

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

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# Guide to Acronyms

- PIDL: Participant Interaction in Digital Libraries
- NSDL: National Science Digital Library
- CI: Core Integration
- SME: Subject Matter Expert

# Workshop Details

- February 6-8, 2004
- Hosted by The Math Forum @ Drexel
- Sponsored by NSF (grant no. DUE-0226284)
- 35 representatives
  - projects funded by NSF's NSDL program
  - experienced practitioners and evaluators working in the areas of online community development

# Workshop Goals

- Share work-to-date and the challenges involved in building out educational DLs as active communities of practice.
- Formulate recommendations that anticipate involving participants as users of the DL and as producers of new knowledge for the community
- Develop recommendations for the NSDL CI and for NSF on the direction of the NSDL program, language and topics for future requests for proposals (RFPs), and ideas about evolving and expanding support for DLs

# Challenges & Opportunities for Digital Libraries

- Challenges
  - To be widely adopted
  - To contribute meaningfully to educational improvements
  - To thrive following start-up funding.
- Opportunities
  - To be more than a collection of resources...a junction for active, engaged communities

# Building DLs with Participants

- How DLs choose to invest in involving participants is affected by:
  - The activities and needs of current and potential participant populations
  - The knowledge and skills that exist within the participant community
  - The types of content and services offered by a DL
  - The stage of development and comparative resources of the DL

*NSDL could benefit from a strategic, centrally-organized participant involvement model resulting in the growth of active communities of practice.*

# **Participant Involvement in Practice**

Key activities where DLs from NSDL, and elsewhere, are involving participants

# Involvement in Implementing Services in Digital Libraries

- Challenges:
  - Participant must believe contributions are valued
  - Supporting sustained interaction across complex social and cultural networks
- Recommendations:
  - Participants might play multiple roles
  - Participants engage with services at individual stages of need, growth and ability
  - Recognize that services have to provide value in return for the effort of using them.
  - Services should be designed to meet the needs of participants at all levels of expertise



# Sustaining & Expanding Involvement

- Challenge:
  - To be **Sustained** and **Sustaining**, participant involvement must happen consistently, and at appropriate volumes
- Recommendations:
  - Place DL in context of users' needs
  - Make use of DL part of a users' everyday activity
  - Build upon local support (e.g., local university support vs. web-mediated by DL)

# **Summary of Issues Identified in PIDL Workshop**

- *DLs/sites can grow organically.* There are a number of online educational resource centers and programs that were begun well before the NSDL initiative and continue to spring forth outside this context. These offer many opportunities for DL development and collaboration.
- *Builders can be users, and users can be builders.* DLs with a substantial participant base have staff who actively use their DL and who support their users to take on various leadership and development roles.
- *Communities can develop where participants are.* Rather than take a “build it and they will come attitude” DLs can encourage learning communities to grow out of the interests and existing activities of the participant base.

# Involving Participants Requires an Investment

- Challenges:
  - Being responsive to participants' needs while progressing steadily through the building process
  - Scaling human-intensive development processes or services
- Benefits:
  - Short-term: infrastructure, content and services meet the immediate strengths, needs, experiences, and interests of participants
  - Long-term: can create a sense of trust in participants, leading to long-term commitments/use

# **Participants' time and effort needs to be recognized and valued**

- A one-time reward does not assure long-term involvement.
- Rewards do not necessarily have to be monetary.
- Rewards may have the most impact when they are supplements to or extensions of existing incentive structures, such as professional development credits for teachers or opportunities for peer recognition for university faculty
- Rewards should not be one-size-fits-all. Rewards should come to participants “where they are.”
- Rewards should be appropriate to participants' roles and location.

# Challenge to Support the Evolution of Participation

- *Challenge:*
  - DLs evolve, during which participation varies; appropriate human and technical scaffolds are required to accommodate these transitions
- *Recommendation:*
  - Build bridges that support participants' changing roles
  - Participation can occur on many different levels
    - between individuals with projects and between projects
  - Recognizing the variables that affect participation/ collaboration (e.g., specific approaches, timelines, or resources), identify different methods or for collaboration
  - Value and reward the strength and contributions of collaborators.

# Evaluation and Participant Involvement

- Recommendations:
  - Evaluation must be valued as an important activity at the beginning of a DL
  - Consider expanding scope of evaluation to permit sharing and collaborating across DLs
  - Ensure understand basic factors, such as types of DL, participants, interactions, etc.
  - Make sure to identify access and equity issues early on