Culminating Workshop for the K-Net/First Nations SchoolNet Online Content Partnership Project

March 23-24, 2004

Report

Prepared for:
K-Net Services
Sioux Lookout, ON
ATTN: Brian Beaton

Prepared by:
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May 21, 2004

Brian Beaton, Director
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Dear Mr. Beaton


I have enclosed a summary report on the culminating workshop for the First Nations SchoolNet Online Content Partnerships Program. The report describes the March 23 workshop and the March 24 next steps meeting in Thunder Bay. Presentations were made by the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, Seven Generations, Noojmowin Teg Health Access Centre, Fernando Oliviera, Wawatay Native Communications Society and the Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation. The sessions were facilitated by John Rowlandson and Florence Woolner.

Please contact us if you require any additional information or follow-up material.
Thank you for your attention to this response.
Yours truly,

Mr. John Rowlandson and Ms. Florence Woolner
TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .......................................................................................................................... 1

1. PROJECT OVERVIEW ................................................................................................................... 2
   A. BACKGROUND ............................................................................................................................... 2

2. CULMINATING WORKSHOP – MARCH 23, 2004 ....................................................................... 3
   A. PRESENTATIONS .......................................................................................................................... 3
      1. NAN Decade for Youth ........................................................................................................ 4
      3. Northern Links-Keewaytinook Okimakanak ........................................................................ 8
      4. Seven Generations .............................................................................................................. 10
      5. Noojmovin Teg Aboriginal Health Access Centre ............................................................ 12
      6. Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation .................................................... 15

3. NEXT STEPS SESSION – MARCH 24, 2004 ............................................................................ 17
Executive Summary

The SchoolNet On-line Content pilot projects addressed strategic web-based knowledge gaps for First Nations school-aged learners. The health, science, culture, language, career and life skills foci of the six projects establish a road map for creating new interactive learning opportunities for First Nations teachers and learners by blending the tactical development of on-line content with formal and informal learning outcomes for First Nations school children.

Independently, the projects provide new sources of historically and culturally validated material. Together they provide a working example of how First Nations organizational expertise can be integrated with community-based educational infrastructure and aims. The six pilot initiatives demonstrate how knowledge bases in existing First Nations organizations can be marshaled to create new communities of practice and collaboration within the school system. Similarly, the projects have shown how web-based tools, protocols and technologies address longstanding cultural barriers by making graphical and audio enhancements accessible for First Nations learners.

The pilot projects established a model for strategic development of First Nations on-line content. Partner organizations were invited to participate in the development of web destinations that were specifically designed to engage First Nations learners. Project officers worked with proponents to refine projects, facilitate knowledge transfer between projects and to provide support in achieving project targets and deliverables. Proponents managed community-based engagement with schools, needs assessment and quality assurance activities.

The partnership approach resulted in the successful launch of six high quality web resources at the Ishikiishiwewin Learning Language On-line Conference on 24 March, 2004. Responses to the web products during individual workshop sessions were universally enthusiastic. More than two-thirds of participants indicated that they enjoyed the project sessions ‘very much’ Accordingly, proponents, attendees and educators felt that new on-line content partnerships should be seeded and encouraged K-Net to coordinate a second round of project development.

Project proponents expressed a need to build on-line information protocols and functions into their organizations. There were concerns that without this capacity demands by schools to continually update material and to introduce higher levels of interaction between school age learners and teachers and content experts would not be achievable. Finally, proponents felt that K-Net should play an on-going coordination and support function and act as an interface for sharing knowledge about new technologies, marketing initiatives and emerging opportunities for strategic on-line content development for First Nations schools.
1. Project Overview

A. Background

The aims of this project were to create specialized online resources for First Nations students within the K-12 system and to integrate the resources into appropriate curriculum streams. Project funding supported collaborative web-based learning initiatives between First Nations organizations and primary and/or elementary educational institutions. Funding facilitated the design, testing and implementation of Internet-based learning tools and information for First Nations students.

