



Squeakland Inc.
www.squeakland.org
610.797.3100

Transition Thoughts

Throughout the world, teachers and parents are frustrated with the task of teaching. Whether their focus is on test scores or "learning learning," they're looking for ways to engage children. They're looking for Etoys.

Our current community hardly needs convincing. We've seen the transformations. We've seen average students become exceptional students. We've seen teachers and children having more fun while tackling otherwise difficult subjects like math and science. We've seen the vision of Papert and Kay manifest as one oasis after another: California, Cambridge, Illinois, Germany, Japan, Korea, Brazil, Nepal, Columbia, the Caribbean. We've seen it work.

Much more is possible. Having had "the talk" with hundreds over the last two years on behalf of Waveplace, I'm quite certain: Etoys is ready to really take off. With interest in low-cost laptops at an all time high, with frustration over "teach to the test" reaching a peak, with social networks and online video transplanting the voice of traditional media, now is the time to craft and communicate our answer to the most important question an adult can ask: how can we best prepare our children for a future we can't yet imagine?

Etoys is a tool that can help take our children into that future, but it won't reach the world if only pockets of people use it. To attract more people, we need to do a better job bragging about Etoys. We need to make the magic easier to see.

United States
1838 Alder Lane
Bethlehem PA 18015

Europe
Potsdamer Str. 3A
Magdeburg, Germany

We've taken steps towards this goal with the new website and new Etoys. These both help answer the essential questions: "what's it about?," "why should I care?," and "how do I start?" More work is needed on the showcase to better represent the breadth of Etoys and its community. Better introductory videos and projects should be made. A new textbook should be written to fill the void left by the loss of the "Powerful Ideas" book.

Etoys itself can also be improved to make it easier to explore and learn. For the most part, it takes a "true believer" to overcome the initial stumbling blocks so they can champion its use. A colleague once described Etoys as being "high entry, high ceiling" whereas Scratch was "low entry, low ceiling." There are several specific software improvements that can make Etoys more "low entry." Simple things like colored tiles and layering complexity (e.g. the "geometry" category) will go a long way in attracting less technical users.

Making the magic easier to see will also help greatly with Squeakland's newest top priority: finding funds. We need to be self-sufficient by 2010. This means we need to be a business: publicity, sales, development, support. While Squeakland will stay non-profit, we'll have to "sing for our supper," which necessarily means a different approach, a mixing of cultures. Finding the balance between a business-suit mindset and a volunteer mindset will be tricky. Attitudes abound. We need to remain inclusive, thoughtful, and respectful. The suits should be told, "don't kill the magic," and the volunteers, "we need money too."

These three tasks create the foundation: simplifying our message, lowering barriers to entry, building the business. We can then get on with our core mission: community outreach. Squeakland's chief job is spreading seeds throughout the world, encouraging classroom use and content creation. We'll be a resource for intrepid explorers, a hub that connects community. Within the bounds of time and funding, we'll do all we can to encourage Etoys everywhere.