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Innovate-Ideagora: Addressing Core Questions

by Denise Easton and Alan McCord

Our most exciting news this month is a development in the way we present our Web 2.0 offerings. In the past year, *Innovate* has explored a variety of ways to integrate Web 2.0 technologies into its portfolio; we have been proud to have a role in that effort by developing Innovate-Ideagora. We originally conceived of Innovate-Ideagora as an open professional network for exploring the same issues that *Innovate* focuses on: education, technology, and the future. Ideagora has become that and much more as we have engaged in a range of efforts to fan the flames of an already active conversation.

Although Innovate-Ideagora was a big step forward, in truth *Innovate* already had a Web 2.0 home: Innovate-Live, the hosting site for the author webcasts *Innovate* has featured since its inaugural issue. As Innovate-Ideagora has matured, the two efforts have overlapped; Innovate-Live has hosted Ideagora events as well as author webcasts, and discussions have spilled over from one venue to the other. This is exactly the cross-pollination we had hoped for, but it has created some confusion and inefficiency. In an effort to consolidate tools and simplify presentation, we have decided to merge Innovate-Live into Ideagora to create a single site for *Innovate* author discussions, Ideagora interviews, and social networking.

Our interactive webcasts and community activities are now consolidated in [Innovate-Ideagora](#), which is produced and hosted by [ULiveandLearn](#), the same helpful folks who created Innovate-Live. This means that you can now view the current schedule and register for the July webcasts from Ideagora (see the left hand column of Ideagora's [home page](#) and the Ideagora [events](#) page). We hope that this change will make it easier for members to participate in the *Innovate* author webcasts, Ideagora interviews, and other special events and will encourage more *Innovate* readers to join the community.

Even ahead of this change, Ideagora continues to grow; we now have over 500 active members participating in 47 current discussions, contributing to a growing number of member blogs, and posting useful videos and other resources. Members hail from around the world, and their varying perspectives bring new questions and solutions to the quest for a creative and sustainable approach to education in the 21st century.

Exploring Core Questions

The discussions in Ideagora frequently touch upon the same set of issues, a series of core questions to which our members return. These are the central issues shaping the future of the education, the ones that fundamentally influence the design, development, delivery, and acceptance of technology-enhanced educational programs across the globe:

1. How do we offer quality education to the most people at the lowest cost?
2. How do we implement and evaluate new learning technologies when the speed of technological evolution far outstrips the rate of adoption?
3. How do we confront the demands of active learners who are not content with traditional teaching models?
4. How do we adapt to the economic stresses of a global recession that has only accentuated the need to find a balance between quality, access, and relevancy?
5. How do we design a consistent and equal education system that accommodates the socioeconomic factors and cultural forces that inevitably influence the learning process?

These five large questions are at the root of nearly all of the discussion on Ideagora. They are the questions driving change today and for the foreseeable future, reflecting deeply embedded elements in our notion of education and in our vision of its future.

What do you think of this list? Is it sufficiently comprehensive? What would you add? What role will technology play in addressing these central issues? We've started a new discussion in Ideagora, [5 Core Questions](#), and we invite you to add your thoughts.

Ensuring Access

The first question, regarding the need to provide access to as many learners as possible at the lowest possible cost, is at the center of one recent post. In [Education 3.—It's coming. Flat global education](#), [Michael Trout](#), the founder of [EduIt](#), elaborates his vision for education:

I believe the world should commit itself to achieving the goal of flattening global education before the end of the next decade, of exploring and developing a free, complete education solution for all people of the world. So no matter who you are, or where you are, people can access the best education possible, for free.

The flattening of the educational landscape will mean that any one is "able to learn anything, anyplace, anywhere from multiple authorities" via "an environment where learning never stops and is free and accessible to all regardless of their social or economic disposition, funded, like Google, by back-end ad revenue." This vision of a model for free global education not only suggests an expansive adoption of technology-based learning platforms but also builds on the collaborative nature of social learning and the growing trend of learners willing and able to share their knowledge in informal networks. Michael's discussion is too new to have generated responses yet, but we look forward to seeing what you think about his ideas.

