Student as Producer

Student as producer and open educational resources: enhancing learning through digital scholarship

Sue Watling

Sue Watling, Centre for Research and Development, University of Lincoln, Brayford Pool, Lincoln LN6 7TS, swatling@lincoln.ac.uk

Biography

Currently a teaching and learning co-ordinator in the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD), Sue has over 20 years' experience in education: in adult and community education, social services and for the past 12 years at the University of Lincoln where she supports staff in the use of virtual learning environments. She has a particular interest in the social impact of the internet and issues of digital inclusion. Sue has MAs in gender studies and open and distance education and is currently undertaking doctoral research based around teaching and learning in a digital age. She has professional accreditation as a learning technologist with the Association for Learning Technology (CMALT), is a member of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE) and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

Abstract

At the University of Lincoln, the student as producer agenda is seeking to disrupt consumer-based learning relationships by reinventing the undergraduate curriculum along the lines of research-engaged teaching. The open education movement, with its emphasis on creative commons and collaborative working practices, also disrupts traditional and formal campus-based education. This paper looks at the linkages between the Student as Producer project and the processes of embedding open educational practice at Lincoln. Both reinforce the need for digital scholarship and the prerequisite digital literacies that are essential for learning in a digital age.

Key words: student as producer, digital scholarship, digital literacies, open education, open educational resources, creative commons

Introduction

Strong linkages are evolving between two major projects at the University of Lincoln. These are Student as Producer[1] and the HEA/JISC-funded Embedding OER (open educational resources) Practice.[2] Both projects aim to support and enhance the learning experience: Student as Producer through promoting research-engaged teaching and Embedding OER Practice through adopting a creative commons approach to teaching, learning and research. Virtual learning environments (VLEs) have become integral to the HE experience and to use them effectively involves a shift in practice to digital scholarship. Becoming a digital scholar involves adopting those digital literacies, which have become essential for learning in the 21st century.

This paper will examine the framework of Student as Producer and the experience of promoting open educational practice at Lincoln. It will show how both these initiatives are highlighting digital scholarship and highlighting essential digital literacies. The paper will begin with a brief outline of the philosophy of Student as Producer before looking more closely at its digital scholarship theme. The wider implications of engagement with virtual learning and the requirements of a digital scholar will be discussed. These include support for individual confidence and competence with educational technology, in particular the adoption of a tripartite model of digital literacies, which includes personal, professional and public dimensions. Finally, the paper will show how the progressive pedagogy of Student as Producer has multiple linkages with the processes of embedding open educational resources and offers useful ways forward for the enhancement of learning in a digital age.

Student as Producer

Student as Producer is a major cross-institutional initiative at the University of Lincoln. It involves establishing research-engaged teaching as the organising principle for curriculum design and development. Student as Producer is reinventing the undergraduate student experience. It is not a prescriptive approach to change but has been introduced as a platform for debate and intellectual discussion about the nature of teaching and learning and its relationship to research:

The essential aspects of research-engaged teaching and learning is that it involves a more research-oriented style of teaching, where students learn about research processes, and where the curriculum emphasises the ways by which knowledge is produced, rather than learning knowledge that has already been discovered.

(Neary 2009: 5)

Under the principles of Student as Producer, the revised curriculum supports opportunities for students to learn as researchers, through inquiry-based learning and problem-solving activities. The philosophical underpinning of Student as Producer is one of critical pedagogy, where students are recognised as being participative constructors of knowledge rather than passive consumers:

Students do come armed with their own experience, which critical teaching acknowledges through a dialogue with students. Here the educator is also educated, and the student also becomes the teacher.

(Burawoy 2008: 9)

Student as Producer is an attempt to restate the purpose of HE by seeking to reconnect the core research and teaching activities of universities in a way that consolidates and substantiates the values of academic life (Neary and Winn 2009; Hagyard and Watling 2012). Under Student as Producer, the student is

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[1] http://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk
[2] http://oer.lincoln.ac.uk

not only encouraged to engage actively in the research process but also to become the producer of social reality and a citizen of the future. At a time when the social impact of the internet is adding digital dimensions to 21st century citizenship, Student as Producer actively recognises the need to support and resource the development of digital scholarship.

Student as Producer and digital scholarship

The progressive pedagogy of Student as Producer seeks to reinstate research engagement as an organising principle within a number of key themes,[3] one of which is digital scholarship. The internet has great potential for enhancing and extending effective teaching and learning. This can happen through staff-led online activities, which support off-campus access and interaction, and through student-led use of social media like Twitter and Facebook. Engaging with digital scholarship offers useful opportunities for establishing new collaborative working relationships between staff and students. Mobile internet access via smartphones and tablets ensures continual connectivity and the ability to be in permanent contact with multiple sources of information. This access to vast repositories of knowledge has the potential to empower students by disrupting traditional classroom practices. Digitally adept students create their own personal learning environments built from digital tools they already use. Favourite content is shared via social bookmarking software like Diigo and Delicious. Slideshare and Vimeo enable the uploading of student-created presentations, while blogs and wikis support student review, feedback and evaluation. Students who are also digital scholars navigate complex websites and authenticate online content with confidence, accurately distinguishing between knowledge, information and personal opinion. Working outside traditional barriers of time and distance, they participate in online communities of practice and expertise, leading to an abundance of collaborative online learning opportunities.

