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LASSIE: LIBRARIES AND SOCIAL SOFTWARE IN EDUCATION

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February 2008

LASSIE: LIBRARIES AND SOCIAL SOFTWARE IN EDUCATION

1   ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The LASSIE project set out to explore whether social software (or Web 2.0 technologies) could enhance the experience of distance learners use of library services.

1A   WHAT WERE THE MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PROJECT AND IN WHICH WAY WAS THE PROJECT INNOVATIVE?

The LASSIE project had several key achievements including:

- Publication of a draft and final literature review providing a comprehensive overview of the use of web 2.0 technologies by libraries, current issues in distance learning librarianship and the role of the library as a social space. (See Appendix 2)
- Publication of five case study reports documenting practical experiments to use different types of social software and where possible to gather feedback from distance learners. (See Appendix 2)
- The successful use of several social software tools including a blog (http://elearning.lse.ac.uk/blogs/socialsoftware/) ,the social bookmarking site del.icio.us for storing useful resources (http://del.icio.us/LSE_LASSIE), the production of a podcast available online.
- The successful use of Moodle for project communication and document sharing
- Wide dissemination of the research findings to fellow librarians and others via the blog, conferences & presentations and publications.

The project sought to establish if social software might be able to provide additional support for distance learners when using library resources. LASSIE concluded that one of the greatest challenges facing distance learners was how they developed information literacy skills without face to face interaction with library staff. It also concluded that library staff could now use a variety of social software tools to enhance the information literacy support they provided to distance learners.

1B   WERE THE OBJECTIVES/OUTPUTS/PRODUCTS YOU SET OUT TO ACHIEVE MET?

The objectives were fully met in terms of producing a literature review (which was also updated at the end of the project) and five case studies to explore different social software technologies. The project initially planned to explore how far libraries could be regarded as social spaces and these objectives were only partially met.

1C   WHAT OBSTACLES HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED IN YOUR PROJECT (PARTICULARLY THOSE THAT MIGHT BE OF VALUE TO CURRENT AND FUTURE CDE AWARD HOLDERS)

Carrying out research into web 2.0 or social software developments is challenging due to the rapid pace of change occurring even during a nine month project. Keeping up to date with the literature

involved learning to use new tools, such as feed readers, as many developments were documented on blogs or the web, rather than in the traditional published literature. The pace of change necessitated producing a draft version of the literature review in July 2007 which was subsequently updated in January 2008 to keep it as up to date as possible.

Unexpected difficulties occurred working with staff from the University of London Research Library Services, partly because of maternity leave of librarian responsible for Online Library. There were also some difficulties working with academic staff who led external programme courses as they were too pressed for time to get fully involved in project.

2   RESEARCH RESULTS (ADDRESSING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS):

2A   WHAT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DID THE PROJECT ADDRESS AND WHICH STUDENT OR OTHER GROUPS BENEFITED FROM THE PROJECT? WHICH STUDENT OR OTHER GROUPS COULD BENEFIT FROM THE PROJECT?

LASSIE attempted to address the issue of how distance learners might have access to "social spaces" within libraries and what role these social spaces might play in learning development. The project was beneficial to both librarians and archivists many of whom are currently exploring the potential of social software to enhance their traditional services. LASSIE also had some benefits to general student body at LSE (through the production of a podcast, and the use of del.icio.us for constructing resource lists), to students on the LSE External Programme course: Introduction to Information Systems course (through the construction of online reading lists), to primary PGCE students at the Institute of Education (through the use of del.icio.us to share resources). The skills and knowledge built up more generally amongst the project team would also benefit students on a variety of face to face, e-learning & distance courses in the participating institutions.

2B   HOW HAS THE PROJECT BUILT UPON CURRENT WORK IN THE FIELD OF DISTANCE EDUCATION?

The LASSIE project built on work in the US where distance learning librarians have more specific roles; as opposed to in the UK where the focus has tended to be on e-learning support. The project focussed specifically on the wider problem of distance learners failing to use the electronic resources which are made available to them. The issue is generally addressed in terms of support for developing information literacy skills but our project looked more generally at how distance learners students might feel more "in touch" with their library.

The project identified that future research could examine the impact that specific information literacy support had on the learning development of distance learners.

2C   HOW DID YOU EVALUATE THE PROJECT?

Nine steering group meetings were held throughout the course of the project including an initial meeting in February 2007 before the project commenced and a review meeting in February 2008 after the project concluded. Members of the Steering Group came from the following institutions: LSE (Library, Archives and CLT), Institute of Education, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, University of London Research Library Services. The project also recruited a member of library staff from the Open University to provide external feedback through the steering group.

The project was also continuously evaluated by an external audience as dissemination was an integral part of LASSIE from the outset. The first presentation on the project was given in April 2007 and these

presentation allowed the project team to gather feedback on the direction of the research. The blog was set up in March 2007 and informal feedback was received via comments. Since March 2007 20 comments have been left on the blog by external visitors and over 40 other blogs have linked to one or more posting on our blog. The LASSIE Blog has been bookmarked in the social bookmarking site del.icio.us (http://del.icio.us) by 29 people to date.

2D   HOW HAVE YOU AND/OR HOW DO YOU PLAN TO DISSEMINATE THE RESULTS OF THE PROJECT THROUGHOUT THE EXTERNAL SYSTEM, THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON AND MORE WIDELY?

