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SAT: An Open space: A prototype to stimulate and capture the scholarly activity for FE practitioners delivering HE in FE centres (Anita Houghton)

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[Anita Houghton](#)
10 January 2016

Short Abstract

Research is often seen as the ultimate aim of the scholar, Boyer (1990). Universities pride themselves in leading the way in the field of research, the forerunners of innovation and discovery. In the UK, there are several types of organisations which deliver Higher Education. These comprise Universities (including the prestigious Russell Group), training providers delivering Higher Apprenticeship and also Higher Education (HE) Centres based in Further Education (FE) colleges.

HE Centres within FE colleges serve a different purpose than traditional Universities. They are often responsive to local labour demands, specialise in technical and flexible part time programmes and increase participation in Higher Education, (Association of Colleges (AOC) 2015). Fostered from these differences are cultural differences. HE centres are born out of the FE (teaching) culture and not the HE (research) culture.

The AOC (2015) in response to addressing these differences are overseeing a Scholarship Project aiming over the next three years of building a framework to support staff in HE centres become more scholarly. The project proposal outlines Boyer's (1990) four areas of scholarly activity, namely, discovery (research), integration, application and teaching.

The Education sector is facing a considerable amount of change. FE colleges are undergoing area reviews which could lead to college mergers, (Dept for Business Innovation and Skills 2015). Becoming more research focused and firmly establishing themselves in HE is strategically desirable as HE taps into different funding streams. Within Universities there are proposals for a teaching excellence framework to focus on the teaching within Universities, (Times Higher Education 2015). The result of these developments may result in FE becoming more research focussed and HE becoming more teaching focused.

The development of digital technologies is also driving change within education. There are an

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increasing number of tools available which can deliver and promote learning in innovative ways. Jisc (2015) and The Russell Group (2015) both discuss open access policies which encourage data sets to be published. Digital technologies have enabled data sets to be available quickly in a global arena. Jisc (2015) state that the open access policy will promote innovation and economic growth.

Perhaps now marks a new era of education, traditional organisational culture is blurring and technology is driving openness. It is with these drivers in mind that I aim to deliver a resource that can stimulate and capture any type of scholarly activity.

Open Space is a platform which can be built by any practitioner regardless of institution, using free web based tools. It will engage practitioners in digital and open practices which mirrors the era that students are now learning in. The prototype will include an area to create an individual online library, use networking tools to keep up to date in their field and an area for reflective blogging and collaboration. Using these tools will not only stimulate but capture scholarly activity irrespective of institutional culture – current or future.

The presentation will be an overview of how these tools are combined within one platform to engage individuals without institutional boundaries. It will show examples of activity which can be captured to demonstrate all the four types of scholarly activity.

References

See academic reference section

Acknowledgement

Thank you Simon Ball for the valuable feedback.

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[Nicki Berry](#)

11:45am 16 January 2016 [Permalink](#)

I love the idea of bringing some of the HE principles into FE contexts, especially for those that deliver HE as part of their offer. I think FE and HE institutions could learn a lot from each other in terms of scholarly activity and employability.

I'm enjoying seeing your project evolve but there is one thing that I'm not quite clear about...

Are you planning to use Open Space as an area where other practitioners can contribute (maybe with a login area) or is it a resource to inspire others to create their own similar resources?



[John Baglow](#)

6:29pm 16 January 2016 [Permalink](#)

Anita, I work in F.E., though not at H.E. level any more.

Your poster explains your purpose clearly; if I understand correctly, you want to explore the creation of a platform where HE students in F.E. can "stimulate and capture scholarly activity". That would certainly be in keeping with recent digital and pedagogical developments. A couple of questions:

- ▶ would it be a forum for collaboration and peer learning, rather like OpenStudio?
- ▶ would students upload work to be reviewed by peers and assessed by tutors?
- ▶ how would it differ from a VLE such as Blackboard?
- ▶ do you imply that students would share their site with students outside their own course and institution? That would certainly be in the spirit of Weller's "open state of mind". My tutor, Dave, has asked me in relation to my own topic of collaborative activity and sharing of materials and opinions whether this would require a change of culture in F.E. Perhaps that would be worth considering as an issue



[Anita Houghton](#)

12:14pm 17 January 2016 [Permalink](#)

Hi John, Nicki

Thank you for your questions.

