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Bridging the geographical distance with PenDA Live

Ng Aik Song, CITE & Ast/P Marissa Wettasinghe, Acting Hd/CITE

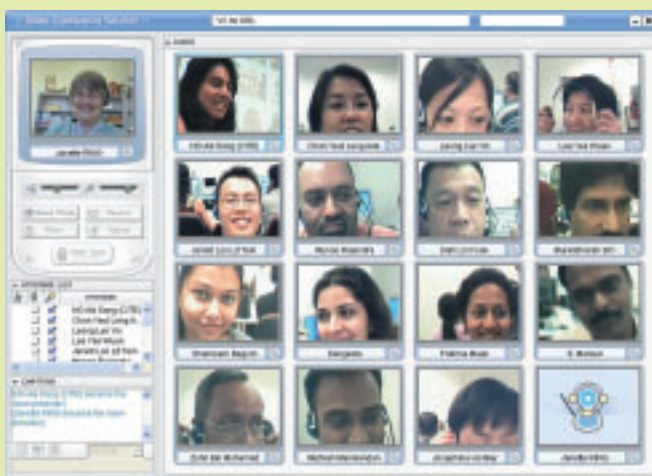
Following last year's success using Centra (a web-based video conferencing software) to communicate with her students, Dr Janette Ring (a Senior Lecturer from the Edith Cowan University) decided to use video conferencing again to communicate with her new batch of NIE students.

This group of students, from the Specialist Diploma in e-Learning Instructional Design, were undertaking a fully online module, and would not have the opportunity to interact with Dr Ring face-to-face as she was based in Perth, Western Australia.

Following some preliminary discussions with Dr Ring, the PenDA Live software was selected for the video conferencing as it allowed all 16 participants to see and talk to each other during the lesson. This software enables dynamic discussions to be made over the Internet, and this was what Dr Ring had in mind when she planned for her interactive lesson with her students.

Prior to the video conferencing session, we had one practice run to:

- agree on the protocol to use during the event, e.g. "raising hands" to signify that students wanted to ask questions
- ensure that the video images and audio were clear at both ends



- familiarise Dr Ring with the software, e.g., how to share materials with her students.

At the end of the session, the rapport established between Dr Ring and her students was so good that many of them looked forward to meeting her when she came down to Singapore in September. Everyone had a fun time interacting with each other and this bond between the lecturer and student helped ease the students into the uncharted

world of a fully online module.

Some comments from the students include:

"Very refreshing experience. It's different.....where you.... get to see all your classmates on one screen..." — Josephine Ho.

"I learnt one thing: it is important to start any online courses with a kick-off session like this either through a face-to-face session or a video conferencing session like this. The main aim is really to get to know the instructor as well as fellow coursemates for the first time before the start of the course" — Lee Yee Wuan.

For more information on this software, you can refer to the e-Learning support section of the CITE website at <http://www.cite.nie.edu.sg>.

Up Close with DD/ACIS

For our last issue this year, our Divisional Director (DD), A/P Philip Wong, shared his insights on developments in ACIS during 2005 and plans for next year.

ACIS Plugin: Could you give an overview of the highlights and challenges facing ACIS this year?

DD: We are seeing more users, especially academic staff, accessing various applications from home. This could be a result of a five-day working week, and thus all applications have to be up and running most of the time.

ACIS is very concerned with network security. With so many different kinds of viruses attacking networks, personal computers and servers, we have to maintain good security. However, we need to strike a good balance between security and home access to our computer applications.

Another main challenge is the use of our Learning Management System (LMS). We see a heavy usage of the system by both our students and staff and this system is now one of our Critical Mission applications during term time.

ACIS Plugin: Could you also let us know about any interesting statistics or anything new that ACIS has done for the first time?

DD: We have been promoting e-learning within NIE and the teams from both CITE and CSC have been working hard. Currently, 63% of all relevant modules in our Foundation Programme use our LMS actively. We hope to increase the level of usage further and to provide more support in using the system. We have upgraded our email system so that it provides faster and more secure email. Together with DED, we will launch the Facility Management System (FMS) sometime soon. Once running, the FMS will be able to manage and keep track of the use of facilities and resources in NIE. I believe we are one of the first institutions to develop and use such a system.

