

Bazaar Seminar Barcelona, 25 October 2006

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Wednesday, 30 August 2006
Last Updated Sunday, 15 April 2007

Amongst other activities, the Bazaar project is organising a series of seminars on key and emergent issues in Open Source and Open Content for learning.

These seminars intend to be explorative and participative events and to raise issues for future policy and funding by the European Commission and national Member States.

The first of these seminars – entitled ‘Hey Dude, Where’s My Data?’ was held in Barcelona on Wednesday 25 October 2006 and was hosted by the Universitat Pompeu Fabra.

One of the participants wrote several blogs about the seminar, which are posted here: www.ictlogy.net
Seminar Theme: Hey Dude, Where’s My Data?

With Web 2.0, more and more people have their documents, products, personal details and photos stashed all over the internet – what issues does this raise for education?

The rise of commercial services

With the use of free, commercial, centrally hosted, social software services growing in education, some important issues arise; Who controls this data? Do users care that commercial services are mining their usage patterns and selling this to marketing companies? Is the nature of these ‘free’ services understood – yes, users can come in and use the base system for free but often, in return, they are bombarded with advertising and their details/usage habits are sold. However, does anyone really care? Perhaps convenience of service outweighs the perceived downsides.

As Bill Fitzgerald points out: ‘This type of commercial activity is sneaky – it is not apparently obvious to the user what is happening to their data and usage patterns, so often they will not think about this.’

Is it wise to build up learning environments around these free-to-use tools? While it is unlikely some of the bigger services, such as Flickr, will shutdown – the terms of usage could certainly change, what happens if learners suddenly have to pay to access their own content?

As Graham Atwell points out: ‘Yes Web 2 is great for allowing mash ups and integrating services to produce rich and interactive web sites. But the reliance on external services from mostly commercial companies does raise a whole series of issues. Can we trust these people with our data? Will we still have access to this data in the future? What is to stop them data mining for their own purposes?’

Is there an alternative?

Open Standards

Surely the way to approach this is to build educational tools based on open standards, not specific, commercial, services? This will remove any reliance on services like Flickr or del.icio.us. Then again, who would be responsible for building and maintaining these tools? Should institutions and perhaps government be responsible?

Open Source

The same issues arise – who is responsible for building, maintaining and paying for the service?

Where to store my data

With the rise in popularity of ePortfolios many have asked; what happens to an ePortfolio after the student has left the institution? What happens to this content – where are learners supposed to store it? Can the student still access it?

At least one UK university is considering charging alumni for continued access to their ePortfolio – is this the correct approach?

If you are interested in this theme and if you are wondering if you can attend this seminar, please contact Graham Atwell, who will be coordinating this event for the Bazaar project. Email: graham10@mac.com