The LASSIE web page (http://clt.lse.ac.uk/Projects/LASSIE.php) and blog (http://elearning.lse.ac.uk/blogs/socialsoftware/) have been available since March 2007 and were regularly accessed throughout the project. The LASSIE team have participating in numerous dissemination events including conferences specifically aimed at:

- the External Programme & University of London staff (e.g. CDE Fellows Conference 2007);
- librarians (University of London, e.g. cpd25, Special Collections Forum, and nationally & internationally e.g. Cambridge University, Libraries without Walls);
- academics, (e.g. Towards a Social Science of Web 2.0, Networked Learning Conference)

Papers from some of these events have been published and further details are available in Appendix 1.

3   A NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY OF LASSIE:

LASSIE (Libraries And Social Software In Education) involves a team of librarians, learning technologists and archivists from the University of London. The project first conducted an extensive literature review, which provides an overview of social software tools and technologies and explores their current implementation by libraries. The review also considers the key issues in supporting distance learners' use of libraries and whether social software might provide solutions. The literature review was followed by several case studies to explore specific types of social software in practice. These included the use of social bookmarking for sharing resources, the value of social software online reading lists, blogging in the library community, the use of the social networking site Facebook by libraries and podcasting for information literacy support.

The project sought to establish if social software might be able to provide additional support for distance learners when using library resources. LASSIE concluded that one of the greatest challenges facing distance learners was how they developed information literacy skills without face to face interaction with library staff. It concluded that library staff could now use a variety of social software tools to enhance the information literacy support they provided to distance learners. However, LASSIE only started to be explore the practicalities of doing this and it is an area for further research.

4   SUPPORT FROM THE CENTRE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION.

The LASSIE Steering Group was fortunate to be chaired by a Fellow of the Centre for Distance Education, Gwyneth Price, who provided valuable input into the project. The LASSIE team attended the CDE conference in June 2007 and this provided a useful opportunity to publicise the project and find out about other CDE projects which were related to LASSIE. Some useful contacts with colleagues at the External Programme office at LSE were made during this event. CDE also organise a series of events which the project team were invited to through the CDE mailing list. However, aside from the CDE conference, contact with staff in CDE was fairly minimal for the duration of the project.

Communication with colleagues in another institution working on a CDE related project was not forthcoming despite best efforts of the LASSIE team and early suggestions that useful synergies could be developed.

5   A SIGNATURE AND DECLARATION SECTION:

Dr Jane Secker (Principle researcher)
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Centre for Learning Technology, LSE

Signed_____

Ms Gwyneth Price
Student Services Librarian
Institute of Education

Signed_____

APPENDIX 1: LASSIE DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

Audience	Date	Venue	Type
Librarians / information professionals	April 2007	CPD25 Conference: The Library in the Interactive Environment:	Seminar presentation of project overview
Practitioners – University of London External Programme	June 2007	Centre for Distance Education, Fellows Conference	Seminar presentation of work-in-progress. Available: http://www.cde.london.ac.uk/support/events/event3319.htm
Librarians / information professionals	July 2007	ALISS Conference: University of Leeds	Hands on workshop
Librarians / information professionals	July 2007	Education Librarians Group Seminar (UCL)	Hands on workshop
Librarians / information professionals in distance education	September 2007	Libraries Without Walls conference Lesbos, Greece.	Paper given at International conference: http://www.cerlim.ac.uk/conf/lww7/abstracts.php#gpjs and written up in the conference proceedings published by Facet.
Academics: Social Scientists	September 2007	Towards a Social Science of Web 2.0, University of York	Paper given at international conference.
Librarians / information professionals	September 2007	*New Review of Information Networking*, Volume 13 Issue 1, 39	Journal publication

Publishers / librarians	December 2007	UK Serials Group seminar	Seminar presentation of work to date
Librarians	January 2008	University of Cambridge library conference	Paper given at conference
Librarians / information professionals	January 2008	*ALISS Quarterly, Vol 3, No.2*	Journal publication
Medical librarians / information professionals	January 2008	Health Information on the Internet	Journal publication
Educators / E-learning staff	May 2008	Networked Learning conference, Halkidiki, Greece	Paper given at international conference

APPENDIX 2: LASSIE'S REPORTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

In addition to external publications and conference attendance the LASSIE project published several reports on the project website and the project blog. These include:

Project website: http://clt.lse.ac.uk/Projects/LASSIE.php

Project Blog: http://elearning.lse.ac.uk/blogs/socialsoftware/

Project del.icio.us account: http://del.icio.us/lse_lassie

PROJECT DOCUMENTS

Secker, Jane. *LASSIE Project: Draft literature review*, July 2007. Available at:
http://clt.lse.ac.uk/Projects/LASSIE_lit_review_draft.pdf

Secker, Jane. *LASSIE Project: Final literature review*, January 2008. Available at:
http://clt.lse.ac.uk/Projects/LASSIE_lit_review_final.pdf

Secker, Jane. *LASSIE Project: Case Study One: reading lists and social software*. January 2008. Available at: http://clt.lse.ac.uk/Projects/Case_Study_One_report.pdf

Secker, Jane. *LASSIE Project: Case Study Two: resource sharing and social software*. January 2008. Available at: http://clt.lse.ac.uk/Projects/Case_Study_Two_report.pdf

Secker, Jane. *LASSIE Project: Case Study Three: citing and referencing podcast*. January 2008. Available at: http://clt.lse.ac.uk/Projects/Case_Study_Three_report.pdf

Secker, Jane. *LASSIE Project: Case Study Four: blogging and libraries*. January 2008. Available at: http://clt.lse.ac.uk/Projects/Case_study_four_report.pdf

Secker, Jane. *LASSIE Project: Case Study Five: libraries and Facebook*. January 2008. Available at: http://clt.lse.ac.uk/Projects/Case_Study_Five_report.pdf