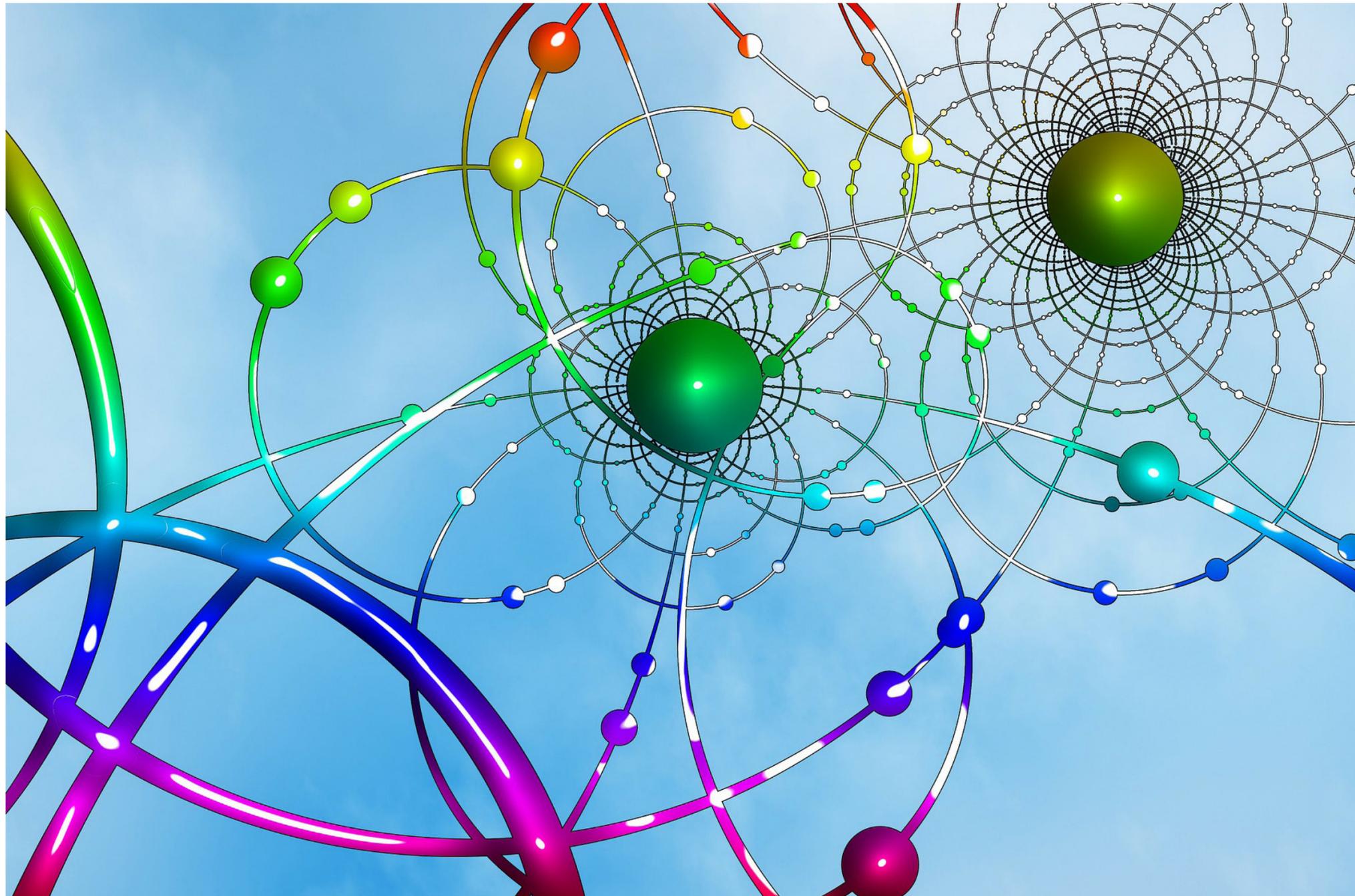


Collaboration for future learning



Steve Wilkins is Leader, Learning Design and Development within Learning Systems. His learning design team includes learning design, video production and digital design teams who are collectively responsible for the publication of online learning and teaching resources within the NSW Department of Education.



