

THETA

The Higher Education Technology Agenda

Towards a New Library of Resources for Higher Education Learning and Teaching

The online Resource Library of the Australian Federal Government's Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT; <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-library>) contains many valuable resources that are the product of hundreds of learning and teaching research projects funded in the past two decades by the OLT and its predecessors, including the Australian Learning and Teaching Council and the Carrick Institute. However, the Resource Library is not systematically organised and the most relevant resources in the database, for any given topic, can be very hard to find.

The National Learning and Teaching Resource Audit and Classification (NLTRAC) is itself an OLT-funded project with a brief to re-organise the materials in the OLT Resource Library so as to optimise its use, as well as to identify gaps and strengths in its coverage. The project, undertaken by a team of academics and librarians from Charles Sturt University, the University of Wollongong and the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER), commenced in early 2014 and is scheduled to be completed in June 2015. This paper reports on the main outcomes of the project, as well as an analysis of the ICT-related content to be found in the Resource Library. It introduces prospective users of the Resource Library to its new features, including new search options, and showcases its potential as a valuable resource for all those involved in improving the quality of higher education.

A major phase of the NLTRAC project involves assessing the existing subject indexing and searching functionality in the Resource Library. Almost 1,600 subject terms have been used to describe the OLT resources. They include topical terms and proper names such as names of organisations, projects and computer programs. There are two main problems with these subject terms. Firstly, there is a lack of consistency amongst the terms, with multiple terms and word forms often used for the same concept; and secondly, there is no structure to the presentation of the terms (they are presented as a flat alphabetical list rather than in a thesaurus format).

One of the NLTRAC project's tasks was to replace this subject vocabulary with one that was

built on established standards, such as ISO 25964-1, Thesaurus for Information Retrieval, 2011. Ideally the new vocabulary would be: specifically geared to the Australian higher education sphere; freely available electronically; consistently structured; easy to access; sufficiently detailed but not too detailed; regularly updated to cater for new concepts and terminology; and offering user support. Eleven candidate vocabularies were identified and evaluated. The Australian Thesaurus of Education Descriptors (ATED) was assessed as most closely meeting the needs of Resource Library users and was duly adopted as the new vocabulary. However, ATED's scope is the broader field of education, not just higher education, and so it was recognized that some development of ATED might be necessary in order for it to more closely cover the content of the Resource Library.

To identify any areas in ATED that needed supplementation, a mapping exercise was undertaken. An initial cull of 27% of terms that were already in ATED, or were variants of terms already in ATED, was made. Each of the remaining 1,160 terms was classified as either: (a) adequately covered by ATED, both conceptually and terminologically, or otherwise out of scope; (b) covered conceptually by ATED, but a new term that could be added as a cross-reference; or, (c) not covered conceptually by ATED and a term that could be established as a new descriptor. Those terms classed in categories (b) and (c) above were added to the thesaurus if they were sufficiently represented in the Australian education literature that forms the usual source of warrant for ATED terms. It was interesting to note those topics that exist in the OLT Resource Library which had not previously been represented in ATED, given its role as the thesaurus for the Australian Education Index. It could be surmised that these topics represent areas of particular importance to higher education, in comparison with the field of education more broadly.

This paper also reports on an additional analysis of the existing subject terms in the OLT Resource Library that relate specifically to ICT, comprising about 220 concepts. Examples of such concepts include: dynamic simulation, learning analytics, net generation, produsage and slowmation. Assuming that the OLT Resource Library is reasonably representative of recent priorities amongst Australian researchers of university learning and teaching, these concepts provide an overview of how ICT is being used in Australian universities to enhance student experiences and improve educational outcomes. The paper reports on the major themes that emerged from analysis of the ICT-related topics, and discusses their relationship to the themes of recent THETA conferences, as well as to a recent content analysis of the Australasian Journal of Educational Technology and to the topics covered by the New Media Consortium's Horizon Higher Education reports.

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