Collaboration: How to Find, Design and Implement Collaborative Internet Projects

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Collaboration: How to Find, Design and Implement Collaborative Internet Projects
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107 pages including appendices.

The book “Collaboration: How to Find, Design and Implement Collaborative Internet Projects” is exactly that! If you are interested in collaborative learning and teaching activities on the Internet, and regardless of whether you are a newcomer or an expert at it, here is an excellent resource for you. This book will help you, to not only FIND information about collaborative projects on the Internet, but also DESIGN, and IMPLEMENT powerful collaborative learning and teaching activities for your students. This is not an overly theoretical book about collaborative learning, nor is it laden with dense technical detail about collaborative learning technologies for the Internet, although there is an appropriate measure of that in some sections of the book. It is a very readable volume, written in very simple English, and a conversational tone. It is not a book that you would probably want to pick up and read from cover to cover, although you can do that, and then return to the appropriate sections as and when necessary. It will serve you best as a reference book and a workbook--one that you would want to use on a regular basis as you go about with searching for information about collaborative learning, designing and implementing these activities as part of your teaching. As such, it is a practitioner's guide!

Betsy Burgess and Patricia Robertson are themselves very experienced collaborators and practitioners of collaborative learning activity. They begin this book with a simple definition of collaboration, the reasons for collaborative learning, and the nature of the collaborative learner as well as the collaborative learning task. As much of their reference context is the Elementary Schools sector, there is good and timely advice offered in the book on the need for seeking appropriate permissions from parents and being vigilant about issues of Internet security as students engage on such work on the Internet.

This is a book about how to FIND information on collaborative learning on the Internet. And in this regard, it offers an innumerable list of useful references to resouceful Website addresses where all sorts of information about collaborative learning can be found. Reference to useful Websites is a common feature throughout the book. An obvious problem, however with citing references to Websites in a static (such as the printed) form is the difficulty of keeping those citations updated in the event of Website addresses falling out, or for whatever reason not being maintained any more at the designated Web Servers. I had a look at some of these sites, not all I admit, and those that I accessed were working fine. It will be awfully frustrating to find these addresses not working just when you thought you needed to access the information on a Website. I am sure the publishers are very aware of this problem, and may already be considering producing a Web-based version of the book where it would be much easier to ensure that the Websites referred to in the book are always kept current.

This is also a book about how to DESIGN collaborative learning activities on the Internet. Neither collaboration nor collaborative learning is a novel concept. For as long as I am told, and can remember myself, elementary school teachers world-over have designed and used collaborative learning activities with their students. However, collaborative learning on the Internet may be new to many educators and students. The Internet is clearly, becoming a very commonly accessible medium for supporting learning and working as well as communicating socially in the developed parts of the world. But the Internet is still out of the reach of many inhabitants of this earth, and while this may not remain to be so, this technology will be beyond the reach of many, for a very long time from now.
For those who have access to the Internet, and are using, or plan to use the power of this technology for supporting collaborative learning and teaching, this book will show you how. Beginning with a section called the "Crystal Ball" on page 65 of the book, the authors outline probable scenarios of collaborative learning activity on the Internet. This is followed immediately with an "Activity Plan" which outlines in detail, all the issues that one needs to consider in designing and developing a collaborative learning activity on the Internet. In effect this is a "lesson plan" and it covers topics from collaborative learning technology that is activity, through to consideration of targeted groups, duration of activity, and assessment. I think this is one of the most useful parts of the book. The novice educators can use this lesson plan as is, and be assured that they are considering all the pertinent issues. The experienced educators can use this lesson plan to embellish their own practices. This generic Activity Plan is followed by several actual collaborative activities on the Internet covering a wide range of subjects from Language and Arts, Geography, Social Studies to Science and Mathematics for all levels of elementary schooling. Each one of these lesson or activity plans comprises creative ideas for collaborative learning as well many references to resources on the Internet.

This book is equally, very much about how to IMPLEMENT collaborative learning and teaching activity on the Internet. Without getting overly technical, it offers the educator a very comprehensive overview of collaborative technologies on the Internet ranging from basic e-mailing, instant messaging, internet-relay chat to various types of video-conferencing. The strengths and weaknesses, and cautions regarding each one of these technologies are adequately reviewed in the book. There is also coverage of issues regarding netiquette, and management of time and information flow during collaborative learning activity on the Internet. Additional useful resources (in the form of Website addresses) for creative ideas on collaborative learning on the Internet is available also at the end of the book in the appendices (page 97). These appendices also comprise a glossary, and worksheets for designing your first collaborative project, and e-mail activity.

In sum, let me recommend this book to you. Regardless of how experienced you are with collaborative learning on the Internet, my hunch is that you will find something of value to your work in this book and the resources it comprises.