The funded projects were developed to achieve three primary outcomes. The first outcome was the development of learning capacity in partner organizations. The second desired outcome was to facilitate collaborative inter-disciplinary efforts in digital program delivery. The third and final outcome was identified as creating and demonstrating models for integrating content expertise and online learning capacity.

The project targeted five key content areas for online partnership development – Language Instruction, Health Promotion and Prevention, Science Education, Study Skills, Attending School away from Home. These themes were accommodated through online learning tools development projects with the following organizations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Content Areas and Online Content Development Partnership</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Instruction</td>
<td>7 Generations Educational Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Promotion</td>
<td>Noojmowin-Teg, NAN Decade for Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Education</td>
<td>Northern Links-Keewaytinook Okimakanak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Skills</td>
<td>Wawatay Native Communications Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending School Away from Home</td>
<td>Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation</td>
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A total of six First Nations projects were initiated in the fall of 2003. All projects were designed for completion by March 31, 2004. Each project was assigned a Project Facilitator who met with project principals on a regular basis and supported the web development work. All projects participated in a culminating workshop where they shared their development experiences, promotional strategies and future needs.
2. Culminating Workshop – March 23, 2004

A. Presentations

The six online content partnership projects each sent representatives to Thunder Bay to participate in the Culminating Workshop. All participants were either Project Leaders or senior staff who had directed the development of the online content project. The participants were asked to review their website and to describe the challenges that their project faced and the lessons that their team had learned from the initiative. They also discussed launch strategies. Participants included the following people:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melanie Goodchild</td>
<td>NAN Decade for Youth Office, Thunder Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alvin Fiddler, Tom Axtell</td>
<td>Wawatay Native Communications Society, Sioux Lookout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernando Oliveira/Northern Links</td>
<td>Teacher/Web Designer – G8 Supplementary Courses, Toronto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis Jones and Sheila Orwick</td>
<td>7 Generations Educational Institute, Fort Frances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion Maar and Donna Chin-McGregor</td>
<td>Noojmowin-Teg Aboriginal Health Access Centre, Manitoulin Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Sherlock, Angela Crozier, April Wemigwans</td>
<td>Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation, Toronto and Thunder Bay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1. NAN Decade for Youth

Summary

Melanie Goodchild demonstrated the NAN Youth Decade Website which features resource material on suicide prevention and awareness geared at secondary and post-secondary students. Students can use the information, which include peer-helping material, personally or as part of class projects. The site also identifies and provides linkages to mental health, suicide prevention, youth empowerment and peer helping websites.

Web Address

http://www.nandecade.ca/article/1.asp

Project Challenges

The NAN Decade for Youth project identified three main challenges they faced when developing the project: dependence on in-kind services; choosing portal software, and capacity to generate specialized content.
One challenge experienced by several of the projects was the reliance of First Nations NGOs on in-kind/internal expertise. In-kind is an effective way to meet objectives with little or no financial resources, but not an effective or timely way to meet the expectations of your client group. Being able to have a software and IT budget made a big difference and allowed the project to focus on the content development task.

Similarly, the NAN Youth project found that there were hundreds of portal software/configuration choices. Finding a good product was a daunting task and so the Project Leader consulted the Northern Ontario Technology Centre who connected them with a local company.

The project also encountered a content generation challenge. Although having distributed portal access made it easy to post and manage content, the development of the site also pointed to important content expertise gaps, e.g. making the Suicide Prevention Manual available in youth vernacular or being able to introduce the Suicide screening tools.

**Lessons Learned**

The project proposed two main lessons learned. The first relates to locus of content generation and distribution. The Project Leader felt that more content needs to be adapted from its front-line worker audience to youth, parents, teachers. The second lesson learned focused on the importance of purchasing easy-to-use portal software. Their use of the SIMS – Systems Integrated Management Software – eliminated their dependence on the organization’s already overtaxed IT staff and were able to rapidly respond to a wide range of content distribution and engagement needs. These included the posting of a web youth video shot in the Osnaburgh First Nation.
2. Wawatay Native Communications Society

Summary

Wawatay showcased their digital news archive created from samples of newspaper issued from its 30 years of publishing. Curriculum-ready interactive exercises have been developed to transfer the information in the archive in ways that are useful and appealing to students and teachers, especially for students attending high school. A searchable database is included which makes the text more accessible by enabling users to carry out keyword searches.

