

WHAT JUST HAPPENED – STORIES FROM THE REUSABILITY FRONTLINE

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The promise and opportunity of Reusable Learning Objects (RLOs) has been one of the main discussion points in learning technology circles for a few years now. However, few teachers have had any practical experience of handling issues of reuse such as the employment of RLOs. The UK-based ACETS Project has investigated the reuse of existing, third-party materials in support of anatomy and communication skills teaching by developing a series of grounded case studies of how teachers really do reuse third party materials in their teaching. These case studies include baseline data, reflective diaries, semi-structured interviews and formal descriptions of the learning activities (using aspects of the IMS Learning Design specification).

The findings of the ACETS Project include:

- