depth plot outlines, characters, conflict, and resolution for their novels before the contest began.

"Once the students began writing their stories, they were very motivated," McGee admitted. "Some days, all I would hear is the tapping of fingers on the NEO keyboards. On other days, students would talk about their stories. Each moment was a productive one as we went through the writing process."



Nneka McGee's students used NEOs to write a novel in one month.

McGee reduced the word goals to 10,000 words for the month, as students were not required to work on their novels at home. Though most students wrote between 6,000 and 7,000 words, two students reached their goals. "The student that won our classroom challenge surprised me," McGee said. "During the beginning of the school year, he struggled in my class, but he became really engaged in the project. He would sit by himself and write furiously everyday. He actually reached his goal 18 days after we began NaNoWriMo."

After NaNoWriMo, McGee transferred the stories onto flash drives so students could take them home. "During NaNoWriMo, many students kept using spell check and trying to edit their work as they wrote—I had to convince them that we would edit later. Some students decided to keep writing because they wanted to complete their stories," McGee said. "The great thing about this project has been watching my students read, edit, and share their stories with others."

McGee said the project was a smashing success, and has plans to include the program into her class in the future. "I will definitely participate in NaNoWriMo again," she said. "My students LOVED the NEOs—we miss working with them. I think it's a great way to introduce basic literary concepts to students in a way that will keep them engaged."

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NEO 2s bring surprises abound for a Wisconsin school's students and teachers

When we last heard from Judie Sage, Occupational Therapist at Arkansaw Elementary School, the school in Durand, Wisconsin had just been notified that they'd won the 2008 Renaissance Learning 21st Century Writing Grant last May. Through the grant, the school received a SmartOption Mobile Lab of 30 NEO 2s in order to achieve their goal of improving writing skills and increasing student motivation.

In the year that has passed since they won the grant, Arkansaw Elementary teachers and students have discovered in the NEO 2 a learning tool that they'd rather not do without—in fact, the school found them so helpful, they purchased a second cart this year.

Sage's grant proposal was based on a model of the Carnegie Corporation's Effective Strategies for Improving Writing Skills. The school's fourth-graders were divided into two classes—one an experimental group using the NEO 2s; the other a control group using traditional writing strategies—to measure gains in student writing and engagement.

Sage reports that use of the NEO 2 brought some pleasant surprises and discoveries to the school. Although not part of the original project, the students particularly loved to use the Keywords SmartApplet to learn keyboarding—a skill they'd normally not learn until high school.

"The keyboarding program on the NEO 2s is better than what we have [in our computer lab], and the students like using it on the NEO 2s better," Sage said. "They can work on keyboarding when they have free time, without having to have a specified 'computer' time. All the students are done with the keyboarding and are now more proficient at it. They LOVE using them."

In addition, teachers were surprised how much quicker writing assignments were completed using the NEO 2s. "It takes significantly less time to complete a writing assignment with the NEO 2s than with the computer lab," Sage said. "In the computer lab, students can get more distracted by Internet or gadgets and trying to do fancy applications rather than just writing."

Another teacher, Brittney Thompkins, agreed, reflecting on an experiment she conducted using the NEO 2s. "The one group that used the NEO 2s completed their personal narratives almost two days ahead of the other two classes who went to the computer lab," she said of the class assignment. "I believe this is because the NEO 2s are straight to the point—there's no 'playing' around, which the kids do on the computer. The NEO 2s were fast and efficient. I think every classroom should have a set of these."

Sage said although the school has already made progress toward their goal of improving students' writing skills, they look forward to incorporating the NEO 2 even further into their curriculum next school year. In addition, Sage believes the teachers have really just scratched the surface of what the NEO 2 can do for them and expects that their use will increase the more they learn.

"With any new technology, having training on how to use it is helpful. I am planning on having teachers meet with each other to help each other after school next year to learn together for a while and share and try things," she said. "As teachers get used to the AlphaSmart Manager it will streamline their operations for them, but it is hard to start doing something new. One of the teachers has gotten proficient at using it, and it simplifies her being able to review students' work. She simply downloads all their work onto her computer or prints it off to review it."

The addition of the second SmartOption Mobile Lab is sure to help, too. "Having more NEO 2s will make it much easier to share," Sage said. "Ms. Thompkins has been included on all the trainings so she is up to speed on all the workings of the NEO 2s and is VERY excited about having a cart to use next year."

