

The democratisation of information - Learning Objects: A hands-on approach

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Abstract:

In 2005 the Waikato Institute of Technology received a significant grant from the e-Learning Collaborative Development Fund (eCDF), administered by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) of New Zealand, to investigate and explore learning objects and how these could be shared across the educational sector. From the beginning of the project it was accepted the debate on the definition of a learning object was widespread, inconclusive and ongoing. However, the project team, comprising members of the Centre for Learning Technologies, Library and ITS, adopted a view there was general agreement Learning Objects (LOs) should be reusable, be durable, be affordable, be searchable, be retrievable and be stored for others to use. This decision supported the concept of increasing the availability of information, lowering access barriers and generally contributing to a learning environment exemplified by democratic, participatory change.

This interactive workshop describes how the Open Source Learning Object Repository (OSLOR) project team worked through the process of defining, describing and sharing learning objects. The OSLOR team were conscious that for learning object repositories to function fully, simple, self-explanatory solutions had to be explored and implemented so participants would not be overwhelmed by the need to acquire advanced software application or library cataloguing skills. The workshop anticipates the definitions, descriptions and sharing solutions described will be open to debate and refinement, it recognizes they are not the final answer. However, it is hoped the workshop will generate ongoing debate on the future of learning objects and their contribution to the democratisation of information.

The workshop will be divided into 4 sections:

1. What are learning objects: a short, interactive discussion session providing an overview of LOs
2. How LOs are described. A short presentation on Metadata and its applications, followed by a question and answer session
3. The roles and responsibilities of creators and library staff: an interactive session demonstrating a simple solution used in the OSLOR project
4. How can LOs be discovered and deployed: An interactive demonstration of Xchange, a Moodle tool used by the OSLOR team
5. Where to from here?: A short presentation on future directions in this field followed by a QA session

On completion of this workshop, participants will

- gain an understanding of the OSLOR project definition of a learning object
- explore the role of metadata within the OSLOR project and the profile created
- discuss the roles creators and libraries play in this process and the blurring of traditional boundaries
- review how the functionalities of a Learning Management System (Moodle) can be used to store, describe and share LOs
- gain an understanding of how a Learning Management System can be used as an authoring tool to repurpose and modify LOs