The site elements will be the same once all of the content has been inputted, curriculum plans are complete and feedback from teachers and students has been incorporated. These elements are: story in English, story in Syllabics; using audio mixing from radio and translation department to do the voiceover translations of each story; using Flash file for audio – starting from MP3 – coded into flash with buttons (sound quality good, downloads fast, small file size, works with any browser);

Web Address

http://education.wawatay.on.ca
Challenges

The Wawatay project identified several challenges and design issues. Project challenges included trying to retrofit a historic cultural resource to work within a standardized provincial curriculum and the ability to appropriately engage learners with the Aboriginal language component of the project. Another challenge was learning how to work in a distributed/interdisciplinary environment that included web designers, translators, journalists and educational technology consultants. These challenges are summarized below:

a. Backward design – taking the existing product (30 years of tri-lingual newspaper content) and fitting it to the Ontario Curriculum and KiHS classroom environment;

b. Website is designed for a very literate group of users – learners who may not have particularly good English language skills and syllabics/Oji-Cree translations. Oji-Cree presents a challenge because content is at a very high level and high school students are not really ready – it may be better to use children’s television programming to reinforce language development.

c. Working within an interdisciplinary and distributed team environment—working at a distance – saw new vision for making all of the Wawatay content being made available on the web.

Lessons Learned

Wawatay noted that their project staff had learned important lessons about working with other organizations to create specialized access to archived data. In particular, project staff worked with the educational consultant to craft archived stories into quizzes and useful curriculum tools for teachers and learners. They also were able to develop a better sense of how Wawatay’s multi-media capacities could be used to reinforce cultural elements – such as Native language speakers – by recording stories into Oji-Cree in the Wawatay studios. Finally, the project was able to identify an organizational need for web development expertise – i.e. the ability for all staff to generate and manage online content and be able to use web tools to meet previously unmet information needs by their First Nations audience.
3. Northern Links-Keewaytinook Okimakanak

Summary

The G8 Supplementary Courses Program online material presented helps Grade 8 students in their transition into high school through the delivery of supplementary courses in Math, Science and English. The site began as a pilot project between Northern Links and Keewaytinook Okimakanak to meet a need identified by KiHS to better prepare Grade 7 and 8 learners for core high school curriculum (math, science, English).

Currently three courses are offered on a rotating basis. Faxes are sent to all First Nations schools in Ontario. On average, 150 to 200 students register and complete one assignment per day. Students participate under the direction of local teachers. This approach was taken to ensure flexibility (teacher control of what students do and when they do it). The teacher and an offsite course marker take on the marking load.

Web Address

http://www.g8.firstnationschools.ca/index.php?module=ContentExpress&func=display&ceid=11&meid=-1
Challenges

The primary challenges of running this course are focused around communication, computer literacy and course loading. The instructor indicated that managing this course requires a great deal of communication between teachers and learner, particularly at the beginning and end of semesters when both groups are immersed in the ramp up and windup of the standard curricula. The course also demands that teachers and learners have a base level of computer literacy. In many First Nations schools learners and teachers are just starting to adopt web and computer processing tools. This creates an additional help services gap for the teacher to fill. Finally, the open ended nature of this course creates a huge time demand to provide timely feedback to learners and teachers about student performance on assignments. This has been partly relieved by part-time markers.