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Machines provide a classroom jump-start

Learning system gives boost to writing skills

By Raina Hanna, Special to The Commercial Appeal

Monday, April 27, 2009

Last fall, students in several classrooms at DeSoto Central Elementary traded in their paper and pencils for what looks like a large calculator.

Actually, though, it's a laptop alternative device with an LCD screen and full keyboard. The NEO, by AlphaSmart Inc. allows students to write, edit, save and share text much like they would on a full-size computer but without any of the distractions of games, graphics, Web access or e-mail.

"One of the advantages is these are so small and portable. We don't have the room for 30 computers in our classroom," said teacher Susie Mooneyham.

The NEO can display three to five lines of text at a time on its small screen. Information can be saved in specific locations so that more than one student can use each device.

"It's really had an impact on students learning to type, file, share and save information."

DeSoto Central has six NEO lab sets of 30 units each. They are intended to help students improve their writing skills in third, fourth and fifth grade.

"The students absolutely love them. After they write things, they are able to send them to the teacher or to other students," Mooneyham said. "The ability to share what they have written has improved the students' editing skills, too."

Mooneyham said teachers control the assignments on the NEOs through their classroom computers. Teachers are able to use lessons designed for the NEO units or create their own.

In her classes, Mooneyham is able to load the units with classroom assignments prior to the start of the school day, enabling the students to begin working right away while also taking things at their own pace. The NEO units can also be used to administer tests which are automatically graded, saving teachers' time.

For more information on the NEO, visit renlearn.com/neo/.



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Best Practices: Writing and Response Intervention

There is a great deal of talk these days about Response to Intervention, or RtI. Most of it centers around reading and math, but there are ways to incorporate intervention strategies into your writing instruction to help those students having difficulties with written expression. The following activity is designed to teach students how to monitor their word count and build motivation for writing.

Title: Increasing Writing Productivity with Self-Monitoring

Appropriate Grade Level: Grades 1-8

Brief Description: The purpose of this intervention is to increase word production through self-monitoring of word counts. The rationale behind this intervention is that the more students write, the more effective they will become at writing. As students learn to monitor their amount of writing output, they will strive to increase that amount. A benefit of this intervention is that it improves students' motivation for writing.

Materials Needed:

1. NEO 1 or NEO 2 for student writing (one NEO per student preferably)
2. Knowledge of the following key command to display word counts on the NEO 2: ctrl-W.
3. Student-made line graphs for recording word counts
4. Posterboard chart with bar graph for recording class word counts
5. Red felt-tip marker
6. Watch with second hand, kitchen timer, or stopwatch

Procedure/Steps:

1. Select a time for freewriting using NEO 2s. Freewriting should be conducted daily or several times a week.
2. Explain to the students that they will be learning to evaluate their progress in writing by counting and recording the number of words they write during each session.
3. Model for the students how to use the key command ctrl-W to display the number of words they have written on their NEO 2s.
 - a. Note that ctrl-W will also display the number of characters, paragraphs and pages written.
 - b. Depending on your age group and skill level, you may want to track more than one indicator.
4. Display the class chart and explain that you will be graphing the total number of words written by the class for each writing session. Using the group average number of words written correctly calculated during the observation period, set a weekly goal of total words to be written by the class. Draw a red line on the chart to indicate that goal. Raise that goal by about 5% each week.
5. Discuss specific topics students may select, provide a writing prompt, or permit students to select their own topics. Provide approximately 15 minutes for writing.

- a. To help your students, select from the nearly 400 Write On! writing lessons available for the NEO.
 - b. Use AlphaSmart Manager 2 to select and send lessons to your students' NEOs.
 - c. You can differentiate your instruction by selecting appropriate lessons based on each student's interest or skill level.
6. After students finish writing, demonstrate how to create a simple line graph on their chart and have them record the number of words they wrote during that session on their graphs.
 - a. Remind them to press ctrl-W to display the number of words that they've written.
 7. Provide an opportunity for students to voluntarily share their writing with the rest of the class.
 8. Each week, review journals and graphs to monitor student self-recording and to obtain the class word count total for recording on the class chart. Discuss progress in achieving the weekly goal and praise students if they meet or exceed it.

Suggestions for Evaluating Effectiveness:

Count the number of words in freewriting samples for a group of selected students or for the entire class for several weeks. Count each word whether it is spelled correctly or an unconventional invented spelling.