Eric Land is a Learning Design and Development Advisor currently working within Learning Systems at the Department of Education. He is managing a state-wide project in enabling online collaboration across the department as part of the Rural and Remote blueprint for action.

Embedding collaborative practice in the development of digital resources

As educators in a modern world, we are continually challenged by an ever expanding menu of methodologies and pedagogical approaches that will engage our modern day learners while meeting their learning needs. At our fingertips is a range of technologies that enable us and our students to create, share, connect and contribute to a global community, to learn new skills *just in time* to solve complex problems.

The challenge we face is not about keeping up with technology; it is in designing authentic, futures based learning experiences that prepare our students for an uncertain future. Technology will come and go, but good teaching is good teaching. How do we inspire and engage, embed information and communication technologies appropriately and address ever-broadening

curriculum requirements? We know the research, we know the pedagogy, we have access to the technology, but what does this really look like in the classroom?

Enter the *Collaboratus* series

Collaboratus is a series of digital learning resources conceived by the department's Learning design and development team within Learning systems. Each resource is designed to lead students through a curriculum based learning activity that develops their future learning skills, while embedding the use of online collaboration tools such as Google Apps for Education and Microsoft Office 365. Our aim is to provide a best practice model that teachers can pick up and run with in the classroom. If teachers also learn something along the way, then our stealth objective has been met.

In [Collaborative learning and technology](#) (Scan, 2015), Tim Gorrod explored the application of the 21st century learning design framework to create authentic learning experiences for students that required realistic integration of technology, in particular the collaborative learning tools available to NSW public school students and teachers. Tim introduced the *Collaboratus* model and explained how this model could fill the gap between educational theory and technological skill and application in the classroom. In essence, it could bridge the gap between talking the talk and walking the walk.

Two *Collaboratus* resources are currently available and many more are on their way. These resources, *Truth be told* and *Waking up in Japan*, are featured later in this article.

What makes the *Collaboratus* series so unique is the collaborative process used in its development – a process which provided writers from across NSW with a quality professional learning experience and a product published online for all to share. Each resource in the series was developed by a working group of experienced educators. We threw teams together just like we would throw students together. Each team had a shared responsibility and made substantive decisions, knowing that each member played an integral role in the delivery of a quality and robust final product. It is no coincidence that this sounds like the definition of one important skill for the 21st century: collaboration.

The collaboration process

Each teams of five expert educators worked to deliver one quality *Collaboratus* resource. Through an expression of interest (EOI) process we sourced school based teachers from across NSW who suggested their seed for a 21st century learning experience. Perhaps it was something they had already tried in class with students, or a program they had run that had potential appeal to a broader audience.

Subject matter experts, curriculum and quality teaching advisors from educational services and state-office directorates were charged with bringing

It is no coincidence that this sounds like the definition of one important skill for the 21st century: collaboration

their rich and highly specific knowledge and expertise to the table. A learning design officer, specialising in the online delivery of learning resources, provided advice about the design, delivery and publication of the final product.

The teams met and explored their ideas in what was an intense experience. There were arguments, agreements, negotiations, compromises, revelations, distractions, discomfort, teaching and, thankfully, learning. The experience required all those soft skills you would hope your students would get out of being thrown together on a shared task. This was authentic collaboration at its best. Blue-sky ideas were tapered while emergent ones were expanded. Some were massaged to have a wider appeal.

It is rare for busy educators to have the opportunity come together to collaborate in concentrated pursuit of a finely tuned end product. It is even less likely to experience, first-hand, the new ways in which we want our students to work. This process embedded collaborative practice, on so many levels, into the development of a learning resource which embedded collaboration. We truly were literally practising what we preach.

Meaningful, continuous collaboration

Two days of in-your-face workshoping allowed for ideas to flow. No one can deny the power of face-to-face collaboration, even in the digital age. Through the collective pursuit, relationships were forged. This was important to ensure that the online collaboration to follow would be meaningful and continuous. The working groups went on to use the technologies and collaborative strategies that they were asking their

students to use to finish their task. They agreed on timelines, assigned roles and tasks, setup and shared documents, and workflows. Most importantly, they continued their conversations. Establishing these rules of conduct mapped how they would commit in the online realm once back in their own respective corners of the state.

