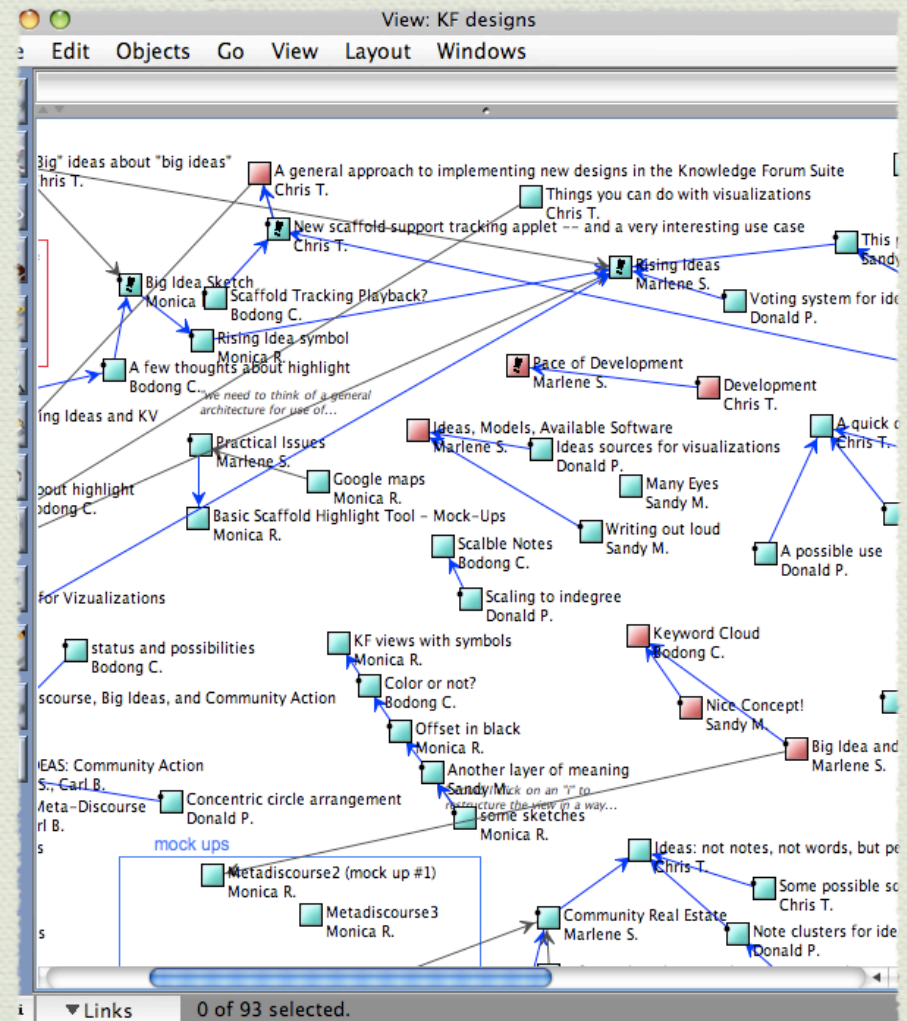# The Recommend Button: Identifying Key Ideas in a KBC

*Jim Hewitt and Clare Brett, IKIT Summer Institute 2010.*

# Motivation

- Good ideas are easily lost in busy Views

- The problem seems equally challenging in both graphical views (see adjacent figure) and text-based representations of discussion threads.

# The Problem:

- All notes are visibly similar in a View;

- Views can easily contain dozens, or even hundreds of notes;

- Even when a student discovers a note that contains a promising idea, there is no easy way to draw the community's attention to that note.

- Consequently, valuable ideas can be easily lost or overlooked in the complex web of online messages.

**Research Objective**:
To experiment with a new software feature for identifying, and calling attention to, important ideas.

# Experimental Feature

- The experimental feature we developed is called the Recommend Button (a work in progress).

- Inspired by the "Like" button in social networking programs, such as Facebook.

- We chose "Recommend" rather than "Like" --> Recommend that others read the contents of this note.

- The Recommend Button was tested in an experimental environment called "Pepper" in two graduate online courses.

# Wikis - Learning Goals and Self-Assessment ☆

by Jessica Kerry, replying to QUESTION ONE.

Last saved: Today, 9:17 PM, Note #1937

For me, the participatory and collaborative process of wikis are the most important learning goals so assessment would accordingly focus on providing students with feedback. This feedback would relate to the kinds of strategies students should use (or continue to use) to help them better negotiate with others, extend and modify others' ideas constructively, and respect the voices of others.

4 people recommend this note. 👍 Recommend

# Wikis - Le[...]
## Self-Asse[...]
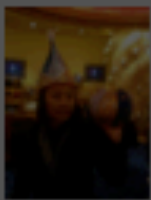
by Jessica[...]

Last saved[...]

