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Designing a Learning Activity Toolkit

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Abstract: The DialogPlus project involves two English and two American universities in sharing learning activities based on digital resources. The subject domain of Geography can draw on a wide variety of digital resources such as maps, databases, web pages, and images. Embedding these in well-designed learning activities for undergraduate and postgraduate students poses many challenges, including accessibility, accommodating learning and teaching preferences, quality, rights clearance and approaches to assessment. The author of this paper, a researcher at the University of Southampton, works with the educators, analysing, supporting and evaluating their innovative approaches, and with computer scientists charged with resolving the complex issues of sharing resources between four institutions each with a different learning management system/environment. This paper reflects on the early project experiences and the design of a learning activity toolkit also being developed at Southampton.

Introduction

The UK’s Joint Information Sciences Committee (JISC) and the USA’s National Science Foundation (NSF) are jointly funding several projects exploring the use of digital libraries in classrooms. One of these, Digital Libraries in Support of Innovative Approaches to Learning and Teaching in Geography (DialogPLUS), has brought together geographers, education specialists, and computer scientists at the universities of Southampton and Leeds in the UK, Pennsylvania State and California (Santa Barbara) in the USA in the development of reusable learning activities (LAs).

To date about twenty LAs, incorporating many different digital resources, have been developed. Efforts are ongoing to devise ways of sharing these resources between the partner universities, each of which currently has a different online learning environment. An online toolkit has been designed to support practitioners as they create or modify LAs. This is being developed at the University of Southampton and will be piloted with the project partners. Toolkit elements have been mapped against emerging pedagogical vocabularies and learning object metadata standards.

This brief paper will describe the processes and outcomes to date, with specific reference to the attributes of elearning activities that have been modelled in the design for the toolkit.