Student as Producer encourages students to see themselves as producers of social reality and citizens of the future. To be a digital scholar under Student as Producer is to engage with the wider social impact of digital ways of working. Digital scholars have the personal skill-set to manage virtual learning effectively and also understand how digital literacies reflect individual identities and values. When they select the appropriate tools for tasks, they are also aware of the potential impact of their choices, particularly with particular to digitally inclusive practice. Finally, digital scholars support the principles of open education, with its sharing of educational resources and the reusing and repurposing of content. There are clear alignments between digital scholarship under Student as Producer and the philosophy and practice of the open education movement. Both support a commons-based, peer- production approach to leaning and this connection will be addressed in more detail later in this paper. Before then, the relationships between digital scholars and their essential digital literacies will be examined.

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[3] Discovery: Student as Producer
• Technology in teaching: digital scholarship
• Space and spatiality: learning landscapes in higher education
• Assessment: active learners in communities of practice
• Research and evaluation: scholarship of teaching and learning
• Student voice: diversity, difference and dissensus
• Support for research-based learning through expert engagement with information resources
• Creating the future: employability, enterprise, beyond employability, postgraduate

Student as Producer: digital scholars and digital literacies

Digital scholarship is not determined by access to educational technology but by the ways in which it is used. This requires attention to digitally literate ways of working, with clear frameworks defining those most essential for learning in a digital age. Prerequisite digital literacies should not be assumed. Instead, their adoption requires explicit support structures which themselves are flexible and adaptable to change as the internet continues to develop and evolve. Research has been funded through the HEA/JISC Developing Digital Literacies Programme.[4] The programme offers a definition of digital literacies as those capabilities which fit an individual for living, learning and working in a digital society: "for example, the skills to use digital tools to undertake academic research, writing and critical thinking; as part of personal development planning; and as a way of showcasing achievements" (JISC 2011). Unpicking digital literacies in more detail reveals a complexity of issues. As well as the effective use of technology for education, these include the wider social dimensions that demand a more scholarly approach. The principles of Student as Producer frame students as the producers of social reality. This can be usefully applied to a tripartite model of digital literacies, one that encompasses professional and public dimensions as well as competency-based personal ones. Personal digital literacies are primarily about functionality. They describe the skill-set necessary for effective management of hardware, software, mobile technology and social media. Personal digital literacies are recognised as essential requirements for learning. Raising awareness of the professional and public dimensions of digital literacies can require a more sophisticated understanding of the broader social consequences of the move towards digital ways of working.

There are exacting boundaries between private and professional online practices. Establishing a virtual presence with friends can differ significantly from how one presents to colleagues, clients or service users. The professional elements of digital literacies include the construction of appropriate online identities. Professional digital literacies include the potential for misuse of email or social media and understanding how the speed of online communication can encourage responses posted in haste and later regretted. The principles of online data protection, understanding the permanence of digital footprints and how user history is tracked and recorded are all essential to professional practice, as is an appreciation of the speed at which images and text can be taken out of context and spread across worldwide networks.

As well as the professional dimension, there is a public aspect to digital literacies. This involves understanding them as learned social practices. It includes awareness of the potential for the replication and reinforcement of existing digital inequalities and exclusions. Public digital literacies highlight the dichotomy of technology that enables access while also denying it unless steps are taken to ensure barrier-free ways of working. The university of the future needs to be many things, including the producer of students who are aware of the social shaping of technology and the parameters of digital divides. Digital citizens have a responsibility to adopt holistic approaches and the progressive pedagogy of Student as Producer ensures that it is ideally placed to support digital citizenship as a new way of being in a digital age. Alongside Student as Producer, another initiative at Lincoln offers opportunities for digital scholarship and acceptance of a triad of personal, professional and public digital literacies. This is the philosophy and practice of open education. The linkages between this and Student as Producer will be examined next.

Student as Producer and the open education movement

As Student as Producer seeks to disrupt consumer-based relationships between tutors and students, so open education has disrupted traditional provision of formal campus-based teaching, learning and research. The

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[4] www.jisc.ac.uk/developingdigitalliteracies

movement was initiated by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2001. Funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, MIT course materials were made freely available online for public access.[5] The UK Open University developed a free access site, OpenLearn,[6] and the sharing of educational resources was promoted in the education sector by JORUM,[7] a national repository of free educational content. HEA/JISC have funded three phrases of research on the creation and embedding of open educational resources, resulting in the construction of a number of subject specialist repositories, for example OpenSpires[8] from the University of Oxford, freely available modules such as ChemistryFM[9] from the University of Lincoln and the development of free educational software for constructing OER such as Xertes[10] from the University of Nottingham.

