july102013callnotes

Participants:

- Josh Baron, Marist College
- Janice Smith, Three Canoes
- Kara Stiles, Brutus Partners
- Neal Caidin, Apereo Foundation
- Yitna Firdyiwek, University of Virginia
- Nancy Hill, UT MD Anderson Cancer Center
- John Grossman, UT MD Anderson Cancer Center
- Alan Berg, University of Amsterdam

Notes:

Neal Caidin will set up an Etherpad on the T&L Confluence page for notes from our next meeting.

Josh

- These meetings have taken up issues and suggestions from the Apereo Conference.
- The TWSIA awards will be coordinated once again for 2014 by Salwa Khan of Texas State. She will be posting in the future to fill out the committee.
- We also want to talk about coordination with the TCC on such topics as documentation and feedback on tools that are in production or being enhanced. An example is the group working around Samigo to provide feedback during the enhancement process. I would like to continue that line of conversation. Alan Berg is on this call. Yesterday I had a phone call with Neal and other TCC folks who displayed a willingness to become involved.
- One of the things from the call yesterday was that the next three months are a point in time where it could be useful to be talking about capabilities and enhancements for the 2.10 release (or whatever it will be called) and maybe for the longer term. It has not been clear when it would be good to get feedback to the TCC but it seems now that the next couple of months will be the right time. In talking about the next release and beyond right now, the TCC is open to getting feedback and suggestions about what to be working on.
- There have been some informal postings. Alan Reagan from Pepperdine put out a blog post with some suggestions.
- In the next T&L call or two we can make a more concrete effort to determine how to best to collaborate and interact.

Neal   Josh has an accurate picture. Right now is good timing. For the release cycle with 2.9, we are in maintenance releases or bug fixes. We do sometimes add in new features. But with 2.10, we are deciding what needs to go into the big release. There is an opportunity to discuss new ideas and new features.

Alan   This is a relatively good time. At the TCC meeting at the San Diego conference, it would have been good to have this conversation. That would be the timing to have the opinions summarized and understood and to go into the TCC and sell it. It is a little late but the window is still open for this year. For 2014, we could plan ahead. There is still a window open for this year, but the T&L group suggestions will be considered an unfunded mandate. Resources would have to be found in a timely manner. There has to be an acknowledgement that good ideas have to be paired with resource finding.

Josh   I have learned this lesson over the years. The gathering of requirements has to be paired with resources. This shouldn't limit our thinking, but in bringing a list of things we would like to see needs to come with a commitment that, with enough interest, we will take on the job of helping to resource. If there is a sincere interest in the ideas that are developed, I am ready to go to the leadership at Marist and at other institutions to look for resources.

John   I want to stress the importance of increasing Sakai's ability to integrate external tools, so that you can take advantage of externally available applications.

Josh   We can list the capabilities we would like to see and several ways of integrating them into Sakai. I am also interested in usability issues. Due to usability concerns, some things might have to be done through Sakai rather than through integration.

Alan   We could develop some kind of style guide for an integration approach and do some thinking about how to integrate the user experience through integration.

Janice I am looking forward to LTI -2 and the services it can offer in integrating various Sakai tools with externally integrated tools.

John   Gradebook 2 would be most important to integrate.

Josh   To have this group thinking about capabilities without a thought to the technical challenges involved is not productive. One of the things we could do is focus on integration with Gradebook 2. Of all the things that LTI 2 could do, integration with Gradebook 2 could be the top priority. Whether that would be the top technical development priority is a different question.

Neal   One of the most important aspects of the TCC conversation is that there are different ways to think about prioritization. One way is need. But another way is what would sell a provost or leaders in the community who have resources to contribute? One filter to think about would be if I was going to sell this to my provost, how would I pitch it?

Josh   We could address the unfunded mandate issue by coming up with priorities. We could put together a video or a handout for people to use to speak to the provost at their institutions. We could use it on our campus. We could say that we just need one developer for six months. I think we would be successful in getting more resources than we have today.

Nancy   There has to be an intersection between what the learners need and the business case for the provost. What did you have in mind for how to gather information to determine the prioritization?

Josh   I was thinking about the process. We could try to take advantage of the two-to-three-month window. We need to do something quickly. Later on we can do something more long term and strategic. We need to interact with the technical community, especially in relation to the resources required. Maybe we could start with content and see what would be needed there, not with a grand plan, but with some early initial ideas. We could get the TCC thoughts and find out what kind of resources would be needed. We could also collaborate with the accessibility group and/or other groups rather than work in isolation.

John   We could define some broad buckets of functionality, such as automation, integration, and content, and then drill down to capabilities. It might help focus a little better.

Josh   One idea is to use the Sakai Teaching and Learning Design Lenses. In a sense you could look at them as buckets of capabilities. For example, there is a lens called content creation and use. The work on the lenses was useful.

Janice The Learning Design Lenses is a great product. Maybe it didn't get used because of the timing of events having to do with OAE -- and because there was not enough coordination with other groups.

Yitna   I agree that is this is a good idea.

Alan   We could have an award for building on of the features you consider important. There are plenty of students around the world that might enjoy such a competition.

Josh   The same idea was mentioned at conference. We tried once but didn't have enough resources. It could be very useful process. The first step would be to come up with a list of what me might think are good capabilities.

John   Where can we find the lenses?

