• The Deep End of the Pool

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For the readings this week, I read Craig Dietrich's (with Jon Ippolito) "A Path towards Global Reach: The Pool." Dietrich starts his article by offering anecdote about an undergraduate student making remarks on a comment-pressed article and how that same student received feedback from the article's author, the head of Comp. Media Studies at MIT, a day later. He builds off of this scenario to argue in favor of opensource online information systems where students become more active in their own learning.

He specifically targets what he considers to be limiting, "top-down," "authoritarian" educational sites such as Blackboard, Turnitin, and Peoplesoft (iLearn?). With teachers taking a managerial role, rather than a collaborative one, Dietrich warns that the learning process becomes static and that the sites mentioned above are "monopolistic." Dietrich believes that software such as The Pool truly focuses on the process of learning and creating rather than systems, such as Blackboard, which have been designed to facilitate management over education.

Dietrich spent some time as a visiting professor at the University of Maine in the New Media Department where he encountered Ippolito's open network, The Pool. Much like a public swimming pool, any user with an design idea was able to jump in and share their project ideas and goals. Other contributors would then draw on their own expertise and comment/make suggestions on the other projects and these projects would subsequently get ranked based on the feedback received. As I understand it, students were able to get a lot of input from their peers and teachers at all stages of their individual projects. They were encouraged to refine and borrow ideas from multiple sources and were able to actively engage and evaluate their peers.

I really would have appreciated a more concrete example from Dietrich in regards to the types of "projects" his students were creating because I am finding it difficult to visualize how a system like the Pool would work in English Departments. I can see this type of software being very useful for when students might need to organize a presentation or maybe to share bibliographic sources and get feedback on research projects. I really like the idea of students being able to critique/comment on each others work from inception to execution and think that this type of system would encourage well planned and thoughtfully executed projects rather than things thrown together at the last minute.

OK kids, let's jump into the pool.