"If You Build It, Will They Come?" Lessons Learned from the Workshop on Participant Interaction In Digital Libraries

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ABSTRACT

A workshop in early February 2004, hosted by the Math Forum, brought together over thirty experts from the National Science Digital Library (NSDL) program and representatives from online communities to discuss and identify promising models of participant involvement for the NSDL and NSDL-funded projects [see pidlworkshop.comm..nsdl.org]. The workshop leveraged the expertise of attendees to identify tools and reporting mechanisms, develop strategies and formulate recommendations that will help NSDL projects incorporate, support and grow the communities who use their digital libraries. Workshop attendees also provided a rich set of examples of how users are currently involved in building and maintaining NSDL digital libraries and the potential impact of their involvement. Participant involvement is a critical factor not only in developing educational digital libraries, but also in sustaining the resources, the technology and most importantly, the communities who use them. Without converting casual or one-time users into recurring, involved participants, or even members of a community, educational digital libraries will simply be yet another example of, "If you build it, will they come."

Incentives to Participate: Attendees recognized that for educational digital libraries to grow beyond the core groups funded to develop and test new technologies and resources, an incentive structure must be developed. Attendees' experiences demonstrated that incentives should be structured according to local practices or standards and should engage the audience "where they are."

Participant Involvement as a Process Along a Continuum: Workshop attendees made a distinction between developers of educational digital libraries, end-users of digital libraries (e.g., teachers, faculty and students), and the technology used to support the involvement (e.g., Amazon.com-style user comments). They also recognized that not every digital library or individual user is at the same level of sophistication at any given moment. These realizations provide important input into the design of future activities to involve participants; they suggest that developers should consider a continuum of possible interactions to meet the needs of their users.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

J.2 [**Physical Sciences and Engineering**]: Physical Sciences and Engineering – *Aerospace, Archaeology, Astronomy, Chemistry, Earth and atmospheric sciences, Electronics, Engineering, Mathematics and statistics, Physics.*

J.3 [**Life and Medical Sciences**]: Life and Medical Sciences – *Biology and genetics, Health, Medical information systems.*

K.6.1 [**Management**]: Management of Computing and Information Systems – *Project and People Management.*

General Terms

Management, Human Factors

Keywords

Educational Digital Libraries, Participant Involvement, Community