Note List | Prev [...] | [...]e | Info

For me, the part[...] the most important learni[...] on providing students with fee[...]s of strategies studer[...] better negotiate with o[...]tively, and respect the voice[...]

Recommend

---

## People who recommend this note: ❌


**Peggy Donohue**


**Fatima Remtulla**


**Jacki Watson**


**Earl Woodruff**

**Wikis - Learning Goals and Self-Assessment** by Jessica Kerry, #1937, Today, 9:17 PM 👍

**A fine balance** by Christina Weinkauf, #1957, Sun March 28, 2010, 11:29 AM 👍

    **Perhaps grading is just secondary?** by Jessica Kerry, #1961, Sun March 28, 2010, 1:40 PM 👍

**wikis in 1602** by Peggy Donohue, #1982, Sun March 28, 2010, 10:42 PM 👍

    **roles are important!** by Melissa Miller, #2018, Mon March 29, 2010, 12:10 PM

        **value of role-play** by Marla Zupan, #2026, Mon March 29, 2010, 2:02 PM

            **and shyness** by Melissa Miller, #2059, Tue March 30, 2010, 12:06 PM 👍

                **Hi Melissa, I'd respond to you but...** by Marla Zupan, #2077, Tue March 30, 2010, 7:36 PM

                **Reluctant Students (Research Based)** 📎 by Jacki Watson, #2085, Tue March 30, 2010, 7:48 PM 👍

    **Literature Circles** by Jacki Watson, #2040, Mon March 29, 2010, 8:07 PM

        **Literature circle rant!** by Marla Zupan, #2044, Mon March 29, 2010, 8:55 PM

            **Don't Give up!** by Dennis Zions, #2049, Mon March 29, 2010, 9:49 PM

                **Agree** by Jacki Watson, #2078, Tue March 30, 2010, 7:37 PM

# Recommend Button Restrictions

- 1. An individual can only recommend a particular note once.

- 2. People cannot recommend their own notes.

- 3. Notes written by an instructor cannot be recommended.

# Research Questions

- 1.  What is the students' experience of using the Recommend Button?  What do they like, and not like, about the process of recommending notes?

- 2.  Do Recommended notes receive more community attention than non-Recommended notes?

# Data Source

- Data were collected from two graduate courses taught in Jan-Apr 2010. The following data sources were used:

  - 1. Log file data that maintained time-stamped records of each student's actions. These data were examined to determine whether students were spending more time examining recommended notes than other notes.

  - 2. Student focus groups served as a second source of data. The focus group meetings were digitally videotaped and transcribed.

# Q1. What is the students' experience of using the Recommend Button?

- Students felt it helped them more easily identify valuable ideas;

- Enjoyed having their notes recommended because they felt it validated their ideas;

- This, in turn, made them feel closer to the classmates who recommended them;

- Overall, students spoke more about the value of the tool for building community than as a tool for building knowledge.

# Q1. What is the students' experience of using the Recommend Button?

- **However**: A few students reported they were reluctant to use this facility. They said they felt wary about recommending other people's notes, since a percentage of their final course grade was based on class participation. They were concerned that their participation mark would be determined, in part, through a qualitative and quantitative comparison of students' notes. Consequently, it was not to their advantage to use "Recommend" to promote other people's ideas.

# Q2. Do Recommended notes receive more community attention than non-Recommended notes?

**Yes. Recommended Notes were opened more frequently than Non-Recommended Notes.**

Table 5

**Average Number of Note-Open Events in Course #1 and #2.**

|  | Non-Recommended Notes | Recommended Notes |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |
| Course #1 (n=20) | 12.92 (sd 7.33) | 16.10 (sd 7.69) |
| Course #2 (n=15) | 11.33 (sd 6.24) | 15.16 (sd 6.47) |
|  |  |  |

# One possibly disturbing finding...

- In Course #1, there was no obvious relationship between giving and receiving Recommendations (r=0.12). However, in Course #2, a positive correlation was found (r=0.60), suggesting that people who gave a lot of recommendations tended to receive a lot of recommendations.

- Question: Does reciprocity play a role in students' decisions to recommend notes?

- Or is the case that serious knowledge builders are more likely to both give and receive recommendations?

# Conclusions

- The Recommend button appears to be successful in terms of focusing greater learner attention on particular notes.

- However, it's not clear that Recommend is being used to tease out the most promising ideas so that they can be further improved. Rather students identify promising ideas, but don't seem to continue to work on those ideas.

- Student concerns about course grades may be preventing the tool from realizing its full potential.

# Next Steps

- In the next iteration of this study we would like to understand more about their reasoning when marking a note as "Recommended" —what are the elements of value they perceive in their peers' contributions?

- How can we move students toward working to improve the promising ideas, once these ideas are identified?