Reflection: Using Google Sketchup in an educational setting
Joe Tompkins
MEDT 7462- Module 12

I began using Google Sketchup a few months ago for personal reasons. My wife and I were trying to design a remolding project for our home and we were in desperate need of some way to visualize our ideas. I had heard of Google Sketchup and it turned out to be the perfect tool for our needs. (The screenshot included in my portfolio is the garage remodeling design we eventually decided on.)

Google Sketchup is a GREAT tool to have for students. We've been needing something like it for years. There are expensive, complicated tools out there that do similar things, but nothing as accessible to students as this tool. (In its web-based nature and it's suite of options.)

Our middle school "technology" class comes instantly to mind. In this class, students learn the basic principles of architecture and design among other things. Google Sketchup lets them "visualize their ideas" (much like my wife and I did with our project) in ways that only technology can offer. To this end, Google Sketchup offers some great features like precise measuring tools and self-correcting angles and corners. We all know that students love to "customize" their own styles, so the really exciting thing Google Sketchup offers is a giant database of downloadable objects created by other users… including furniture, household objects, landscaping items, and anything else the student would want to decorate their creation with. Add in the ability to cover surfaces with textures for paint, wallpaper, and floor coverings, and the students can create a virtual world of their own while learning the principles of architecture and design. (And then, to top it off, the students can do a 3-D virtual "walkthrough" of their creation.)

This goes beyond graph paper and charcoal pencils to give students a feeling that they are creating something of substance… and the opportunity to visualize what their creations may actually look like beyond two-dimensional paper.

Finally, in the true fashion of Web 2.0, students can upload their creations to the Google database to share with the world. This "real world" publishing of their work is the greatest motivation for students of any age.