A great balance. Working on the project felt inspirational, creative, professional, structured and innovative, all at the same time: a most rare combination.

Merc Goldstein (*Waking up in Japan*)

Sharing expertise with a variety of educators was really beneficial and helped to give diversity to ideas. Problem solving skills were stretched :) which is positive, and new perspectives given.

Carla Saunders (*Truth be told*)

Following the workshops, team members continued to build their resource prototypes online using a Google sites *Collaboratus* template. This allowed rural team members and their city partners to overcome vast geographical distances using collaborative technology. Content could be added, manipulated and commented on at any time, for all to see. This working model informed the final product, which was then published professionally as an accessible, responsive and quality learning resource available to teachers nationally through *Scout/e*.

DIY – Collaboratus tools

Learning systems has developed tools to help teachers create their own *Collaboratus* style learning resources that can be shared with students and colleagues. All tools and intellectual property are available to NSW public school teachers. These tools include the:

- *Collaboratus* resource model and instruction guide
- *Collaboratus* template.

[Collaboratus: resource model](#)

The [Collaboratus: resource model](#) is a working model that defines the thinking behind the *Collaboratus* series and provides a detailed guide for teachers wanting to create their own online resource.

The *Collaboratus* template within Google sites (DoE Portal) allows teachers to scaffold their online resource and share it with colleagues and students. Read [How to access and use the Collaboratus template](#) [DoE intranet].

[Google sites Collaboratus template](#) [DoE intranet]

Examples in the field

Kimberly Nagle and Breeanna Thayer from the isolated Bourke Walgett School of Distance Education used the *Collaboratus* tools Google site template to design and develop a *Collaboratus* unit of work that coincided with the Rio Olympic Games. Students as young as six and seven years worked together to

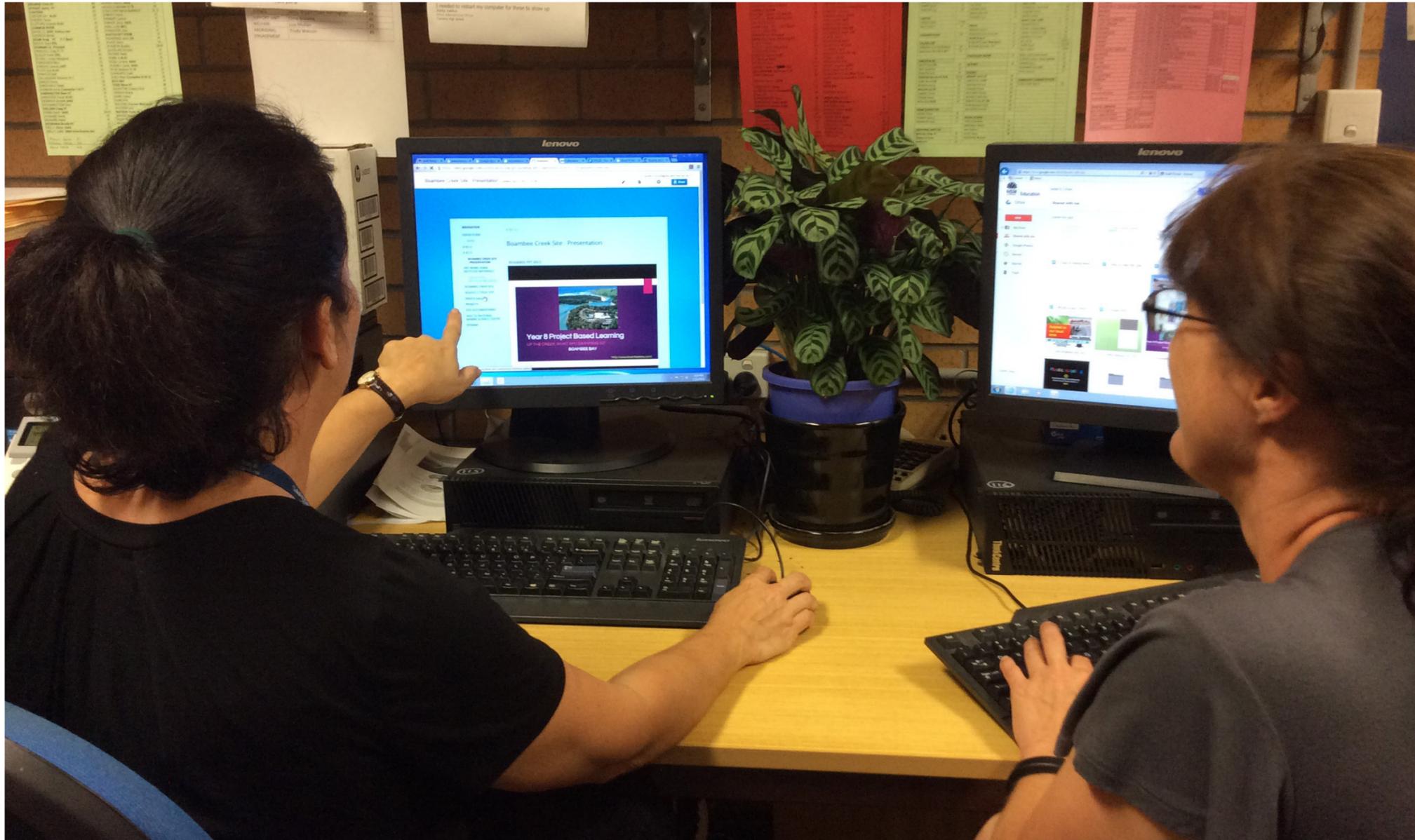
research different aspects of the Olympic movement and the 2016 host country, Brazil. *Collaboratus* provided a great way to deliver content and guidance for isolated learners sometimes separated by hundreds of kilometres.