ACIS Plugin: What are the plans and developments that NIE can expect from ACIS in 2006?

DD: We moved to this campus near the end of 2000 and have been operating here for five years. Many computers and other equipment are in need of replacement and repair. We are working closely with the various Academic Groups to help them to refurbish their computer labs with new equipment.

ACIS is in the process of promoting more remote access to our computing facilities. We shall see more students and in-service teachers accessing our teaching, learning and library resources from home. More lecturers are also working off campus as they are conducting classes outside our Yunnan Garden campus. Thus, we need to take a positive approach in our development and infrastructure to cater for more off-campus services.



We will be forming an ICT Governing Committee (IGC) to formulate and strategise the development and use of various applications based on NIE's needs. There will be fewer ad hoc applications but a more systematic and integrated application for the NIE system. Hopefully, we will be able to streamline the workflow and thus create a more conducive ICT-based working environment.

ACIS Plugin: What is your vision for ACIS in 2006?

DD: One of ACIS' missions is to help staff internalise the institute's five core values and apply them to their work environment. By operationalising these core values, ACIS will be a great working place with a lot more collaboration and cooperation between staff so that we can provide good service to our users.

ACIS Plugin: Do you have any comments or observations on ACIS activities or staff matters (e.g. teambuilding, healthy lifestyle, etc.)?

DD: We want to make our working place fun and enjoyable. If staff can feel happy in this environment, they will then be productive and more forthcoming. I am very happy with the staff's involvement in our teambuilding activities. These activities will help us to bond as one. One of the most memorable was our Sungei Buloh Teambuilding activities.

I think that the staff need to be more active in healthy lifestyle programmes. Our momentum for these activities is slowing down and we need to boost it up. However, when healthy lifestyle activities are arranged, response has not been very good. We are encouraging staff to take a more active interest.

The mainstay of ACIS is technology. We need to constantly update ourselves when new technology is introduced. At times, we have to take on new responsibilities and to discard old ones. Thus, staff members have to be nimble and to be able to respond to changes constantly and positively.

ACIS Plugin: Thank you for your time, Dr Wong!

Congratulations to A/P Philip Wong for being honoured with the Public Service Medal (Bronze) and to Miss Emily Ng for receiving the Long Service Medal at the recent National Day Awards 2005.

Southeast Asia Blackboard User Day: 'Extending Possibilities'

Eric Bonneau, CSC, Anita Kalandasamy & Chang Yi Ching, CITE

Together with Blackboard Inc., the Academic Computing and Information Services (ACIS) Division organised Southeast Asia Blackboard User Day: 'Extending Possibilities' on 23 September 2005. The event, with Professor Leo Tan, Director, NIE, as the Guest-of-Honour, showcased the application of educational technologies in the teaching and learning context and highlighted new features and applications in educational technologies to enhance teaching and learning.



Participants at the Southeast Asia Blackboard User Day

The Blackboard User Day was divided into 3 sessions, namely, Technical, Academic and Hands-on.

Technical Session

Participants in the first of the two technical sessions got an exclusive opportunity to learn about the architecture put in place to support Blackboard in this Institute, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singapore Polytechnic.

A high turnout was also recorded for the afternoon technical session. Mr Chris Etesse (Director of Consulting, Blackboard, Asia Pacific) and Mr Zach Johnson (Vice-President of Blackboard Consulting, International) addressed questions on the latest and future software developments. Effectively, the participants were treated to advance and unpublished information about the upcoming Blackboard version 7.

Academic Session

For the academic session, the focus was on addressing effective ways in which Blackboard can be used for online teaching and learning. Speaker Mr Paul Gagnon (NTU), shared on how to create short video clips which can be easily incorporated into Blackboard to give short lectures on Blackboard.