The platform is intended for the students but for the tutors/lecturers. The issue being that HE centres based in FE usually tap into the same staff as FE where the focus is more on teaching than research. I agree Nicki both institutions could potentially learn lots from each other.

It is a resource which is aimed at inspiring others to create their own similar resource.

Items can be linked together using google docs so several people may have a link on their page to joint projects.

Yes would like an area for collaboration. However, not sure how best to do this at the moment. I'm trying to keep the site as simple as possible so my first thought is a google doc as this can be linked to specific people who are involved in the collaboration.

If anybody knows a forum based free web tool – this would be great.

Below should give you more indication of my current direction of travel. (although this is bare bones at the moment)

<https://anitajhoughton.wordpress.com/>

As the outcomes to the site involves reflective blogs, there is a comment option. However, how these are encouraged, monitored and by who – I'm not sure yet so would be useful to know your thoughts as this touches on your work in the collaborative area.

It wouldn't be a platform which his tied to a course specifically or a set piece of learning. More like an evolving CPD record which demonstrated scholarly activity. So a different purpose to a VLE.

Yes the site would be in the open, I believe for maximum impact. Part of the challenge is recognising that there is more to scholarly activity than publishing research papers (this is in no way an attempt to question the value of this practice). In a vocational context scholarly activity is about keeping up to date in ones field and adjusting practice accordingly (going back to Boyer's four areas of scholarship). Part of this is using twitter and online tools to connect with people – so openness is key.

I totally agree that the culture in many (not all) FE institutions in respect of sharing materials may be an issue. This is in part why I wanted a platform independent of an institution. It travels with the person not the organisation. And personally I'm great believer that the more you put into something the more you get out of it (not sure of the technical for this).

Thanks again for taking time to read and the questions.



[Elaine Dalloway](#)

12:46pm 17 January 2016 [Permalink](#)

Hi Anita

This might be of interest for a future iteration of your project:

[Moodle Launches MoodleCloud – Free Hosting for Educators](#)

It's a great tool which can be customised to your needs and incorporates blog areas (which can be public or shared), forums, chat, surveys, etc.,

Looking forward to your presentation.

Elaine



[John Baglow](#)

9:46am 21 January 2016 [Permalink](#)

Hello Anita, thanks for your clarification. I now understand that you are aiming to set up a forum for teachers of HE in FE. This is a really useful idea. I have often wondered how I could do something similar for ITE teachers in F.E., such as myself. I wonder if the issue is not so much what platform you use but how you publicise it and attract people to it. I have dabbled with Facebook groups in the past, but people now seem to think that FB is more the preserve of private, non work-based contact. I have also tried a Google+ community, but that remained a rather closed, restricted group.



[Chris Gray](#)

8:22pm 21 January 2016 [Permalink](#)

FE is harder hit by cuts and more prone to constant change than HE (I'm sure there's some who would disagree), so a space to help "stimulate and capture ... scholarly activity" would be a great resource.

From your abstract I understand your open platform to be more informal than formal, i.e. it isn't managed in the way an institutions learning platform would be managed. I think this would be more receptive to users, plus also you would have the flexibility to integrate Web 2.0 tools as you see fit.

I would suggest that if you are to develop the concept a lot further then having the platform on a paid host will give you a lot more control than free hosting (I currently use 1 and 1, but there are many to choose from.

You could also link between hosts if you wanted, for example, as Elaine mentions about Moodle Cloud, that could be a separate platform to your host but it would appear integrated as you would have a hyperlink between them.

I use the Simple Machines Forum <http://www.simplerachines.org/> on my platform, but there are others you could use.



