Exercise 1: Which is the new media solution?

For each of the following capstone ideas, identify which solution embodies many-to-many principle, and explain why in one or more paragraphs. You should have at least 4 paragraphs, one for each problem. Be prepared to read your answer aloud in the next class. You will also be posting these responses in your own wordpress site later.

1. Problem: A disappearing language

Ian Larson wanted to help preserve the Passamaquoddy language from extinction.

Solution A

Create a taskforce from a select group of Native American language experts, and ask them to write down a dictionary of words and their definitions. Enter these definitions into a database and build a Web site that allows anyone to search for terms and hear their pronunciation. Hire a high-profile Web designer and marketing firm to ensure that as many people as possible learn about this resource.

Solution B

Distribute laptops with video cameras to schoolkids in the Passamaquoddy community, and ask them to record their grandparents telling stories in Passamaquoddy. Upload these to a Web site along with the grandparents' definitions of particular words used in the story, and make these words searchable via a tag cloud.

Solution B appears to be the most 'New Media' of the two. While I agree that Solution A has properties of the many-to-many media type, the 'taskforce' is still a single unit that produces an opinionated web site. Solution B uses information from many different children who are all unrelated and never collaborate on their work. This web site will produce content that varies in opinion and style. Therefore, Solution B best embodies the ideas of 'many-to-many'.

2. Problem: Neglected ruins

Evan Habeeb wanted to make people aware of the beauty of abandoned buildings.

Solution A

Assemble a film crew and visit abandoned homes, factories, and other buildings. Bring lights to illuminate these spaces dramatically, and record ambient sounds like dripping water. Edit the footage onto a DVD to create a compelling account that documents these relics for posterity, and distribute copies to historical societies across the state for their collections.

Solution B

Build a Web site that allows adventurers to print stickers they can leave behind in abandoned buildings they explore. Create the stickers so they can be scanned by a mobile phone to reveal a Web site built to feature photographs taken by those explorers.

Similar to question 1 Solution A takes a bunch of people and mashes them together, creating a group that 'thinks' as many but 'does' as one. Although the film crew develops several different types of media, the DVD they create is still only from a single viewpoint. Solution B, on the other hand, allows an infinite number of users to alter the project. This perspective allows for the most interaction between persons and promotes the evolution of the original idea.

3. Problem: Misunderstanding computer animation

Ryan Schaller and Jason Walker wanted to help people understand the many layers required to create a computer-animated film, including wireframe, textures, and light effects. As a case study, they created an animation depicting a cartoon archeologist digging for ancient artifacts.

Solution A

Design and build a touch-screen interface that allows viewers to "rub" away layers of the film with their hands to reveal previous stages of the animation as it plays.

Solution B

Create an iPad application that documents each stage of the animation process, using stills from the archeologist film as illustrations. Explain techniques such as ray tracing, motion capture, and morphing. Include links to companies that create animation software such as Autodesk.

By being able to interact with a project or art installation, users are inevitably more involved. This involvement produces a much better 'many-to-many' experience than anything simply handed to the person. Each individual can alter the project and change how the next person understands it. This ends up producing an ever-changing work where multiple persons receive different experiences.

4. Problem: A broken fountain

Danielle Gagner wanted to renovate the waterfall fountain under the skylight in the middle of the University Union, which had fallen into disrepair.

Solution A

Repurpose the existing plumbing to irrigate a garden planted in the former fountain. Research the types of plants that would grow well together at different levels of the fountain, and meet with dining hall staff to find out what herbs or vegetables they might add to salads and other offerings. Then plant these in collaboration with the sustainable agriculture club on campus,

and invite students to pick the resulting parsley, strawberries, and other fare from the garden for their lunch.

Solution B

Use Google Image Search to download photographs of natural bodies of water such as streams, rivers, and the ocean. Combine these with nature footage from sources like National Geographic and the Discovery Channel to create a multichannel video installation that projects images of flowing water and rippling waves onto the fountain, which has been covered with theatrical screening. Supplement the moving images with the sound of a babbling brook emanating from surround-sound speakers mounted on the ceiling.

Solution B is clearly dipping into New Media, but it isn't the best option. While technically inventive and intriguing, projecting images of water onto a barren surface provides no additional user interaction. The other solution however, encourages users to pick herbs and vegetables to supplement their lunches. This solution demands interactivity and would produce a much better 'many-to-many' experience.