Open Research Online

THU: Knowledge is social: learning in an open online, global community of practice (Siobhan Duvigneau)

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Dr Simon Ball
4 February 2014

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This paper presents a case study of an open, online distributed learning event on 'Chat literacy' (Eldis Communities: http://community.eldis.org/chatliteracy/) which aimed to 'broaden the conceptions of information literacy (IL) through open dialogue and exchange with experts and practitioners' in the field of IL and knowledge management. Focusing primarily on the theme of 'innovation', this case study will explore 'how to use a social constructivist approach to design an open, online discussion to innovate the information literacy practices of practitioners based in the global south (i.e. primarily Africa) through an open exchange of ideas and working-practices. In addition, the case study will propose a low cost, technology-based solution for learning in an open environment.

Convening open, online learning events can have several affordances for the members of a virtual community of practice but requires careful design to ensure participants can openly participate in and contribute to discussions, especially if they are based in multiple geographical locations, and have unstable connections to the internet (Wenger, 2002). The use of technology that is easy to master (e.g. simple interface or email lists), will ensure that members with low levels of digital literacy will not experience a barrier to participation. Additional barriers include the size of the group, a lack of time, conflicting priorities and a fear of losing one's competitive advantage (Wenger, 2012). Cultural differences will also determine anticipated styles of engagement (Wenger, 2002), and how a community responds to questioning members in a position of authority (Ardichvili, 2008). Drawing on Etienne Wenger's research on distributed communities of practice, this case study will share innovative tips and solutions for designing an open, online learning event.

The democratisation of education through the adoption of open practices is widely regarded as a panacea for tackling the rise in student enrolment and ensuring quality of open education resources in higher education institutions (Wright and Reju, 2012). Despite efforts to engage academics and support staff in open scholarly practices, there is still some resistance and mistrust of sharing research, and engaging with wider audiences (Weller 2012). Weller (2012) observed that some international scholars regard open practices, and are suspicious of the value of occupying social networking spaces. The practice of constructing 'meaning' through face to face exchanges with peers (Dewey, 1938) in related or divergent fields is not a new phenomenon but requires sustained 'prodding', and motivation by experienced and impassioned facilitators to demonstrate the value of conducting these exchanges online

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(Wenger, 2020). A virtual community of practice will flounder if members aren't consulted or invited to make meaningful mutually supportive relationships (Wenger, 2012).

This session will appeal to individuals who are looking for innovative approaches to cultivating an open scholarly practice, as well as those individuals who would like to learn about the application of social constructivist approaches in an open, online learning environment. The case study will link theory to practice by sharing participant experiences of the online discussion, in addition to including their suggestions for improving the design and delivery of future learning events. The case study will draw on an analysis of participant contributions, survey data, and web analytics to triangulate feedback with the quality of interactions to propose a model for designing a global learning event using an open, online community of practice.

Word count: 553 (excluding references)

References

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Extra content

Audio version of poster can be found at: https://www.dropbox.com/s/jqhsraqj5iex8tu/Audio Poster.m4a

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[Dr Simon Ball](#)
17:18 on 6 February 2014

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Nicola Morris
9:14pm 12 February 2014 Permalink

The concept sounds really interesting. I was wondering if this could be adopted for more formal knowledge sharing between groups of staff in different locations?

Sarah-Louise Quinnell
12:21pm 13 February 2014 Permalink

Siobhan, I'm watching your presentation and have just realised you are an IDS person. I did my undergrad and first two masters at Sussex in Development, PhD is from King's and I am now working in the Sussex Innovation Centre for Macmillan Education. Would be really good to connect.

This is a very smilar topic to my PhD - would be interested in your views on how online spaces alter the concept of participation?

Dr Simon Ball
6:48pm 13 February 2014 Permalink

Following the live presentations, we asked each speaker to respond to questions posed by audience members. In the short time available, it was not possible to put all of the questions submitted to the speaker for a response. We asked all speakers if they would respond to the unanswered questions here on Cloudworks. Here are all of the questions asked during the session:

- Do online spaces change the way in which learners participate?
- What are the implications for ICT for Development policies in general - does the use of online technology expand the digital divide or mean expertise and knowledge only comes from certain, westernised sectors? I am wondering about the transmission of traditional knowledge

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