



Innoteach: Using technology for professional learning



Innoteach, as the name suggests, is about technological innovation – in the classroom and in how ETFO offers professional learning programs. We developed the *Innoteach* project to capitalize on the ability of new technologies to span distance and time. The project brought together a group of teachers who created multimedia learning objects that incorporate innovative uses of technology to enhance student learning and illustrate new ways of thinking about teaching and learning.

Central to *Innoteach* is an online community of practice housed on a web portal that allows the sharing of documents and ideas. This virtual community lets teachers interested in innovation connect with colleagues, develop new approaches, share successes and challenges, and “push the envelope” of current educational practice.

Using a process known as a critical friends group, which is a social collaborative model, *Innoteach* engages participants in sharing one or more learning objects (lesson plan, multimedia resource) that they have created, critiquing and refining each other’s work, making revisions based on peer critiques, and participating in a face-to-face and online learning community.

BY JANET MILLAR GRANT AND ANNE RODRIGUE

Participants examine their learning objects critically to ensure that each one includes components on differentiated learning, and instructional and assessment strategies. They frame their learning objects from a research and best practices perspective. They document their learning using a Wiki, a web portal that allows all participants to access each other’s work.

***Innoteach* Projects**

Innoteach participants created a variety of learning objects for use in the classroom. Each of these includes a reflective component for teachers and techniques for creating inclusive classrooms. Each learning object helps to address a specific issue or challenge faced by Ontario teachers.

- **Classroom podcasts:** Students communicate their knowledge and understanding of a variety of writing forms by creating a radio show. Students conduct research, develop and publish content, and prepare transitions and audio effects to create one full-length radio show.
- **Nonfiction digital storytelling:** Students create a 60-second public service announcement video about maintaining a healthy lifestyle. This learning object combines grade 5 Ontario curriculum expectation requirements from health, language arts, and art. Adjustments can be made to accommodate other grade-level curriculum expectations.
- **Bringing language to the big screen:** Students use and expand

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their French speaking skills and perfect their written French as they bring their imagined movie to life on the big screen through the use of movie editing software. A final DVD cover adds a professional touch.

- **N’attendez pas, téléphonez aujourd’hui!** : Students in grade 7 core French create commercials using imperative verbs. They learn how to use imperative verbs to give instructions or convey a sense of urgency, and about the creative process, by participating in the stages of preproduction, production, postproduction, and celebration. Students apply their learning as they write and orally present their commercials to class.
- **Graphic tales of crime in medieval times:** Students bring to life a story they have written using puppetry and technology. At the end of this unit plan students use Comic Life software to create a graphic story about a medieval peasant accused of a crime.

Learning objects for teachers

Innoteach began as a meeting place for a small group of teachers. But starting this spring, their learning object materials will be posted on the ETFO website so that teachers anywhere in the province can view them or download and share them. Learning objects will also be available in both audio and video formats via podcast/RSS feeds for use on computers and on portable devices such as MP3 players and video iPods. A feedback loop will allow teachers to add their comments and ideas, and share ways of adapting the materials for use in other classrooms.

The author of each classroom project posted on the *Innoteach* site will be part of a learning object for teachers. Each participant will be featured in a video or narrated presenta-

tion that will also provide supporting documentation such as curriculum expectations, templates, samples, related readings and research. Of particular interest are statements on the impact of innovative practices on student learning.

A unique opportunity and challenge

Using the format of a professional learning community, the processes of collaborative work, and the opportunities for reflection afforded by online interaction takes teachers into uncharted territory. Asking us to revise lesson plans so as to demonstrate our thinking to others forces us to answer a number of questions. What is the research base surrounding the problem we are attempting to solve and the solution we arrive at? How have we accommodated the needs of individual students? What assessment practices are best aligned to this learning object? How did student learning change as a result of innovative practice? What would we do differently?

The participants of *Innoteach* thought that collaborative learning and peer review helped them to take an existing innovation and make it even better:

- “It has made me look at my teaching differently, trying to really focus on making each unit of study as complete and detailed as possible.”
- “While it was difficult at times to listen to other people making constructive criticism of my work, it was helpful in terms of teaching me to look at my work differently.”
- “We generally teach in isolation. Especially as a French teacher, I have no grade team members to talk through projects. This allowed others to ‘talk through’ ideas with me.”
- “It opened my eyes to how my ideas can be reformed.” ❖