Learners do not have to be separated by great distances for these tools to come into effect.

Julie Roberts at Toormina High School made a copy of the *Collaboratus* template and used it as the backbone of a project based learning unit. Students at her school redesigned their library into a 21st century learning space. Students connected with local architects and furniture experts for specialist advice and feedback. Again there were arguments, agreements, negotiations, compromises, revelations, distractions, discomfort, teaching and thankfully, learning. Finally, the students came up with their own proposals to re-invent their shared school learning space.

Further support

To provide ongoing support in embedding collaborative practice, Learning Systems has established a network of [online collaboration mentors](#) (OCM). These volunteer teachers can provide help in the use of online collaborative technologies to improve student outcomes. They can provide advice on how to get collaborative projects off and running. Research suggests that teachers working with colleagues have significant impact in implementing change. When schools connect and start working together, knowledge is unlocked and great things happen.



Available resources

As mentioned earlier, two *Collaboratus* resources are currently available and many more are on their way. These resources are *Truth be told* and *Waking up in Japan*.

Truth be told – using the [English Textual Concepts](#), students explore ideas around point of view, perspective and the notion of truth, as they collaboratively build their knowledge about, and then create, personal stories. The learning in *Truth be told* requires Stage 5 English students to analyse a range of personal stories told using different media, draft an individual personal story, and then persuade their peers to produce their particular story idea. Throughout the learning, students engage in significant self-reflection and provide peer feedback to their teams.

Collaboratus: Truth be told

Waking up in Japan – students work collaboratively to research a topic of cultural interest in Japan and make a presentation (digital and/or face-to-face) that demonstrates their learning. *Waking up in Japan* supports students studying the 100-hour mandatory Stage 4 or 100/200 elective Stage 5 Japanese courses. Key learning outcomes relate to the syllabus objectives *Moving between cultures* and *Using language*, through the investigation of key Japanese words (Stage 4) and conducting a Japanese Q&A interview (Stage 5) related to their chosen topic.

