The Development of Open and Distance Educational Resources and Practices within the Service Industry of Tourism

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INTRODUCTION

Hillary Jenkins is a Programme Manager for the Diploma in Applied Travel and Tourism, Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand. Hillary has worked in the educational tourism sector for the past seven years and has a Bachelor of Commerce Degree and a Post Graduate Certificate in teaching (information communication) from Otago University. Hillary has a background in print journalism. She is also the project manager for the tourism programme development.

This presentation and the following discussion will look at all areas outlined in the abstract but will primarily focus on the use of Wikieducator in the development of a new tourism programme for Otago Polytechnic and the use an open platform for delivery. It will also address attempts, through the use of Wikieducator, to form a community of learning with other educational providers or organisations in the service sector of tourism. Recommendations will be offered as potential guidelines for the use of Wikieducator, those wanting to develop using an open platform and the development of a community of learning.

The tourism project has also been a response to the strategies and values of the New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015, recently launched by the Prime Minister Rt Hon Helen Clark, - in particular the need for communities and operators to build strong relationships and recognise each other as important contributors to the industry globally. (Reference) Otago Polytechnic is also working hard to create an environment of sustainability (reference) not only in its curriculum but also as a physical campus. Use of Web 2.0 and Wikieducator technology is viewed as one viable way to contribute to this drive.

Otago Polytechnic is a tertiary provider focussing on skills based, technical education and occupational training. It offers a range of New Zealand accredited degrees, diplomas and certificates (Wikipedia, 2006).

Many of the schools within Otago Polytechnic have delivered programmes both by distance and face to face by way of a proprietary learning management system called "Blackboard" (closed platform). The need for greater flexibility in curriculum and distributed methods of delivery outside of a closed environment has at times created a challenge for Polytechnic teaching staff. This is because of the default copyright restriction All Rights Reserved CCL on all their educational content and course development.

For over two years, a few individuals across 10 departments have been exploring the use of wikis to develop and manage a number of open access Otago Polytechnic courses and teaching resources repositories. Currently there are courses offered as open educational resources on Wikieducator. Some of these received project funding (such as tourism) all of which are undergoing development. This represents around 15 full time lecturing staff and 5 part-time programme designers regularly using the Wikieducator for their online courses.

In 2006 an Educational Development Centre for staff development, online and flexible learning development, and research into educational development was formed. During 2007 Otago Polytechnic senior management approved a revised Intellectual Property Policy. In effect, the existing All Rights Reserved default CCL was replaced by a Some Rights Reserved - Attribution (CC BY). This would effectively give staff intellectual property ownership rights with an option of restriction. This policy change went hand in hand with institutional strategic objectives and leadership in flexible learning, multimedia training and technical support. One of the centre's duties is to administer a contestable fund for assistance in the development of flexible learning. This also provides a project designer whill will aid and assist the programme manager who acquires the funds.

There is a recommendation that all staff use the least restrictive copyright over Intellectual Property. It is hoped replacing an All Rights Reserved CCL default copyright with the recommended (CC BY) copyright will foster collaboration, avoid the legalistic complications when practitioners, re-use resources that have attribution restrictions. (Otago Polytechnic Intellectual Property, 2007)

BACKGROUND – THE CHALLENGE
The tourism development project involved a complete rethink of how, why and to whom the programme was being delivered and the intended outcomes for students, industry counterparts, fellow educational providers and for the community; locally, nationally and internationally.

Factors such as; declining student enrolment numbers, difficulty with student retention, the need for more flexibility in delivery, updating of teaching resources, required changes to the curriculum, more flexible programme framework, need for more industry involvement, greater use of the internet and online bookings, community requirements and high employment levels for the past six years, all played a role in the need to update the qualification. There was also the need to expand the programme to encompass all areas and opportunities in tourism.

Government changes to funding policies for polytechnics - funding based on capping student numbers per organisation and placing the emphasis on student success and retention plus a call from tertiary providers governing body Tertiary Education Commission (TEC, 2007) for greater collaboration between educational providers, were also driving forces behind the need for change.

BACKGROUND - THE RESPONSE
In March 2007 the School of Applied Business - Travel and Tourism section applied for and successfully gained project funding (from the contestable fund) towards the development of a higher level, two year local diploma. The monies to be used in conjunction with the upgrading/development of teaching resources, improvement of flexible delivery methods and dedicated staff time allocation for development.