Also, Dr Janette Ring from Edith Cowan University gave tips for effective online coaching via Blackboard and shared her experience on lecturing via Blackboard to the Singapore-based NIE Specialist Diploma in e-Learning Instructional Design students while she was based in Perth.

Kranji Primary School principal, Mr Sam Wong, presented the various measures taken by his school to incorporate Blackboard, the challenges faced and the infrastructure the school provided to facilitate the culture of e-learning in the school. The academic sessions wrapped up with a panel discussion with the speakers.

Hands-on Session

Participants who opted for the hands-on sessions benefited from the lively interaction with Ms Melissa Anderson (Senior Pedagogical Advisor, Blackboard) who shared her experience and vast knowledge of Blackboard's Application Pack 3 key features. The workshop participants eagerly tried out the new features such as Adaptive Release, Review Status, Performance Dashboard and Advanced Assessment Questions.



Panel members from Blackboard at the technical session

All in all, the Blackboard User Day was a success as there was something interesting for everyone attending.



Blackboard representatives

Blackboard Rebranding Competition

Nenny Noorman, ACIS

In conjunction with the Southeast Asia Blackboard User Day: 'Extending Possibilities', a Rebranding Competition for NIE's Learning Management System (LMS), Blackboard, was held. The competition was to search for a new name for NIE's Blackboard – a name which would reflect the LMS' vibrant use, user-friendliness and also portray it as a portal full of endless possibilities. The competition was open to all NIE trainee teachers and staff members.

A total of 103 entries was received and the five most outstanding entries were selected after many rounds of judging. Participants for the competition were required to submit a name, a tagline to accompany the name as well as the rationale for the name and tagline that they had given. The five best names and taglines were as follows:

- **geNIEus** – Learning Beyond Walls
Mr Mazlan Hasan, Centre for IT in Education
- **Kaleidoscope** – Bringing Sunshine to You
Ms Angela Chong, Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Secondary)
- **@ccessNIE** – One Click, Infinite Possibilities
Mr Nuriskandar Bin Mohd Kassim, Bachelor in Education
- **Blue Skies** – Soar Higher
Mr Raymond Tan, Natural Sciences and Science Education Academic Group
- **E-HIVE** – Holistic Interactive Virtual Environment
Miss Chan Soo Ping, Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Primary)

Mr Mazlan Hasan, whose entry, geNIEus, won him the top prize, gave the rationale that the name (pronounced "genius") has NIE embedded to show Blackboard as an effective teaching and learning tool that could bring out the genius in us (genieUS). geNIEus is also an extension to our Staff Portal (geNIE).

The winning entries were awarded prizes kindly sponsored by Hewlett-Packard Singapore and Sun Microsystems Pte Ltd. The winners walked away with an IPAQ, an iPod Nano and iPod Shuffles during the prize presentation on the Southeast Asia Blackboard Day. The five outstanding entries will undergo another round of user selection by the management to finalise the name for NIE's Blackboard.

Congratulations to our winners once again!



Mr Mazlan Hasan receiving his prize from Prof Leo Tan, Director, NIE

ACIS Technology Education Programme

Nenny Noorman, ACIS

The Academic Computing and Information Services (ACIS) Division's direction for the next two years is to explore the use of technology to help increase productivity and to improve its functional role of supporting the NIE community. In line with this direction, ACIS has organised various training sessions under its Technology Education Programme.



One of the Outlook training courses conducted by CUS Training Team

The programme comprises two categories of training. The first category is considered functional whereby staff members are taught various topics to help them use ICT more efficiently. The second category of training focuses on academic tools. In this category, students and staff are taught various educational tools to help them to use IT creatively in their teaching and learning.

Some of the courses provided for new staff members are Outlook (Basic), Laptop Orientation (Basic), Common Teaching Facilities

Familiarisation Briefing and sessions on Video Conferencing Facilities. These sessions are aimed at providing new staff with the basic level of information and awareness of the availability of the ICT facilities on campus.