Open education challenges historical conceptions of academic institutions as sole gatekeepers of information and knowledge. By taking advantage of the instant access to digital data afforded by internet technologies, open education provides platforms for user participation and sharing and in so doing creates internationally distributed networks of open educational resources. These support knowledge sharing through flexible and borderless online educational experiences, which fit well with Student as Producer's active engagement with research and the production of new knowledge. Working with open educational content supports digital scholarship and its associated digital literacies, for example searching, selecting and evaluating content, making measured judgments on authenticity and value, and being aware of the need for inclusive design in order to achieve maximum capacity for sharing.

Student as Producer and Embedding OER Practice

At the University of Lincoln, staff are adopting the philosophy and practice of open educational resources as a whole-institution approach. Embedding OER Practice[11] is a HEA/JISC-funded project, running concurrently with an HE Change Academy Programme. Using a macro and a micro approach, it aims to promote open education as a sustainable and effective way of supporting teaching, learning and research in a digital age. The micro element consists of six individual projects investigating the use of OER in different generic aspects of the student experience. Project teams include current students who are actively encouraged to provide the student voice with regard to learning and to participate in the OER research processes. The six areas of OER practice are listed below:

- **Supporting transition with OER** focuses on providing new students with access to library resources prior to enrolment.

- **Early reflective writing** uses OER to support the processes of reflective thinking and writing early in the student experience in semester A, year one.

- **Employability** explores OER for embedding graduate attributes in the undergraduate curriculum.

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[5] http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm
[6] http://openlearn.open.ac.uk
[7] http://www.jorum.ac.uk
[7] http://openspires.oucs.ox.ac.uk
[8] http://forensicchemistry.lincoln.ac.uk
[10] http://nottingham.ac.uk/xertes
[11] http://oer.lincoln.ac.uk

- **Practice education electronic resources (PEER)** is looking at OER for the construction and assessment of e-portfolios for students and practice educators or mentors on undergraduate and postgraduate work-based learning awards.

- **Exploring and embedding the use of OER on PGCert/HE … and beyond** is the development of an online postgraduate module called Teaching and Learning in a Digital Age.

- **Behind the scenes** offers technical support for the using and reusing of OER and is making recommendations for policy and practice with repositories.

Alignment of OER practice with generic elements of learning reflects the macro dimensions of the project, which investigate strategic approaches for sustaining institutional change. Sustainability of project outcomes will be enhanced through the purposeful alignment of themes with existing institution-wide strategies. Getting Started is the University of Lincoln programme for transition support and the OER work of the library-based team will feed directly into this pre-existing framework. Students can participate in a Learn Higher Certificate experience, which involves evidencing extra-curricular activities and offers an institution-wide pathway for broader adoption of the OER work on employability. Highlighting shared student experiences, such as transition, reflective writing, employability and e-portfolios, offers multiple opportunities for attracting wider attention to OER and extending open practices across a range of subject disciplines. Further commonalities include evidencing graduate attributes and difficulties with reflective practice. These are reported by all project teams and the linkages suggest the availability of free open educational resources, encouraging opportunities for employability and reflective processes, will support the embedding of OER practice as a whole-institution strategy.

The OER research project is bringing together teaching and learning staff from across the university and asking them to work specifically in digital environments. This is raising awareness of the need for increased support for those digital literacies which are essential for OER practice: for example searching, selecting and evaluation, the identification of appropriate tools for content sharing, and the effective management of online ways of working. One way this need might be met is through raising the profile of the digital scholarship theme of Student as Producer. Promoting digital scholarship through Student as Producer will help to ensure relevant institution-wide support for a broad range of digital learning experiences. This will include opportunities for enhancing the personal, professional and public dimensions of digital literacies as well as creating an institution-wide framework in which open education practices can be sustained.

Conclusion

This paper has examined linkages between Student as Producer and research on open education at the University of Lincoln. The digital scholarship theme of Student as Producer offers a useful framework for the adoption of open educational practices, which in themselves are a potential way forward for the university of the future. Working with open educational resources highlights the potential of technology for education. It demands attention to digital scholarship and reinforces the development of a tripartite model of the personal, professional and public dimensions of digital literacies. Student as Producer has a natural affinity with the ethos of the open education movement; both have in common the disruption of traditional balances of power and provide valuable opportunities for discussion and debate about the enhancing the learning experience. Open education requires a whole-institution approach to digital scholarship, which in turn requires attention to the appropriate digital literacies. Student as Producer offers a strategic framework for enhancing the quality of the learning experience, one which aligns well with the philosophy and practice of open educational resources. Through promoting open approaches to learning, Student as Producer can provide a mechanism for

embedding digital scholarship in the curriculum and in so doing will create an effective learning environment which is relevant for a digital age.

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