The new diploma replaced a one year National Certificate in Travel and Tourism. The framework underpinning the diploma was purchased from another education provider through membership of Tertiary Accord New Zealand (TANZ) a collaboration of six New Zealand polytechnics. The mission/purpose of Tertiary Accord of New Zealand is to work collaboratively as an accord to identify, design, develop, deliver and evaluate applied vocational quality products for tertiary learners (TANZ Strategy Paper 2006 – 2011). Membership of the accord allows access to the curricula of all the members, as well as the opportunity for shared collaborative academic, business, and international development activity. What follows is an exploration of the challenges and the issues we faced.

WHAT TO USE – OPEN OR CLOSED PLATFORM – WHY?
The first question we faced was - why change from a closed, managed learning delivery to open source? The need for greater flexibility in curriculum and methods of delivery could have been contained within present systems and courses could have continued without any great upheaval.

According to Deputy Chief Executive Robin Day, the polytechnic is trying to be more open, more sharing, more responsive to the community and Wikieducator met this criteria. There is, he said, a shift to focus more on learners, rather than teachers and institutional control.

For the tourism project there were several factors which also influenced the change. There was of course the creation of a new programme, the main resource developer and designer were both relatively new staff to the polytechnic, new resources had to be designed and found so why not a new environment?

Project funding provided an opportunity to look at new ways of doing things. With the investment of time and resources it seemed an opportune time to do this.

Wikieducator offered an opportunity to provide and add an exciting visual dimension to the presentation. The platform was dynamic, changes could be made with ease and the site accessed far more easily by staff and students. External contribution, from a community of learning, was a positive and staff resistance, if any, was something which could be addressed.

The options for image enhancement, linking, RSS feed, tagging and using all forms of Web 2.0 software are expanded using Wikieducator. There are however limitations with formatting. At times this is frustrating especially with the quality of software programmes being used in business. An emphasis on developing greater compatibility with other desktop publishing programmes would greatly enhance the use of Wikieducator.

Using a web log as an interface with the wiki provided another visual, interactive component and supplied a slick marketing tool. A majority of the staff teaching on the programme are currently taking part in blogging sessions. Initially the postings were frequent however workload demands have soon taken over from the novelty of writing to a web log.

There was also the wish to contribute to a greater good, and to address our social responsibility. The sharing of teaching resources and the opportunity for international collaboration would be ways in which to do this. Tourism is a global service and students are able to recognise that more readily from an open source.

DOES THE REALITY MATCH THE IDEALS?
Wikieducator offers a living, dynamic environment. The potential for resource contribution from external sources in particular is an exciting prospect. Wayne Mackintosh from the Commonwealth of Learning has said there are 30,000 unique visitors to Wikieducator each week (Web log - massageonline.wordpress, 10 March, 2008). However our travel and tourism wiki has attracted only one external contributor in the past 12 months. If one is to look at the history page there is also no record (logged in) of anyone, unknown to us, browsing. Iif logging in was made compulsory a good record of browsers could be compiled and followed up on. A communication thread was opened earlier this year and as yet the have has been no response.

It may be, as suggested by Robin Day that we are so far ahead of others that they may not be contributing but are probably using some of the resources on the wiki. Or it could be that there are not many, if any, other areas developing on the wiki in the tourism area at tertiary level. Hopefully expanded communication will be forthcoming as Wikieducator grows internationally.

Otago Polytechnic course development structure encourages the separation of information and other reference materials from lesson plans and activity sheets. This is to maximise re-usability, and to assist teachers developing courses on the wikis to think more deliberately about what it is they want their students to be doing, and to create a variety of different activities around a single learning objective for use in different contexts. Because of this, or to assist with this, a simplified process for backing up of teaching resource material needs to available. At present the process is protracted because of the differences in Wikieducator and the software package used by the polytechnic..

WHAT IS REQUIRED
Delivering a programme through Wikieducator does have particular requirements. Fast internet speed is imperative to the delivery of the programme, for both on-line and face to face students. While the Otago Polytechnic runs a well resourced and supported network system with broadband internet speed. Teaching resources such as Youtube are often slow to buffer and run and web logs can take some time to open. Good wireless capability can be beneficial to the face to face teaching aspect especially when being used in conjunction with other hardware e.g. laptop and projector.

Access to Wikieducator has at times been denied through difficulties with the polytechnic's internet server. However there have been times when Wikieducator has been one of the few sites accessible when the same problem has occurred.