The Cost of Innovation

Michael's vision is compelling, but it is not yet a reflection of the world in which most of us teach and learn. Economic issues have hit as hard in education as anywhere else if not harder. A few months ago, [Bill](#) offered a post exploring the very real financial strictures on the use of technology in his underfunded school district, [The challenges of obtaining and using IT tools in school districts with minimal resources](#). Bill's discussion emphasizes the need for resources but also calls for creative, affordable solutions to establish a "healthy environment for learning."

Bill's post suggests that while we focus on the positive benefits of technology in learning, we must remain aware of the need to address the great diversity of the student population—and the tremendous variability in access to resources—in the United States.

Ideagora members provided a range of responses to Bill's question, including suggesting specific resources that could help him. That kind of specific advice is undoubtedly useful, but the discussion itself raises larger questions about Ideagora's purpose and reach. Certainly as a community, we can provide resources, suggestions, and support to Bill and to others who share his concerns. But can we do more? Is the Ideagora community interested in joining the fight for a flatter global education system? Certainly, we have the expertise and the experience as the thoughtful, provocative discussions have shown. Can we help design models that integrate technology and broader support for the well-being of students in a sustainable, affordable way? The possibilities are endless, and they begin with your participation and reflection on the issues raised by your colleagues.

Technology and Culture

[John Adsit](#) offered a response to Bill's question that approaches the question from a broader perspective:

Imposing a technological solution on a school system that is not totally prepared to embrace it will fail. It is as simple as that. For a change like this to be successful, it must be part of a total vision that is accepted and owned by everyone in the school community. Achieving that vision is the Principal's greatest challenge and most important responsibility.

John suggests that a school wishing to use technology as a contributor to its overall success first must develop a success-based school culture; that culture can then allow teachers to consider how technology supports success. Only then can the school define technology needs and be prepared to embrace useful technologies when they arrive.

The question of culture is a concern at every level. John addresses school culture, but larger cultural questions also intrude on the educational process. *Innovate* Editor-in-Chief [Jim Morrison](#) raised this issue in his discussion on [Facilitating the adoption of technology-enhanced active learning strategies in Middle Eastern colleges and Universities](#). Jim's original post asked some provocative questions, beginning with the proposition that "cultural differences [can] present a barrier to the adoption of innovative pedagogical and administrative programs in higher education in the region." The really tough questions around catalyzing change, Jim argues, "must be approached from a perspective that respects the cultural traditions of the region."

Jim's post continues to generate thoughtful responses. [Laurence Shatkin](#) is one of many participants who have provided examples from their own work to illustrate the successes and challenges inherent in such efforts. Laurence went on to suggest at least one way in which cultural barriers may be overcome: "I believe that people developing educational technology resources can succeed with Middle Eastern users by accommodating the local culture and that does not necessarily mean using the lecture-and-recitation format." Laurence went on to give two examples from his own experience with a career education program in Saudi Arabia, including the use of a storytelling format to elicit student values and the effort to involve parents in a career education effort as an acknowledgment of the region's patriarchal, family-oriented culture.

Jim's follow-up post describing his recent experience in Egypt also acknowledges the need to work within the culture, even to change it. Jim describes how a nursing education director at the Om Haibeh Foundation in Aswan employs instructors who use project-based learning in the hope that their students will, in turn, be more likely to use this pedagogy when they are teachers. "This approach," Jim concludes, "may well be the ticket" for implementing change in any region.

What's Next in Innovate-Ideagora

We need your input to help plan upcoming interviews! Let us know what topics you would like to explore, who you would like us to interview, and what you would like us to ask our guests by posting your questions to our [Future Interview Topics](#) thread. To find out when specific interviews are scheduled or to participate in the live sessions, please check Ideagora's [events](#) page, which lists upcoming Ideagora events as well as *Innovate* author webcasts.

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!

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