Comments/tips:

This intervention can also be done for 3-5 minute periods. In that case, give students time to brainstorm ideas and to plan their writing before the time begins.

Source:

Adapted from <https://www.msu.edu/course/cep/886/Writing/page2.htm>
Rathvon, N. (1999). *Effective School Interventions*. New York: Guilford Press.

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NEO 2 Forums coming to a location near you

Are you looking for an opportunity to explore more deeply the features and functions of NEO 2 that make it the only laptop designed for the classroom that lets you use it all day, every day? Then attend a NEO 2 Forum. Spend the day learning how NEO 2 can make a difference in the way your teachers teach and your students learn.

NEO 2 Forum currently scheduled for:

- Educational Service District 113, Olympia, WA: June 4

To learn more about the Forums and how you can attend, call 866-391-5336 or 866-391-5344.

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Conference Appearances

Stop by and visit us at the Renaissance Learning booth.

Location	Dates	Events
Washington, DC	June 21-28, 2009	National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Conference
Washington, DC	June 28-July 1, 2009	NECC—National Educational Computing Conference
San Diego, CA	July 1-3 , 2009	National Education Association Annual Meeting
Las Vegas, NV	July 19-22, 2009	SDE National Conference on Differentiated Instruction

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Customer Loyalty Promotion

In these tough economic times, loyal customers like you deserve the best that Renaissance Learning has to offer. Our laptops have always offered you sustainable, measurable, long-term results for a low, one-time investment.

So, if you have Renaissance Learning hardware or software products in your school district—even older hardware products such as the AlphaSmart Pro, 2000, or 3000—then you are eligible for our current Customer Loyalty Promotion. The Customer Loyalty Promotion provides current customers with a 5% discount on individual NEO 2 laptops or an \$800 discount on NEO 2 SmartOption Mobile Labs.

Remember: NEO 2 is loaded with new features including:

- Accelerated Reader Quizzing
- Support for Math Facts in a Flash software
- Wireless file transfer to Google Docs
- Wireless printing
- A built-in classroom response system
- And soon, integration with MY! Access writing assessment software



NEO 2 is a great one-time investment that will bring continual rewards to you and your students. If you have wanted to bring additional NEO 2 laptops into your school or district, there has never been a better time. **But you must act by June 30, 2009.** Call us toll free at 800-338-4204 to learn more about this promotion.

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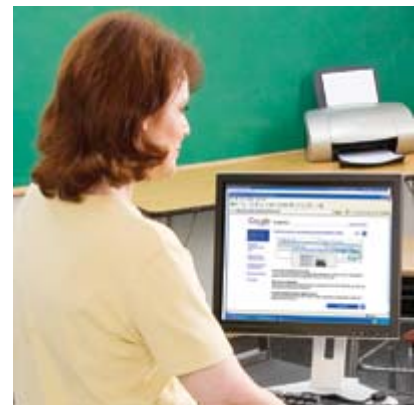
Here's what's new with NEO 2:

GoogleDocs™ Document Transfer

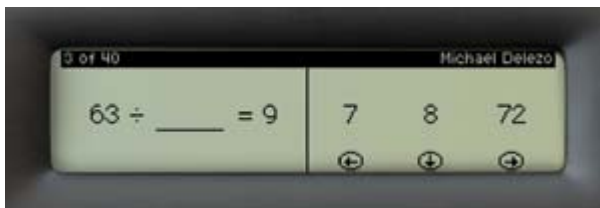
Students can easily transfer documents wirelessly from their NEO 2 to Google Docs, Google's document, spreadsheet and presentation application. Once stored on Google Docs, they can access their work again from any internet-enabled computer to continue working. Or, they can use Google's sharing capability to allow peers or their teachers to review their work.

Here's an example of how you could use this new feature in your classroom:

- Teachers place a writing assignment on Google Docs.
- Students download the assignment to their NEO 2s and write their draft.
- Writing Buddies use NEO 2s IrDA capability to beam their drafts to each other for peer review, and then make their revisions.
- When finished, students upload their completed drafts to Google Docs for teacher review.



What a great way to build 21st century skills and give students a chance to work with the latest computing trends.



Students use MathFacts in a Flash on the NEO 2, which provides more opportunities to master their basic math facts.

