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Open Source Community Models for Supporting Educational Practice

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The failure of the repository model

- There are many repositories of resources for practitioners in education
  - NLN, CoLRiC, FENC, ERIC, etc.
  - Grant supported projects almost never have systemic impact
- The uptake and usage in real life are minimal due to the provider/customer models and unconsidered realities of practitioner life
- Despite their promise, repositories have failed to transform education at any level in the way that books have a blackboards have

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The success of the Open Source community model

- Open Source software is the true backbone of the internet and has contributed to the transformation of our world
- The success of Open Source resides in Community approach to development
- The Open Source philosophy is compatible with the best ideals of progressive education

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How the community does NOT work!

- Lots of enthusiastic people each contributing a little bit!

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How the successful communities work!

- Communities have a philosophy
- Communities have structure
  - Benevolent dictator
  - Topic maintainers
  - Valued members
  - Casual members / lurkers
  - N00bs
- People in communities play different roles (often one person plays more than one or changes from time to time)
  - Decision makers (merit on amount and quality of work)
  - Primary product workers (primary product, support, …)
  - Contributing users
  - Community knowledge maintainers (historians, philosophers, etc.)

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How the successful communities work! (cont.)

- Communities have financial support
  - Companies sponsor community members to work on the community work
  - Foundations funded by donations, advertising, promotions, fundraising
  - Commercial ventures by community members gives incentive Communities spend time on socialization
- Communities invest resources into socialization
- Communities research their practice
- Communities document their practices to socialize newcomers
- Communities develop “cultures” and discuss their nature

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How do communities create products?

- Smaller projects (themes, branches) have maintainers
- New work is released early and often (providing possibilities for early failures and timely feedback)
- All members of community can submit “patches” and ideas but maintainers implement them

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How/why do people participate in communities?

- Participation in community is part of the daily workflow of information (email, RSS)
- Participation in community provides direct links to practice
- Participation in a community provides personal satisfaction and fulfillment
- Participation in a community is supported/mandated by other organization

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Building realities of practitioner life into community design

- Staffroom language, behaviour patterns
- Management obligations
- Pay dissatisfaction
- Curricular shortcomings (no way to give feedback)
- Stress from student interaction
- Real motivation to help students learn
- Diverging philosophy of learning
- Disconnect between the rationalistic and realistic models (e.g. one 20-minute task takes 20-minutes to complete and two 5-minute tasks take 20 minutes to complete)

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Suggested community design

- Online social space (merit-driven) with regular offline interaction (conferences)
- JISC/BECTA sponsored leader and topic maintainers
- Institution-sponsored contributors
- Institution-supported users (becoming contributors)
- Intra-institutional ‘user groups’ and community ‘champions’ providing feedback in both directions
- Versioning and support system for resources
- Repository of past discussions
- Connections to other communities
- Support for community maintenance

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Where can Open Source community design be applied in education?

- Technological innovation (application and development)
- Support for users of technologies
- Curriculum development
- Teaching materials development
- Teaching method development

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Discussion question

"What features would a successful sustainable community have to have in order to provide an environment in which innovation is fostered?"

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