Sessions on Outlook (Advanced), Laptop Orientation (Advanced) and the Staff Portal Awareness Programme are held for all staff members. In addition, familiarisation sessions for WebOPAC and access to e-databases are held by the library. These courses are meant to enhance staff members' knowledge and skills in the use of the respective applications. Familiarisation courses on Wireless@NIE and MyDisk are also conducted. These courses teach staff how to use the campus-wide wireless network.

Specifically catering to academic staff are training sessions on the use of educational technology. Sessions covering topics such as Blackboard, Blackboard Course Management Tool, Centra, PenDALive, Respondus, StudyMate, Impatica for Powerpoint, Learning Director, BrainPop and MS Producer are held regularly.

Do look out for these announcements on GeNIE or through ACIS Helpdesk. Alternatively, enquiries may be sent to ACIS Helpdesk at acishelp@nie.edu.sg.

e-Learning with Authorware

Apurva Lawale, CITE

Authorware is a flowchart style, multimedia authoring tool. It is used to transfer knowledge from subject matter experts to learners and for developing both computer-based training and web-based training packages.

Authorware has its roots in the education field, and is widely used to develop learning objects, learning units and even full-fledged multimedia training packages. It was developed keeping the layman in mind and so is very easy to use once a user understands a few basic things such as the interface and the icons. Authorware provides a wizard to create a complete course if you are not keen on using icons and prefer to create a customised course yourself. With this wizard, a user can easily create various types of interactions such as "Drag and Drop" and "Multiple Choice Questions". These wizards are known as "Knowledge Objects".

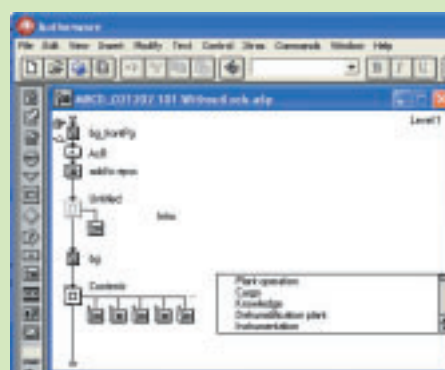
However, there will be times when you will need or want to create something that no wizard can provide, such as simulations or entire customised courses with your own custom graphic designs. The good news is that this can be easily done by dragging and dropping icons onto the Authorware flowline but remember that coding might be needed in the case of simulations. Coding is easy if you already know some scripting or programming languages. Alternatively, it is not difficult to learn Authorware's own scripting language or Javascript - a language most web developers have used to develop interactive web pages.

Other features that make Authorware fun and easy to use are:

- It allows easy importing of Powerpoint presentations such that each Powerpoint screen is converted into an Authorware

screen, enabling you to edit or add/ delete content and make more interactive if you like. No manual importing using 'copy and paste' to Authorware is involved where Powerpoint is concerned.

- It accepts a wide variety of media formats (sound, video, animation and image files and even DVD videos).
- Authorware has many built-in tracking functions and variables which can be easily used for student score tracking. Data can also be collected and fed into standards compliant learning management systems.
- It has tight integration with learning standards such as SCORM (Sharable Content Object Reference Model).
- It provides tools which allow developers to incorporate accessibility features into their products such as self voicing (for the visually impaired), tab navigable features (for the physically impaired) or captioning (for the hearing impaired).



Screenshot of the Authorware 7.0 interface with a sample project open (you can see icons in the flowline)

Introducing Digital NIE Dissertations and Theses Collection @ LIBRIS

Yuyun Wirawati, LIBRIS

The number of NIE dissertations/theses deposited at LIBRIS has almost reached 1,000 titles. These hard copies are only available for consultation within the library premises. As more information resources have become available online, there have been requests to provide electronic access.

To meet the needs of the increasing number of online users, LIBRIS has set up a procedure for electronic submission of dissertations/theses for graduating students in collaboration with Computer Services Centre (CSC) and Graduate Programmes and Research (GPR) Office. LIBRIS has also started digitising dissertations/theses deposited in the previous years.

