

Education Using Technology, the Possibilities are Endless

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It is apparent from the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) 2009 Conference that faculty are involved in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Many faculty members /academic staff are engaged in individual personal projects, and in collaborative projects within disciplines, across disciplines, and internationally. This allows for greater collaboration and participation in local and formal networks within institutions and across the globe that occur in a variety of spaces such as discussion groups, websites and journals using technology.

It is apparent from the types and numbers of presentations at the ISSOTL 2009 conference that online resource repositories of learning activities and resources, discussion groups, websites and journal sites are being used to create scholarly communities using free available technologies. At the time of publication, the open courseware consortium, <http://www.ocwconsortium.org/members/consortium-members.html>, had a membership of 163 universities representing 33 countries and 33 affiliate organizations for a total of 199 organizations. There are online repository sites such as <http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm>, <http://archive.nmc.org/projects/lo/repositories.shtml>, and <http://cnx.org/>. These are all created under a common license agreement. Such sites allow anyone with web access to develop and deposit learning resources ranging from single learning activities to textbooks and other multimedia resources. This website allows the user to personalize learning resources from a range of possibilities.

The website <http://cnx.org/> is the site for Connexions. It states "Connexions is a place to view and share educational material made of small knowledge chunks called modules that can be organized as courses, books, reports, etc. Anyone may view or contribute:

- authors create and collaborate
- instructors rapidly build and share custom collections
- learners find and explore content."

These internet resources are multidimensional and not bound as print resources are into a linear pattern. Because of this, they cater better to multiple learning styles and offer more course choices.

In order to be a member of the courseware consortium mentioned earlier, the organization has to commit to making available at least 10 courses. This means that with a membership of 199 organizations, there are at least 1990 courses available from organizations around the world. This may be more courses than what one particular university can offer and, as such, have a huge impact on access for students. According to Richard Baronial (2009), a keynote speaker at the ISSOTL conference, the United Nations University based on the Open Education model will soon start giving credit for

these courses. This means a student may be able to choose from any of the 199 and ever increasing sites to learn and then write an exam and receive credentials for his or her studies from the United Nations University. This concept may be a way of dealing with ever shrinking education budgets of countries around the world. President Obama of the United States has proposed \$500 million to fund an on-line education plan for the colleges. Under such a plan, college will go to the student rather than the student going to college. The question is, what will the role of the educator be in the future with this explosion of free access to knowledge? What types of SoTL questions will this generate?

SoTL projects indicate that better student engagement leads to improved curricula and better learning. Student engagement can be increased and personalized through technology, for free internet spaces and servers at many post-secondary institutions and other organizations will help provide a space for educators to send and receive personalized messages and group messages to students.

Although this seems utopian, there may be some drawbacks and concerns. While technology is easily accessible for middle and upper class students around the globe, this may not be so for lower class students. One concern is that learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may not be able to afford the technology hardware and software for access. This may lead to a further divide in completion rates between privileged students from middle and upper class families compared to those from underprivileged backgrounds and low socioeconomic status.

A challenge for educators is the knowledge explosion. Since there is so much material on the internet, it is a challenge for educators to keep abreast of the information. This leaves room for increased risk for plagiarism. With open access, students are able to go through a great deal of material quickly and refigure ideas and present them as their own. This leads to the question of copyright. Who owns copyright, those who own the internet site, employers who pay for employees to produce multimedia resources, individual authors or the public? This is a question that will need to be addressed.

Another challenge with open publishing is quality control. Since anyone is able to publish material, how will users, learners and teachers, discern what is truth or knowledge? Each open access site can help filter the reliability of material by having a review process for quality control for their site. In the case of *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching and Learning Journal (TD)*, quality control comes in the form of peer review. This may not be the case for all sites nor may it be appropriate. I challenge you to think about what should count as knowledge and who should get to make that decision.

This issue was to be about multimedia use. Unfortunately, we did not get as many submissions on the topic as we would have liked, but we have the privilege of a guest forward from the President of the Canadian Nursing Informatics Association, June Kaminski, who has written about the importance of infusing technology into undergraduate programs.

We ask you to read critically and join the dialogue. Please submit your reactions and insights to TD@kwantlen.ca.