[Laila Burton](#)

8:13pm 26 January 2016 [Permalink](#)

Hi Anita

This is a really interesting abstract. I was aware that pedagogy was increasingly a priority for HE, but I hadn't realised that FE was focusing on research.

I attended a Jisc webinar recently on technology for employability that gave participants from FE and HE to share practice. Some from the FE sector are using Kloodle (<https://pages.kloodle.com/>) and others seemed keen to find out more about its use. It's a social networking tool that brings together employers, students and staff, and can be used by education providers to help students articulate their employability skills.

In terms of collaboration tools, some colleagues at our University use WordPress for

student collaboration. I see you're already using it, so perhaps that could be used.

I look forward to the session!

Laila



[Dr Carol Waites](#)

4:44pm 29 January 2016 [Permalink](#)

Hi Anita - now that I have looked at your website and seen these comments, I also wondered if your platform couldn't be used as a peer assistance one for people undertaking scholarly activity. This could be the best way for them to test out their ideas before trying to present or publish.

I like the way you have conceived it as a take along with them rather than an institutional one. The blog aspect is a good idea. I am also having similar concerns as you about how to manage a blog or how to get a forum going to make it more interactive. If anyone has an idea, please let us know! So far, I am hoping people may be able to leave comments at least on the blog part, but I see I haven't got comments boxes yet - put it on my to do list.

<http://professionalwritingtips.weebly.com/blog>

I am nervous about paying for a website when I am unsure of its longevity or whether it will be successful. There is a burst of enthusiasm at the moment - let's hope it lasts.

The kloodle site seemed interesting. How can you find out what other FE colleges are using as Laila says they are already collaborating on it.

How can you spread the word about your venture and get some guinea pigs on board to test it out? You need the actual future users to test it out and give you feedback. Have you sent them the google form? Perhaps they can subscribe to a list for updates or to give you ongoing feedback. I have people emailing me everyday at the moment! Hard to manage but I guess it'll settle down.

Looking forward to the presentation. Carol



[Anita Houghton](#)

11:10am 3 February 2016 (Edited 11:41am 3 February 2016) [Permalink](#)

Thanks John

That is the question – how to publicise it. Several thoughts

- Asking for feedback – I have tried this, received some useful feedback
- Further developments – take the project to a different direction, conduct a study in different contexts.
- Work collaboratively through it – this springboards on everybody else's connections.

Thanks for the forum link Chris. I will check this out. I am coming to the conclusion that

there is more functionality/control with paid hosts, however, still want to make the point that it is quick and simple (and free) to build.

Hi Liala – Kloodle looks interesting something to explore at a later date.

Technology for employability is an interesting one. A couple of years ago we tested out a section of classroom provision using e-portfolios to track their work – it wasn't used as full package. At the time some asked what was the point as the adults concerned came into college once a week in a traditional classroom setting. There were several instances of candidates popping into their library in between sessions to send messages and look at their progress. For some of these learners who had never been in a library or didn't have access to a computer at home they gained independence and developed digital skills. One leap forward on the path to employment.

Thanks Carol - Lots of food for thought as always. Spreading the word seems to be the issue. I hadn't considered the subscribing option. On reflection it goes back to the intended audience – who is the site aimed at? It's a record of activity and area for collaboration. So the question of who needs to see it is - who needs to see scholarly activity? and who is collaborating with you?

Elaine - I have started to investigate the moodle cloud for another project. From what I have done so far it requires username and passwords set up etc and permissions to view various parts and enrolment on courses etc. I think it probably has more functionality but also requires a greater deal of administration but I'll definitely continue with this for another project.



[Maxine Armstrong](#)

9:10am 9 February 2016 [Permalink](#)

Hi Anita,

I think your project is very interesting. I have been in HE long enough now to see the balance between teaching and research shift and forth. But I agree with you that there are many drivers for change in both FE and HE at the moment and I can see the balance shifting repeatedly.

I have got a few questions, my apologies if you have covered these elsewhere, if so could you direct me there.

