Joy2Learn
Summary of Research and Recommendations

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The Joy2Learn user research, site review, and web scan provide valuable information for the strategic planning process. This document summarizes key points from those documents and offers recommendations.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

The Joy2Learn video resources are, of course, the cornerstone of the site's assets. In a world awash in online video they are unique in the insight they provide into artists' lives and work. Teachers found the content to be engaging for students at different grade levels and easy to connect both to curriculum in multiple content areas and to students' real lives and worlds. Teachers would like to see the site showcase more artists representing different perspectives in each genre. We found the varied quality of the videos to be an issue. In addition, internet users are more and more likely to expect to be able to download online video content, which may also prove to be an issue for Joy2Learn. Neither of these points diminishes the power of the Joy2Learn videos themselves as teaching and learning tools.

Teachers like the activities associated with the e-Presentations, and reported that their students enjoyed them, as well. We found the degree of interactivity relatively limited, however. In addition, they miss opportunities to call on students to engage in further reflection and critical thinking and to make additional connections to the themes of the videos.

Teachers like the lesson plans as well, and want to see more. We found them to be concise and the fact that they are in easily printable PDF format is a plus. While easily accessible, however, the lesson plans are not organized in a way that allows browsing, or that enables teachers to know something of the content without opening each individual lesson plan file.

While most teachers felt that the site was easy for their students to navigate, they themselves found the navigation wanting, as did we. Because each e-Presentation has its own structure and navigational pathways, there is no consistency across the site in what you can find and how you go about finding it. By far the most common complaint we heard from users was that it was difficult to find a particular location on the site, even if you'd been there before.

POTENTIAL DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The site review and web scan suggested several possible directions for Joy2Learn.

Maintain Joy2Learn as a standalone site in its current format. There are several possibilities for additional work in this scenario. These include:

〈 Basic clean up and maintenance- fixing dead links and typos
〈 Recompressing videos for better quality
〈 Developing additional activities with greater interactivity
〈 Developing a lesson plan database
〈 Generating activity for the user forums and providing facilitation

Maintain Joy 2 Learn as a standalone site but redesign to focus on making videos accessible. This would mean removing the e-Presentation shell and providing the video files in a format that allows downloading and embedding in other applications. This would expand the ways users could interact with the videos and enable formats such as podcasts. New, more interactive activities could be developed in this scenario, as well.

Partner with another arts education website and house the e-Presentations there. The primary advantage to this approach would be the expanded reach an established, large-scale site could offer. A disadvantage would be the compromises Joy2Learn might be asked to make in order to fit the new host's style and approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on the research, site review, and web scan, as well as our own experience with teachers and electronic educational materials, we offer the following recommendations.

Core Recommendations

Keep the e-Presentation format. The core asset of Joy2Learn is the artists themselves. The personal nature of their conversations and the sharing of their work are unique and would be valuable however they were presented. Each of the e-Presentations, even with their sometimes convoluted structure, has its own distinctive character, however, which we suspect is part of the appeal to teachers and students. Therefore, we would suggest maintaining the e-Presentation structure.

Expand the repertoire of e-Presentations. We recommend mapping out an expansion plan to guide the selection of new artists. Each new e-Presentation is an opportunity to develop new lesson plans and activities, as well. In developing new activities, Joy2Learn might want to consider approaches that provide more significant learning opportunities than currently offered by the end-of-presentation activities. The curating activity in the Elizabeth Murray e-Presentation, for instance, might include a journal with guiding questions that encourage students to explain their choices.

Establish a common structure for future e-Presentations. While the different structures of the existing e-Presentations add an element of character, they also contribute to the difficulty of navigating the site – the user can't learn a particular set of strategies for getting around that apply to all the e-Presentations, but rather has to discover new rules

for each. We recommend developing a common structure to be used for all future e-Presentations, perhaps allowing for a certain amount of variation, but enabling the user to develop navigational skills that are applicable across units. In addition, the common structure should emphasize ease of movement within a given e-Presentation.

Create a more detailed site map. Especially because the existing six e-Presentations are not likely to be redesigned according to the new structure, we suggest updating the existing site map to make it easier for them to find their way to specific areas and resources.

Build a searchable lesson plan database. Teachers should be able to browse lesson plans or search by subject area, genre, artist, and state standards, among other potential key words.

Additional Suggestions

Provide the videos in a downloadable format in addition to the e-Presentations. While this may not be a critical feature, enabling teachers and students to include Joy2Learn video clips in their own lesson plans and presentations would further extend the learning options beyond the site itself.

Remove the user forums. Educational user forums generally require significant facilitation, and even then are often unsuccessful. Our limited Joy2Learn user research suggests that teachers are likely to use the site only occasionally, which would mean that there may not be a large enough active community at any given time to generate more than sporadic use of online forums.