ALT-C 1st draft (unedited)

Title: Benefits and challenges of mainstreaming grass roots innovation in open educational practice

Theme: Mainstreaming

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Abstract

This paper will draw on the university of the arts London (UAL's) perspectives and processes of developing process.arts <http://process.arts.ac.uk/> a grass roots web2.0 open educational environment for sharing day-to-day arts practice and research of staff and students into an official institution service. Through its ‘communities of practice’ strategy the UAL acknowledges that innovation, new ideas and approaches tend to emerge from grass roots activity. Experience has shown that collaboration emerges from shared interests and purpose and that it is unlikely to be successful if imposed from above. This paper presents the rational for ‘mainstreaming’ process.arts

This early exemplar case study explores the benefits and challenges of mainstreaming an independently developed and supported platform for ‘open educational practice’ into institutionally supported one. The key challenge for UAL and the project team in this transitional process is how best to retain, develop and support the unique and fundamental elements that define this popular open participatory hybrid educational-social space.

Background

Chris Follows initially developed Process.arts in 2008 with the support of UALs Centre for Learning and teaching in art and design (CLTAD). Chris was awarded a secondment and fellowship to develop his ideas for creating an open educational web environment for arts staff and students to share and cluster rich media content and resources. Process.arts has since maintained its own sustainable and independent system of development, through agile experimentation, small project support, voluntary support, stewardship and an open university SCORE fellowship project.

Since 2010 UAL has been involved in JISC funded UK programme. The Arts Learning and teaching (ALTO) project at UAL helped raise awareness of open educational resources OERs and helped clarify institutional perspectives and processes in terms of its open educational agenda. In November 2011 open educational practice gained further support through the DIAL project (Digital Integration into Arts Learning) a two-year JISC funded digital literacies (DL) at UAL which aims to address cultural change by developing confidence and capability in the adoption and integration of digitally enhanced learning for staff and students.

Approach & Result

In 2012 the UAL began the process of rebuilding its VLE framework, process.arts was identified by CLTAD as a valuable resource that could fit into its new portfolio of tools, its due to be officially introduced as a ‘service’ in September 2012. In order to achieve this status the current site needs to be ‘mainstreamed’ into a ‘manageable’ service, to do this we first have to identify what it is or its not. Like many web2.0 environments used for education, process.arts can’t be described as a repository or a VLE. What makes process.arts different from other web2.0 environments is that this has been developed in-house/college, its not a commercial space, therefore its provides a new alternative VLE environment, one that encourages and supports rich media experimentation and informal learning, a welcome alternative to commercial alternatives. Courses are not represented in process.arts, meta data links user generated pieces of openly licensed text, image, video and audio content together through individual profiles and subject specific interest groups.

The project team is in the process of integrating the current informal agile development approach into a more formal in-house system, the team are addressing outstanding bugs, monitoring user interface changes and identifying outstanding functionality, whilst also working closely on defining exactly what’s required to make process.arts an institutional service. Primarily a service provides a firm foundation for long term stability, support and growth although it will lose its overall agile spontaneity but aims to retain its overall grass roots participatory feel.

Conclusion

Process.arts currently provides a new ‘open learning’ space that straddles the institution/educational (formal learning) environment and the social (informal learning) environment therefore allowing a ‘experimental’ space for open educational practitioners to maybe develop and define a new language for open edu-social practice without conforming or being influenced by pre-existing academic structures and processes. The transition of process.arts into an official UAL service will tests this model and question how institutions successfully support and develop autonomous and independent grassroots innovation without creating an homogenising effect on this innovation?