I have taken a look at your Open Space and like the clean interface, which appears very accessible. However I am not quite sure how an individual practitioner would use it. Is it your intention that each practitioner builds their own WordPress website? If so, how will that be achieved? If practitioners are creating their own sites, is there a danger that the collaborative side gets lost as everyone starts to develop their own personalised learning environment (PLE)?

You mention the four scholarly activities, how do they align with the tools you have selected (WordPress, Twitter, Diigo and GoogleDocs)? (By the way I like your choice of tools; they are ones I often use.)

Do you think the four scholarly activities (discovery, integration, application and teaching)

need different methods to capture them? I can see them listed in the CPD log, but is there a means to tag them so that each activity can be looked at individually? Do you think this would be a benefit or is it more helpful to have a chronological list to demonstrate development?

You were asking about a forum based free web tool – I believe there is a WordPress plug-in called **bbPress**. Not used it myself so I cannot say how good it is.

I am looking forward to your presentation on Saturday.

Best wishes, Maxine



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

10:36am 14 February 2016 [Permalink](#)

Hi Anita

Here is a summary of the questions/comments from your presentation - please respond as you wish:

- ▶ My understanding is that FEs are offering more and more HE. I recently learned that my local FE offers some MA-level courses. But if offering MAs, then need to have research active staff even more important.
- ▶ Difficult to get a course validated by universities now.
- ▶ I wonder if the part-time student numbers in FE have seen the same decline as they have in HE.
- ▶ With the new TEF coming through University will be in similar boat to external assessment. Although - you are right course autonomy is key point of difference
- ▶ Will this be a new route for utilising (validated?) MOOCs...
- ▶ My HE institution has partnerships college so that students start in FE then articulate into SCQF (Scottish) levels 8 and 9 (2nd/3rd years).
- ▶ My last institution was mainly offering MBAs and the time of the academics was almost entirely taken up with teaching. Very little research - just text book writing. I think it's really important that academics have some time to pursue their research interests. It raises profile and status of institution.
- ▶ Have you tested the site on any guinea pigs yet?
- ▶ Some FE lecturers find it very difficult to transition to teaching HE.
- ▶ Effective use of Google docs -well done. Really interesting to see how you've used Google Docs. I had two questions (sorry, cheeky I know!) How much time did it take to set it up? Also, how accessible are Google Docs. I was told by a colleague there were accessibility issues.
- ▶ Digital Scholarship can extend 'traditional scholarship' by greater impact and reach. This presentation shows an excellent blending of tool affordances to get the best out of the suite of them.
- ▶ Do you think colleagues will better recognise their reflective activities as 'scholarly' when then use this?
- ▶ someone mentioned to me the other day that they thought the distinction between research and teaching is that in research we invent its implementation in teaching is where real innovation occurs.
- ▶ Open Space has a Bright Future

- ▶ Excellent! Are you using a hosted Wordpress site or you own hosted Wordpress installation?
- ▶ It would be good if HEA and ALT would look at PLNs for accreditation rather than always to format into their bespoke formats.



[Anita Houghton](#)

9:20am 20 February 2016 [Permalink](#)

Hi all

Thank you for the host of comments and questions. I have attempted to answer these below.

- ▶ My understanding is that FEs are offering more and more HE. I recently learned that my local FE offers some MA-level courses. But if offering MAs, then need to have research active staff even more important.

I'm not sure of the balance between undergraduate and MA courses delivered in college based HE centres.

In relation to practitioners, what tends to happen due to practically is staff sometimes drift from FE to HE. Currently I am assessing on NVQ programmes at level 2, level 3, level 4 and level 5. There are huge differences in expectations for my level 2 learners compared to my level 5 learners. Unfortunately, my level 2 learners probably are stretched far more than other learners whose tutors assessors don't deliver at level 5. I think as tutors/ assessors we all have our preferred level of student so having the right staff for the level of course is essential.

- ▶ Difficult to get a course validated by universities now.

I'm not sure of the process re this but know some colleges are pursuing foundation degree awarding powers to start offering their own qualifications.