Lessons Learned

The primary lesson learned is to keep the site as simple to navigate and use as is possible. Learners can get lost in sophisticated sites and will easily get turned off if the site is not intuitive. Similarly, the project leader identified collaboration as a key to building a good site – incorporating the work of others and letting online content experts fill holes that are difficult or impossible to fill in a standard face-to-face instructional environment. Additional lessons learned include:

- Using search engines effectively (www.oshki.ca)
- Resources can be integrated into the course
- Creating own resources – photos, audio files, Flash, diagrams
- Using miniDV or digital cameras to create local multi-media projects
- Engaging Kids as content creators
- Using diagrams to illustrate elements
- Using easy to use open source software to reduce learner barriers – e.g. created Dare to Dream flash video that uses SWISH not as complex as FLASH (swishzone.com)
- Communicating a course theme to motivate and excite students to look forward to the transition to high school
- Sharing resources
- Exchange best practices, resources, stories
- Co-create wherever possible
4. Seven Generations

Summary

Seven Generations Education Institute representatives showcased some of their existing Ojibway-language teaching curriculum units they have begun to reformat in an electronic web-based platform.

Included in the materials are interactive worksheets, games, and puzzles for the students to accompany the units, and linkage to Aboriginal websites as deemed appropriate.

Web Address:

http://www.7generations.org
Challenges

The main challenge for this project was digitizing and repurposing an integrated paper-based Ojibwe language learning curriculum. Project members supervised the digitization of cultural resources and developed corresponding iconography to support effective Native language learning.

Lessons Learned

Project proponents described the need for additional staff resources to temporarily generate digital content and to support the IT needs of project workers.
5. Noojmowin Teg Aboriginal Health Access Centre

Summary

Noojmowin Teg Health Centre demonstrated a health information portal for First Nations that functions as an online student learning tool. The content of this site was designed to meet the learning objectives set out in the Ontario Curriculum for Health and Physical Education for children in grades 3 to 5; it focuses on Aboriginal approaches to health promotion and physical activity appropriate to the target students.

It is part of an ongoing strategic development of e-health applications for the First Nations in the Manitoulin District in North Central Ontario. The learning tool development was a collaborative process, involving health professionals, cultural resource people, teachers, students and web designers from local First Nations agencies. The project began with a web design training session for content developers.

Focus groups were conducted in all four local First Nations schools to gain feedback from teachers: What are teachers information needs to better prepare culturally appropriate and stimulating health and physical education? What sparks children’s interest in health and physical education? The focus groups were a first step in creating local interest and awareness in this new project. The information from these sessions was consolidated with the Health and Physical education curriculum objectives, and provided the basis for the content development and web design.

The content development team collaborated with various health care workers, mental health care workers, Aboriginal language teachers and people with cultural knowledge in order to develop lesson plans covering topics such as healthy living, health foods, substance abuse, school yard bullying, school yard games, role models and pow wow dancing.

A logo and naming contest helped to create further awareness in schools. The contest was successful and the project was named Wiinmagewin. The English translation is “to tell something” or “to inform”. The logo is for the project is represented on the right. Ken Ense, a local artist redrew and digitized the logo.

Once the web design was completed and the site populated with content, the website was tested in local schools. An independent evaluator was hired to test the website site with potential users. In this evaluation teachers were invited to determine if priority content areas identified in earlier focus groups were adequately met.

The website was also tested with students to determine if the website is considered interesting and easy to navigate from their perspective. The site received positive feedback for the depth of the content and the Aboriginal health and physical education activities.
Challenges

The website received a positive evaluation from teachers and students. However, teachers and students envision a living site with interactive features and continuously updated information. To update and expand development according to these recommendations, additional resources will be necessary to meet the needs of teachers and students in health and physical education. Noojmowin Teg Health Centre would welcome the opportunity to expand the existing website according to these recommendations.

Lessons Learned

1. Website needs to be sustained and updated regularly. Teachers need information prior to September when doing long-range planning.

2. Long-range goal should be to provide online course curriculum
3. Add links for websites on asthma, diabetes, Act Now program, Indigenous Games, Aboriginal NHL players, various sports, and the Manitoulin Wild.

4. Expand the Aboriginal games section with a sidebar on Aboriginal origins of games to promote pride with kids in their heritage

5. Add a resource list of books, videos, and people

Further long-term recommendations focused on the development of interactive features:

1. Add a feature to register with the website and to receive monthly updates

2. Add a comment, feedback and discussion section

3. Develop a way for teachers to share information and best practices and a place to post their own variation of an activity and evaluate activities.
6. Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation

Summary

The Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation demonstrated its Aboriginal Virtual Career Fair website, an online resource accessible to Aboriginal youth, parents and educators in Ontario.

