

Authoring Contexts

I have tried to write down some key points about the different contexts in which we may be discussing authoring:

Academic Programme (e.g. Masters in Business Administration) Controlled by a group of academics and administrators - (teaching committee at Cambridge). Approved by Institution QA procedures - (Education Committee at Cambridge). Likely to be maintained in other systems, e.g. SIS (Cambridge investigating Quali Student Learning Unit Mangement). May be composed of different modules that can be taken independently for graduation - different students will study different Modules or Courses to complete the same programme and graduate with the same qualification. **Requires** public site for recruitment and private site for student progress towards degree [?]

Course or Module on which a student registers and which produces a final grade that is used to assess completion of programme requirements. Also requires approval, probably by local teaching committee, and delivery may be by different Professors (one or more) assisted by different qualified staff or graduate students (TA's in the US). May be delivered more than once in an academic year, perhaps by different professors (one or more each time).

Coordination required between professors to ensure consistent information taught and standards set. Likely to have a shared exam, but coursework will also likely be assessed, which creates issues for more than one instance in the academic year. May need anonymised marking (where marker is not aware of identity of student). Course site may be reused by different professors using the same, similar, or different materials. Student participation components unique to each instance. **Requires** one or more course sites that allows coordination of student cohort and provides access to restricted materials (and some non-restricted materials).

In current Sakai, interactive components such as discussion, assignment, etc. are offered at this level. A different authoring paradigm would allow interactive components in the Teaching Units, leaving this level for progress targets/ summaries, and convenience aggregations (e.g. all work due in the next 5 days). This change may have less relevance for research groups.

Teaching Unit. One or more author, designed to convey a particular aspect of the course. Often a multimedia presentation with quizzes to be worked through. [but may be as simple as a reading list and a set of instructions]. Increasingly, authored with interactive elements that require knowledge of student membership. **Requires** SCORM-like teaching material authoring, presentation, and tracking.

Inline embedding of interactive elements, such as discussion thread or assignment will make teaching units richer and more intuitive.

Elements may need to be accessed in cross-cutting locations like question pools, student authored portfolio pages, content libraries, or reference sources

We haven't touched much on the top level, public presence (mostly) and private presence (a bit) for a programme, or collection of courses. Matthew Bucket's hierarchy presentation at Paris showed something of how useful this can be. Sakai mainly operates at the course/site level and the thinking behind widgets is to move some of the interactive functionality (discussion threads, tests, reference lists, etc.) from this level to the teaching unit level and integrate them with the more traditional teaching unit content. The other attraction of widgets is to enable cross-cutting information to be just as available, like all my late assignments for this programme (collection of courses), student-centred Portfolios across all course work, shared teaching materials, etc. I currently understand Mathieu Plourde's concept as being aimed at a general solution for the teaching unit, Mark Norton's concept as being a more traditional concept of teaching unit authoring, Michael's word plugin as a limited scope concept for part of the course or module authoring context and Noah's concept addressing the cross-cutting authoring context. The 'Edit in Place' or 'Google Sites' concept I was pushing was aimed at the course context, but after drawing this diagram I can see that I was mixing in teaching unit issues. I need to think more about how important it may be to keep these contexts separate.

I hope to review where common technology can help next, by reviewing the way Google has specialised tools for different contexts that all seem to draw on some common technology. I am imagining this could be a way forward for Sakai.

Note: I already know that we don't use FCK editor very wisely. I am pretty confident that we may want to look at Tiny MCE as an alternative, but there **could** be an argument for writing our own. We should certainly be trying to think about how to analyse the choice.

Note: I also think we should go into this with a lot of secondary issues in mind - e.g. export/archive formats, standards and interoperability, accessibility, internationalisation, adaptability to rapid change, etc.