- ▶ I wonder if the part-time student numbers in FE have seen the same decline as they have in HE.

I believe so however, have no hard facts or figures regarding this.

- ▶ With the new TEF coming through University will be in similar boat to external assessment. Although - you are right course autonomy is key point of difference

Measuring teaching quality (in my view) is not always beneficial. When teaching becomes about the teachers grade and not about the learner the emphasis on the wrong thing

Also as somebody who used to grade sessions (I hated it!) sometimes organisations can become obsessed with grades and grade profiles – to the detriment of common sense.

These are only my experiences of FE and I am aware that there are a lot of differing views re the proposed TEF within HE

Below is an interesting article related to this.

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/damage-controller-or-perfection-seeker-it-may-all-come-down-training>

- ▶ Will this be a new route for utilising (validated?) MOOCs...

Possibly.

- ▶ My HE institution has partnerships college so that students start in FE then articulate into SCQF (Scottish) levels 8 and 9 (2nd/3rd years).

I think this is a good way to widen participation in HE.

- ▶ My last institution was mainly offering MBAs and the time of the academics was almost entirely taken up with teaching. Very little research - just text book writing. I think it's really important that academics have some time to pursue their research interests. It raises profile and status of institution.

I totally agree, however, this project has really made me think about how useful research is in some areas in relation to what impact it has on the learners. I think some subjects lend themselves to practical research better than others. I have found that on the Management programmes the old theories are still highly relevant, however, new areas are coming into play such as remote working and my favourite phrase 'managing via email' which could probably benefit from research.

- ▶ Have you tested the site on any guinea pigs yet?

No, but hope to.

- ▶ Some FE lecturers find it very difficult to transition to teaching HE.

I totally agree and many academic tutors find it difficult to assess competence in the workplace. I recruited a team of approx 10 tutors and assessors over a three year period for a Higher Apprenticeship programme in Management – people either excelled at delivering the theory or the vocational. I think there were only two out of the 10 who excelled at both. There are many different skills.

- ▶ Effective use of Google docs -well done. Really interesting to see how you've used Google Docs. I had two questions (sorry, cheeky I know!) How much time did it take to set it up? Also, how accessible are Google Docs. I was told by a colleague there were accessibility issues.

I think the site could be replicated in a few hours –I am hoping to provide instructions. Google docs is still quite new to me and I am hoping to test it out more.

- ▶ Digital Scholarship can extend 'traditional scholarship' by greater impact and reach.

Absolutely.

This presentation shows an excellent blending of tool affordances to get the best out of the suite of them.

- ▶ Do you think colleagues will better recognise their reflective activities as 'scholarly' when then use this?

I am hoping so.

- ▶ someone mentioned to me the other day that they thought the distinction between research and teaching is that in research we invent its implementation in teaching is where real innovation occurs.

I posted thoughts in 'reflections on innovation' above which touches on this - I agree. All the research in the world would be a waste of time without the skills to integrate, apply and teach. And the process of doing any of these three may lead to more innovation.

- ▶ Open Space has a Bright Future

Thank you.

- ▶ Excellent! Are you using a hosted Wordpress site or you own hosted Wordpress installation?

Hosted, although some of the features are limited. I was aiming for freeweb based tools and as simple as possible.

- ▶ It would be good if HEA and ALT would look at PLNs for accreditation rather having always to format into their bespoke formats.

Not something I know too much about but this seems like a good suggestion.

Once again thank you to everybody who has made suggestions and comments, you have certainly given me plenty of food for thought.



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

9:05am 23 February 2016 [Permalink](#)

Many Congratulations Anita! Your presentation has been voted by delegates to be one of the most effective of the H818 Online Conference 2016 and you are officially one of our H818 Presentation Star Open Badge Winners! Please see how to Apply for your Badge here: <http://cloudworks.ac.uk/badge/view/33>

Well done!

Simon

H818 Conference Organiser



[Anita Houghton](#)

10:20am 23 February 2016 [Permalink](#)

Thank you to everybody - I'm a bit lost for words!

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