Web2Gether
An Online Community for Parents and Teachers

Challenges

Software applications can have a profound impact in the life and learning of students with disabilities. However, if not adequately integrated into their everyday life and learning activities, the benefit of these technologies will not be fully realized. *There has been great technological development, but little impact in the actual special education practices.*

One major challenge is the lack of adequate mechanisms to support for teacher and caregivers professional development. Support for an effective use of technology should foster a long-term, interactive and participative learning experience.

That is, it has to foster and support communities of practice among caregivers, so that they can receive adequate support whenever necessary, and at the same time be able to help others.

Research Approach

Field-research:

. Better understand special education environment and work practices

. Better understand the role of technology to support special education activities – technology as assistive technologies

. Better understand the use of technology to support the work practices of special education teachers, i.e. for their learning and training activities

Technological Support:

. To Design, develop and deploy **Web2gether**, an collaborative and evolving web-based technology

. Web2gether lays on a new conceptual design approach, *designing for empathy*, that focuses primarily on supporting the interaction among members of a community, rather than solely on information management.

. Web2gether is a web-environment in which caregivers can find and share resources to help in educational activities, exchange stories and life-experiences with people who face similar challenges and concerns, and become aware of others with whom they can establish and strength their personal social network

. Web2gether implements a dynamic and interactive interface that attempts to foster empathic experiences among users of the system to create awareness of the activities of others on the site

. Web2gether technology is based on new concepts, such as, recommender systems, social & collaborative filtering and user modeling, and on standard web technologies, such as, Java-Servlets, J2EE, Weblogic, and Flash.