Some advantages of the digital collection are:

1. Provides 24/7 access
2. Facilitates browsing and searching
3. Allows launching of hypertext links and files (e.g. files

containing interactive elements/multimedia/virtual reality/raw data) from within the dissertations/theses

4. Allows tracking of access to the collection
5. Saves on storage space and maintenance

Currently, there are about 400 titles in this collection. The digital access (read-only) is available to NIE/NTU staff and students only.

Steps to access the digital collection:

1. Connect to <http://opac.nie.edu.sg>
2. Login using your user ID and PIN
3. Click on 'Digital Media Archive'
4. Browse the collection or do a search via the 'Complex Metadata Searching' page

Do explore this new collection! Feel free to send your comments or feedback to libref@nie.edu.sg.

ICT Invasion at Fuhua Primary!

Nenny Noorman, ACIS

On 12 August 2005, a group of academic and research staff visited Fuhua Primary School to learn more about its implementation of Information & Communications Technology (ICT) in its lessons. They found that the strength of the school's ICT background stems from its principle of exploring technology for educational gains.

ICT is applied in lessons in various forms :

Multiple Choice Quiz

Classroom Performance System (CPS) was used to conduct a multiple-choice quiz. Instead of putting up their hands or shouting out their answers, the students used the remote controls to enter their answers. With the CPS, even the most shy or quiet student in class could participate in the open quiz.

Learning Chinese Language

Students had to form sentences with the new words which they had learnt by typing in the hanyu pinyin spelling. The software automatically writes the Chinese characters for the students. Students were able to use the words learnt without being penalised for the inability to write the characters.

Learning English Language

Students searched for information on national costumes on specific websites and presented the findings on PowerPoint slides. The students learned how to do research on the Internet and at the same time improved their skills in preparing presentation materials.

Dataloggers in Science Experiment



Tabulating experiment results made easy with dataloggers

Results of the experiment were tabulated and graphs were automatically produced using dataloggers. The technology-assisted lesson enabled students to focus on the objective of the lesson and not be hampered by their lack of ability to draw graphs or organise the results into a neat table.

The staff members who visited the school found the visit beneficial to them. Mr Ng Foo Keong, Research Associate from the Learning Sciences Laboratory (LSL) said, "I got to see educational IT in action and to meet IT implementors who have 'fire in their belly'."

Mr David Huang, LSL Project Manager, added that the visit "helped us to understand Singapore school practices, and to see how teachers translated the constructivism theories into their daily pedagogical practices in the classrooms. It also helped us to establish good relationship with schools, and enabled us to identify committed schools as LSL research partners. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Academic Computing and Information Services (ACIS) for this wonderful visit and look forward to working with ACIS and leveraging on each other's strengths in the future".

New and Improved GeNIE

Staff Portal Team, ACIS

Enhancements were made recently to the Staff Portal, GeNIE. Besides having the e-services reorganised into categories, a new informative portlet has been introduced. In addition, plans are in the pipeline to enable staff to personalise the Staff Portal interface by using a new themes "palette".

Reclassification of E-services

The e-services have been reclassified into categories so that staff can find the right e-service link with ease. Previously, staff had to search through a long list of e-services to find the application that they wanted to use. With the reorganisation, the e-services are now arranged into more user-friendly categories. Staff may be glad to know that a similar reclassification is currently being planned for the forms.

'Do You Know?' Portlet

Upon logging on to GeNIE, staff will be greeted by the 'Do You Know?' portlet on the left-hand side of the home page. The portlet injects a lighter side to the otherwise serious home page. The contents of the portlet are changed once a week. Staff are most welcome to contribute contents for this portlet and may do so via

the feedback form on GeNIE.

Customisation Feature

For the aesthetically-inclined staff who find the current portal colour schemes and themes boring, good news is on the way! With assistance from the Centre for IT in Education's (CITE) graphic artist, the Staff Portal team was able to come up with a more colourful and vibrant themes palette for staff to choose from. This customisation feature will be in place in the near future!

What to Expect

With the enhancements, the new GeNIE is now packed with more information and has a more user-friendly interface. Staff can expect more improvements to GeNIE as the Staff Portal team continues to strive to meet staff needs and demands.

Look out for useful information on the 'Do You Know?' Portlet



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