The Virtual Career Fair offers opportunities for a user to discover information on scientific and technology-based careers - opportunities, educational prerequisites, programs, and institutions and support mechanisms available in Ontario. In addition there is information on emerging sectors of the economy, availability of employment by region and sector, and motivational material, including a role model feature, and activity-based areas.

Through the initial phase of development OFNTSC developed a number of features, including sections on career profiles, FAQs, educational links, role models, a promotional video, and an articles section which will be added to on a regular basis. OFNTSC has begun building a database of First Nations and career related images for use on the site to ensure that the look does not become stale. OFNTSC is striving to create a virtual venue which keeps youth returning time after time.

OFNTSC is currently involved in ongoing negotiations to bring in content from federal and provincial ministries, as well as national and provincial associations with stated interests in promoting career awareness to aboriginal youth. As these agreements are reached OFNTSC will add new content and features to the site. As an interim measure links to important resource information will be highlighted.

In keeping with the theme of an aboriginal career fair, OFNTSC is actively seeking contributions from private sector partners interested in promoting their sector or companies recruitment information.

Web Address:

http://www.coolcareers.ca
Username: coolcareers
Password: w0rking
Challenges

The OFNTSC project encountered five primary challenges in completing the work. These challenges include:

- balancing project work loads with competing duties
- choosing the most appropriate external expert to review content
- preparing required authorizations for government departments to obtain permission to use their material
- sustainability issues and the need to find funding partners

Lessons Learned

Project team members felt that they had learned important lessons from the project. These include highlighting how the web can be effectively used to increase awareness about gaps in Aboriginal participation in Science and Technology careers and how it can be used to reduce the lack of knowledge of teachers and counselors who are pointing students in this direction. Similarly, they were able to identify opportunities for bringing new partners in to sponsor the site and activities that the site features.
3. Next Steps Session – March 24, 2004

At the close of the Culminating Workshop, facilitators suggested that discussion continue the next morning with a focus towards identifying next steps and recommendations for future SchoolNet content initiatives. The Next Steps session was facilitated by Florence Woolner and was introduced by K-Net Director, Brian Beaton. Mr. Beaton asked that participants use their own experiences to identify issues moving forward and to make recommendations for developing new content development initiatives.

**Issues Moving Forward**

**Sustainability**

- Integration. Building in and sustaining web-friendly processes in organizations – for example WWT will need seed money to get web page development going and integrate it within the organization.

- Marketing. Seeking out sponsors for the sites so that organizations are able to serve new audiences, e.g. youth initiatives are only one of the services provided by an organization and so a sponsored website allows organization to feature an aspect of career development.

**Organizational, Individual and Technical Capacity**

- User uptake. It is still early in the development of web-based information - whole organizations have not embraced the web though key leaders have the vision.

- Human Capacity. There is a constant demand by users to have access to new content; staff has little if any understanding of using the web as a tool or how to create online content. Staff needs more training to distribute the content development work.

- Technical Capacity. Computers in organizations are often old and usually just one person has all of the knowledge. Requires capacity building - new media literacy.

**Quality**

- Validity and User Expectations. Keeping information up-to-date and implementing responses to changes – as requested by users – e.g. more has been
requested on health living, diabetes – the site itself has led to the creation of local demand but with no additional staff time allocated to respond.

- Continuous Quality Improvement. Learning from previous experiences and applying improvements (better design, better content development (additional resources) in each new iteration of the site. Planning expansion in a focused programmatic way to anticipate what users will need from the website.

**Recommendations**

Project participants concluded their discussion of the content development process by considering how this type of initiative could be improved or expanded in the future. Two main recommendations were made. The first focused on supporting human, organizational and technical resource issues in existing projects and the second suggested an opportunity for K-Net to play a communication role by creating a contacts database to facilitate project collaboration.