Josh   Do a Google search for Sakai Learning Design Lenses. We spent a year in a group like this brainstorming all the capabilities we wanted to see in Sakai. We got past 160 rows in a Google spreadsheet and then boiled them down into seven design lenses with accompanying facets. At the time OAE was emerging and the lenses got incorporated. But the original idea was to create lenses that a developer could look through in order to understand what a teaching and learning person would like to see in each lens. The lenses are abstract in order not to be tied to any technology or tool. But if we want to tie them into something more concrete, we may need to modify them.

Alan   We could suggest that translating the lenses into methodology should be an important part of Sakai incubation projects.

Janice I am a member of the incubation working group and would be happy to take this idea to the group.

John   It is difficult to do pure online learning in Sakai. The user context changes too much between content and tools like tests and quizzes. It is too awkward. In Coursera and EdX, the tie-in is much smoother. This is true whether it is done through integration or directly in Sakai. Switching back and forth between Resources and Tests and Quizzes is too difficult.

Josh   We need to clarify that there was originally a tool known as Lessons or Melete and more recently a new tool known as Lesson Builder or Lessons. Marist has been able to embed quizzes within content in Lesson Builder.

Nancy   With self-contained, self-paced teaching and learning, it is different. It is all in kind of a flow. There are some small issues in Lesson Builder, but this is different. Coursera and others have things pop up in the context of the learning rather than the user having to go somewhere else for it.

Josh   I have been using Melete for many years. Lesson Builder has been exciting. It is a big step forward over Lessons (Melete). But it is still an early tool. If others are interested, Marist has launched a MOOC using the Lesson Builder tool. We would be happy to share it.

Nancy   I would be very interested in seeing it. We have had difficulties with the tool.

Yitna   At the University of Virginia, we have tried to improve the situation by creating links within the editor itself so that any text the instructor creates can also be embedded in the same way. You can have a very granular set of activities along with larger chunks or blocks of activities on the same page. We want to give instructors the ability to personalize the pages they create, so that they can control the flow. I am looking at the lenses and would like to see some of these ideas placed in these lenses. These activities are like the leaves on each the nodes (lenses). Lesson Builder is a good place to start.

Josh   I have been thinking about starting with Lesson Builder to see what we could do to enhance it as a Teaching and Learning Group. This is a good time to do this type of brainstorming and to gain a larger community interest.

Janice In situations like these it is important to make sure we are aware of who developed the tool and get them on board.

Alan   We could make a list of what enhancements might be good and have a meeting with Chuck Hedrick, who is the main one developing it. Perhaps he would be willing to make the changes and do so relatively quickly.

Josh   I respect what has been done with Lesson Builder, but focusing on tools in Sakai is always a catch-up situation. Rather than focusing on Sakai, our energy is better directed to develop well defined interfaces to core Sakai services. If you look at Soft Chalk, you can see that they list LMSs and say if you develop your learning in Soft Chalk, we can drop it in. The IMS and SCORM stuff is not yet native to Sakai. These integrated tools need to talk to Gradebook.

Alan   We need to do both. We need to prove our ability to get small changes into Sakai.

Josh   We have two tasks: Getting some much needed changes to tools right away, but then moving onto vision statements about longer term strategies. Part of the second task is to move forward with integrating with third party tools. In the future there will be a high interest and demand.

Neil   Speaking for myself, not the TCC or Sakai, I suggest that another way to look at it would be to say that Sakai is not nothing. It is important to integrate with the outside world, but there has to be a value-add to Sakai. We need to think about what the core tools are that have to work well in Sakai.

Josh   Is Sakai to just be one core integration tool or is there something more to it?

Yitna   This is the direction things are going. We are already integrating many external tools into Sakai. Basic LTI ahs works well and we are hopeful about LTI-2. All I can say is to encourage Chuck Severance to keep going. At the same time, Lesson Builder is one of the best tools that has been produced in Sakai. Both aspects are important. We need to work with Lessons, especially with a common cartridge to export content. The LTI enhancement is moving on its own. We can encourage it, but Lesson Builder is something we can work on right now.

Nancy In looking at the lenses I wonder if it might add value to bring up pain points or issues that can be solved. Instead of enhancements, talk about problems that can be solved or opportunities to move into the next century. Tools are a way to solve issues. But anytime we focus on tools we are on the way to loosing the upper management's interest.

Josh

- There is a need for content authoring publishing tools for faculty to author courses, research, and MOOC content. I am not familiar with an open source tool that is rich in that area. The strategic question would be to enable digital content authoring in higher education. This idea requires a longer term perspective. The first step would be to enhance the Lessons tool.
- Let me suggest a next step. We have mixed interest. Some of us are more interested in Lesson Builder tool feedback. Others are interested in longer term strategy. Because of the window of opportunity, it might be better to start with Lesson Builder. I would be willing to reach out to Chuck Hedrick to see if he is interested in dialog. Chuck actually tried to start a T&L group in Sakai at an earlier date. Later on, we can engage in long term strategy. On our next call we can work on the shorter term strategy of Lesson Builder.

Yitna   Let's look at Lesson Builder by comparing it to the design lenses.

Neil   We can also ask Chuck what he thinks bout our process.

Janice Comparing the design lenses to the tools could improve our thinking about both the tool and the lenses.

Alan   Comparing the design lenses to the tools also brings us further into the community.

Josh   We will also learn a lot from the process as well. Our next call will be on July 17 at the same time. In the meantime, try to think about Lesson Builder in relation to the lenses. We also may be going in to look at Lesson Builder on t