This technical area in particular could raise many concerns for developing countries wanting to access resources and delivery means.

An ongoing feature of the liaison bethwee the Educational Development Centre project developer and the tourism resource developer has been the technical support for the writing and styliation of the travel and tourism wiki site. Access to support staff with good knowledge of Web 2.0 social networking software and HTML programming has been a great advantage. Developers of content for Wikieducator are usually teaching staff who may have a limited knowledge of Web 2.0 software and face not only a step learning curve due to this, but time and resource constraints. A resource librarian/quality controller is also a beneficial addition to support staff gain resource material and help with wiki content. The Commonwealth of Learning has tutorials available and has created wiki's for further development in this area.

A comprehensive introduction/induction to the medium of use for students is essential along with support and help. Options such as; block courses, on-line tutorials, demonstration videos/DVDs are easily accessed by Otago Polytechnic students on a national basis but this may not be so internationally.

At present, face to face tourism students at the Otago Polytechnic are using course web logs as an interface to Wikieducator. The original intention was that that students would go directly to the Wikieducator site once the initial development was completed (end of 2008). However the interface seems to be working really well, with staff being able to communicate with the students through the web log before accessing a direct link to activities on the wiki.

COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING
Use of Wikieducator has the potential to progress the building of community, or circles of learning for educational providers, faster and more easily. This may be the single most important reason why educators will choose to use Wikieducator and is vital to the successful use of Wikieducator. It is these communities of learning which could potentially become the first audience even before the enrolled students. They can contribute, critique, supply feedback, and support and encouragement and influence the quality of the resources.

Through the Wikieducator development collaborative relationships with TAFE New South Wales - Illawarra Institute, Canberra Institute of Technology and Michigan State University in the United States of America, have been formed. All teams are positioning themselves to work with us in our development of a sustainable tourism course.

We have also been in communication with the Pacific Island region in particular Samoa with the aim in the future to offer our programme on-line to potential students. This works well with our strategy to attract more Pacific Island students to our programme. We were also looking at how this collaboration could offer extra support to Samoan students studying our programme both here and in Samoa. This is an area we will continue to pursue.

The Commonwealth of Learning as the innovators/administrators of Wikieducator may need to be even more proactive in facilitating communication than they are or have been to date. Perhaps the question that needs to be asked is - are there key people in the Commonwealth of Learning (Ambassadors) who are identifying the need for more facilitation in the creation of a community of learning. It would greatly benefit new participants and indeed current users of Wikieducator to have an initial community to join.

By joining an initial group it would then become the responsibility of educators to facilitate collaboration. This need not be limited to areas of interest but could extend to other people and subject areas of the organisation. This perspective links individuals within an organisation to an international teaching community. This would also help the creation of communities outside of the Commonwealth countries.

QUALITY
An open platform, openly contributed to, sourced and edited both internally and externally, begs the question - how is total quality management, obtained and maintained. When the reputation and viability of a programme, indeed an organisation can rely heavily on the

content of a wiki should the responsibility of content always lie with them as well? (Academic Quality Management Manual, 2007)

Some answers may be answered through internal quality control which can be addressed through standardisation of resource content and navigational techniques. Peer networking within your area and discussion outside of it may also help. Within an institutional context, academic quality guidelines are necessary for professional performance, expectations and accreditation purposes.

External quality control; comes from the community of learning. An example of this would be to ensure contributions being made meet the formatting requirements of the wiki being edited or added to. There could be an opportunity for the Commonwealth of Learning to take on a facilitating role in ensuring guidelines are met.

CONCLUSION
If Web 2.0 networked learning is the way of the future then the use, support and further development of open platforms such as Wikieducator is not only our responsibility – as a community of learning, it may very well be what defines us as true pioneers of educational development in this century.

However expansion and growth without planning, strategy and goals can only slow down the growth of open platforms, such as Wikieducator, for educational, organisational use. At present there is a lot of foundation work being carried out but is there enough support structure in place for the building to continue?. Otago Polytechnic has identified the need for such structure by putting in place strategic goals in policies and its business plan. There still however remains a need for more coordinated collaboration internally and externally before the true benefits of Wikieducator are experienced.

It may be that the Commonwealth of Learning needs to take a leading role (or the role) in forming a group to compile a more detailed pathway for organisations or individuals to follow for the uses of Wikieducator in their organisation. This, alongside the formation and introduction of a community of learning, to new and existing would provide a powerful incentive for Wikieducator use and growth.

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