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Innovate-Ideagora: Connecting Students to Leverage Learning
by Alan McCord and Denise Easton

The Innovate-Ideagora community now boasts 330 members, and we are truly an international endeavor. Participants hail from 17 countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom (including Scotland!), India, the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, Argentina, Finland, Venezuela, Republic of Korea, Germany, Norway, France, and Poland. If you have not yet checked out Innovate-Ideagora, please do so by visiting http://innovate-ideagora.ning.com. We also encourage members to share the invitation with colleagues and associates. It only takes a few minutes to establish your profile and begin connecting!

Interviews and Gatherings: Connecting Students to Leverage Learning

Three recent live events highlighted ongoing efforts to use technology to improve learning and collaboration. The first two, interviews with Ed Gehringer and Tim DiScipio, focused on projects designed to connect students for course-related peer review and for cross-cultural exploration.

Ed Gehringer, associate professor of electronic and computer engineering and computer science at North Carolina State University (NCSU), discussed his Expertiza project, which uses Web 2.0 tools to facilitate peer review of student work and then creates reusable learning objects. Gehringer described Expertiza in a 2007 *Innovate* article. (View the interview at http://breeze.uliveandlearn.com/p84785847/.) With Expertiza, students submit completed assignments; the best work in each category is then identified through a peer-review process, and the Expertiza system assembles that work to create a single learning unit. Ed has produced a number of publications documenting Expertiza's usefulness.

In our interview, Ed described the project and shared resources with the audience including a paper on the system. Participants were interested in where and how Expertiza was being implemented. Verne Morland speculated about how this model could be adapted to the business community.

Tim DiScipio, cofounder of ePals, joined us in a live webcast interview to discuss this unique social and academic networking environment for global education. (View the interview at http://breeze.uliveandlearn.com/p27689137/.) Drawing on principles of authentic learning, ePals allows school- and district-level communication and collaboration across cultural and national lines as students develop verbal and visual literacy through dialogue and storytelling. ePals's classroom match feature takes online learning to a new level by linking classrooms across the world to form the largest and fastest growing interactive, Web-based learning community. Tim provided a comprehensive overview of ePals while highlighting specific examples of how students were connecting around issues ranging from global warming to sports.

In conjunction with Tim's interview, we featured in our favorite tools section a custom widget that showcases student responses to ePals's Students Speak! program. Students from all over the world submitted one-minute videos, audio recordings, and presentations expressing their views to the new president and his administration. ePals compiled the best responses and has shared them with the president, his transition team, and members of the ePals global community.

Our favorite Tools, Widgets and Cool Things

We love widgets -- who is developing them for educational use?

We have initiated follow-up discussions on both of these topics in Innovate-Ideagora. Listen to the archived interviews and join us for more energizing conversation about ePals or Expertiza.

In our third live event, we hosted an informal gathering of Innovate-Ideagora members to discuss emerging issues related to technology and learning. The hour-long discussion via live webcast allowed the audience to participate with both audio and text chat. We are experimenting with different opportunities for the community to discuss exciting individual work, projects, and trends and to identify topics and venues for Ideagora activity. We did not record the discussion, but several participants suggested we do so in the future. We plan to continue hosting informal live webcasts to identify future topics and plan improvements to the Innovate-Ideagora community.

The Forums: Edutainment and Teacher Training

Many Innovate-Ideagora members contributed interesting and provocative discussion topics to the community. Greg, impressed by a game that introduced his young son to the complex working of the human immune system, challenged the community to speculate about the value of using "edutainment" technologies—game-based learning or what Greg called "stealth learning"—at a curricular level. Al McCord suggested that this kind of learning has affinities with other student-centered paradigms, such as case-based learning. Denise Easton raised a related topic, quoting from a recent MacArthur Foundation white paper on youth and new media to suggest that technological developments may be changing the way we think of education as well as how and where learning takes place. She posted a video of Sir Ken Robinson's TED conference presentation "Do schools kill creativity?" to add another dimension to the debate.

Patrick requested suggestions for addressing the significant challenge of training teachers in the use of technology when they will teach in countries with uneven levels of technology infrastructure and services. Jim Shimabukuro suggested Paolo Freire as a theoretical starting point, arguing that part of the problem may be our own notions of what constitutes "school," which focus on institutional models that may not be replicable, or desirable, in these contexts. Other participants offered specific resources that teachers in areas with unreliable technology infrastructures may find useful.

And *Innovate* editor-in-chief Jim Morrison is still facilitating an active discussion about addressing faculty resistance to the use of IT tools in active learning instructional strategies stemming from his initial post on the topic in July 2008. This ongoing dialogue underscores the value of the community for developing in-depth explorations of important issues in educational technology.

These and other discussions can be found on Innovate-Ideagora; please join us and contribute your thoughts!

Coming Up on Innovate-Ideagora

We have an exciting line-up of expert guests for future Innovate-Ideagora interviews; details about these interviews will be announced as they become available:

Clifford Lynch, director of the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI). CNI, jointly sponsored by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and EDUCAUSE , includes about 200 member organizations dedicated to improving the use of information technology and networked information to enhance scholarship and intellectual productivity. Lynch will undoubtedly provide a compelling discussion about the role of technology in creating scholarship. Tim McLain and Adam Blackwell from ProQuest , which provides electronic access to information from periodicals, newspapers, multimedia and image collections, out-of-print books, dissertations, and scholarly collections. ProQuest's family of brands provides information products and
- services to academic, corporate, and government libraries around the world

for creative services. crowdSpring's corporate philosophy emphasizes the creative process and the protection of intellectual property. How can crowdSPRING's model be leveraged for academic services? Ross will share how crowdSPRING is creating a flexible model for matching available skills with employer needs.

- Miriam Scurrah, e-learning coordinator at Kmart Australia Limited, which is using [iClone](#) software for avatar-based training. Scurrah will describe how Kmart Australia intends to integrate virtual, three-dimensional scenario-based training into employee development programs, including new employee training and customer service simulations.

We need your input for these interviews! Let us know what you'd like us to ask our guests by posting your questions to the [Major Topics](#) thread on the Ideagora discussion forum. To find out when specific interviews are scheduled or to participate in the live sessions, please check the [Innovate-Live](#) schedule.

As a marketplace for ideas, Innovate-Ideagora lets us all participate directly in wide-ranging conversations about education and information technology. Ideagora represents an important step in *Innovate*'s ongoing mission to spotlight the latest innovations in technology and explore their implications for education in all its forms. Membership is open to all and registration is easy and free. We hope you will join us in our experiment. Visit http://innovate-ideagora.ning.com to establish your profile and join the conversation!