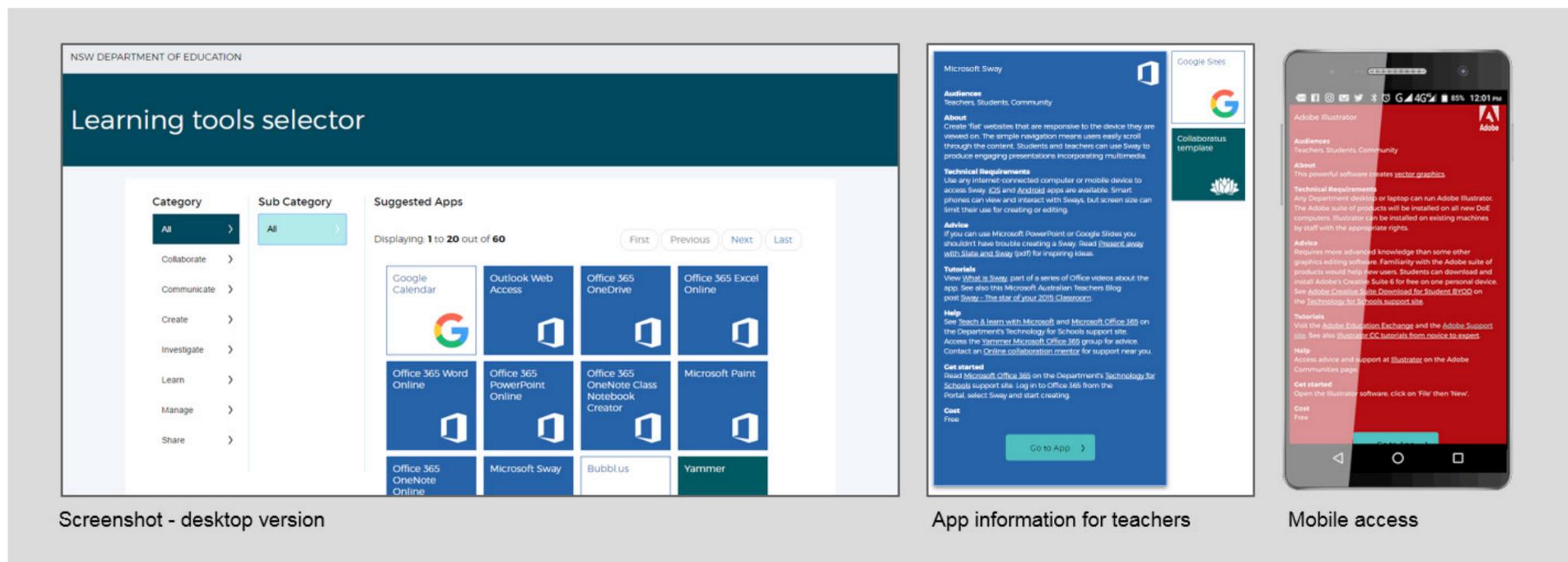
Collaboratus: Waking up in Japan

Online and mobile learning tools selector app

The *Collaboratus* series provides teachers with a model for integrating online learning tools, such as Google Apps for Education and Microsoft Office 365, to allow students to work collaboratively and connect with others. Content writers suggest and embed appropriate learning and collaboration tools for student tasks.

The [Learning tools selector](#) is an online and mobile app that helps teachers decide what technology to use with their students to meet their learning needs. Learning tools are represented as coloured tiles and arranged into categories that reflect modern teaching and learning practices. Each tile provides information about the tool, technical requirements, how to get started as well as advice, tutorials and help.





Screenshot - desktop version

App information for teachers

Mobile access

[Learning tools selector](#)

References and further reading

Booth, A. 2015, '[New learning tools for all NSW public schools](#)', *Scan*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp.11-13, accessed 11 October 2016.

[Collaboratus: resource model](#), State of NSW, Department of Education, accessed 11 October 2016.

[Collaboratus: Truth be told](#), State of NSW, Department of Education, accessed 11 October 2016.

[Collaboratus: Waking up in Japan](#), State of NSW, Department of Education, accessed 11 October 2016.

Gorrod, T. 2015, '[Collaborative learning and technology](#)', *Scan*, vol. 34, no. 4, pp.28-32, accessed 11 October 2016.

[Learning tools selector](#), State of NSW, Department of Education, accessed 11 October 2016.

Learning and Teaching Directorate, NSW Department of Education and the English Teachers Association NSW 2016, [English Textual Concepts](#), State of NSW, Department of Education, accessed 11 October 2016.