Math Facts Practice on the NEO 2

You already know that NEO 2 supports Accelerated Reader™, Renaissance Learning's reading practice software for building strong reading skills. Now, NEO 2 also supports MathFacts in a Flash, Renaissance's math practice software. Using NEO 2s for practicing math facts means every student can practice at their own pace and at their own desk as often as they have time to practice. With support for both Accelerated Reader and MathFacts in a Flash, your students can build a strong foundation for both math and reading*.

*Requires an active subscription to Accelerated Reader Renaissance Place and/or MathFacts in a Flash Renaissance Place

Text2Speech™ for NEO

Whether you have one of the original green NEOs, one of the newer NEO 2s, or are about to make a new NEO purchase, you can provide text-to-speech capability with our new Text2Speech device. Text2Speech is an optional external device that costs just \$129 and works with both NEO 1s and NEO 2s, and also supports Co:Writer for NEO word prediction software from Don Johnston. With a simple key command, students can turn text-to-speech on or off, configure it to read every letter, word, sentence or paragraph, or change

the voice from male to female. Students can listen to the output through the headphones provided with Text2Speech or through a set of speakers connected to the Text2Speech device.

Because it is an external device, Text2Speech can be loaned out as needed or placed in a central location for any student to use with a NEO. Text2Speech will run for approximately 200 hours or 3000 words on two alkaline batteries.

More Content through Key Partnerships

Renaissance Learning has partnered with a number of key companies to provide additional content and functionality for the NEO 2. These partnerships include:

Vantage Learning, makers of MY Access! writing software

Both NEO and MY Access! are known for their ability to help instruct and motivate students during the writing process. Together, they are an unbeatable combination for building strong writing skills in your students*. Using NEO 2's wireless file transfer capability, students can download a writing prompt from MY Access!, draft their response, and then upload their draft again to MY Access! for immediate feedback. Those who also use Accelerated Reader can benefit even more because MY Access! includes writing prompts that support the 100 most-read books by students. What a great way to connect reading and writing in the classroom.



To learn more about MY Access!, visit the Vantage Learning website at <http://www.vantagelearning.com/school/products/myaccess/>.

* Available Summer 2009

Learning Multi-Systems, makers of PowerZone Software

Use PowerZone's rich multimedia content and game strategies with NEO 2 to build student knowledge in math, science and social studies. PowerZone contains hundreds of carefully designed questions to assess student understanding and challenge student thinking. As teams strive for points, game strategy—combined with skill and knowledge—creates an unpredictable and suspense-filled contest.

For more information on PowerZone, visit the Learning Multi-Systems site at <http://www.lmssite.com/>.




RM Education, makers of RM Easiteach Interactive Whiteboard Software

Inspired by teachers and teaching experts, RM Easiteach's innovative and easy-to-use teaching tools are ideal for creating exciting and engaging lessons. These tools are software equivalents of familiar teaching tools that you already use in the classroom, including place-value cards for Math, sentence builder cards for English Language Arts, map building tools for Geography, and stopwatch and timer tools for Science. When combined with NEO 2's classroom response system, you can create engaging whole-class instruction that builds student skills across the curriculum.

Extract from *I'm Not Scared of the Monster and other poems*, compiled by John Foster, published by Oxford University Press

Herbaceous Plodd (1)

Herbaceous Plodd
is rather odd.
His eyes are red,
his nose is blue,
his neck and head
are joined by glue.



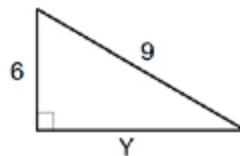
To learn more about RM Easiteach, visit the RM Education website at <http://www.rmeducation.com/easiteach>.

American Education Corporation, makers of A+ Classroom Response Software

By using A+ Software's interactive academic competitions, challenging quizzes and automated assessments with NEO 2, you can create a fun and engaging classroom where students are motivated to learn all day, every day. A+ Classroom Response software provides engaging, competition-style activities that work with NEO 2's classroom response system.

FIND THE MISSING SIDE OF THE RIGHT TRIANGLE.

1. $81 = (Y \cdot Y) + 36$
2. $36 = (1/2) Y + 81$
3. $Y = 6 + 9$



Question 1 of 8

1000

For more information about A+ Classroom Response Software, visit the American Education Corporation website at <http://www.aplusclassroom.com/>.

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