Using Skype Effectively in the Classroom

Have you ever wanted to confer with another class in a different area of the world or talk with a remote expert about something you are studying in class? Have you used Skype in your personal life to communicate with family or friends? Well, there are many educators around the globe using the tool to effectively enrich the lessons that they are teaching by allowing communication with other classes and "specialists" in fields they are studying. Why Mr. Shrock from the middle school has held a Skype conference with Mr. Bagley's son in Uganda in the past. While Mr. Shrock has done this on a large scale (all classes at once in the cafeteria) you can use the same program as a class to talk with others from throughout the world. How do you do so and how do you find "experts" or other classes that you would like to Skype with? There are a number of ways to set up a session but first and foremost you need to have a Skype account (which is free). You will also need a webcam, microphone, and speakers to perform the actual Skype session. I will refer you to the following Edublog website by Sue Waters which is the inspiration for this article and has detailed set-up instructions for Skype. You can also find instructions by "googling" Skype or visiting the Skype homepage. Set-up is a bit lengthy but if you follow the advice you will have your system up and running in no time. The hardest part about Skype is finding individuals with which you and your class can work. My personal suggestion is to start out small by approaching a colleague from another school to see if his or her class would like to work with your class collaboratively. You can also find educators you don't know at sites like http://education.skype.com/ which is run by Skype to encourage educational use of its product. The aforementioned Edublog also maintains a list of educators that are willing to Skype with you along with some other resources that you may want to explore. If you would like to use Skype in the classroom, but are a little uneasy or need some help, let me know and I would be happy to help out. If you try it once you'll be hooked and you'll find yourself looking for other interesting individuals to enrich your classes.

THE TECH TRAINER

Michael K. Berg   michael.berg@eastern.k12.in.us

Vol 5.5

Sync Your Online Browsing with the New FireFox 4.0!

How would you like a browser that keeps track of all of your important information like online passwords, browsing history, bookmarks, preferences, and tabs? Now, would you like it even more if you could set up a secure account that allows you to sync this data with any other device that is running the browser? If your answer is yes, then Firefox 4 has some functionality upgrades that you should definitely try out. When you use the newest browser, "Firefox 4," you can set up a sync account by going to the menu area and selecting "Set Up Sync…" You are then taken to a wizard that asks you to sign up with email and password. Once you have set up a sync account on your initial browser and chosen what you want to sync (I would click all of the available choices) the Firefox server generates a "key" which is used to add other devices and computers. If you download the browser on another computer or android mobile device, follow the sync set up instructions and you can easily link them to your new account. Every option you checked will then sync back and forth between your browser on each computer or device. The Firefox service uses an encryption protocol to make sure your information is secure and not accessible by individuals or companies out on the net. Firefox 4 is currently available as a desktop browser for Linux, Mac, and Windows and a portable version is available for all android devices. While there is no Firefox release for iPads and iPhones, you can download the Firefox Home app (iPhone native) which allows you access to your tabs, browsing history, and bookmarks. The information is in a read only state on Apple devices and will not allow you to save new tabs or sync history back to your computer. A full web browser of Firefox is not planned for the iPad due to restrictions placed upon browsers by Apple development. Remember, if you are an Apple fan boy, you can still download the desktop browser on your mac with full sync functionality, just not iDevices.

Tech Tuesday Upcoming Session

April 19th—Based upon the interest expressed through eMail, this session will focus on "StoryJumper," another storytelling web 2.0 tool. The main difference with this tool is that you can upload your own images to the project. Digital story telling with your own photos and drawings, now how cool is that? The other added benefit is the use of clipart allowing students to "build" pictures that go along with the story they are writing. The StoryJumper session will run from 3:30-4:30 in the lower high school lab. Come prepared to create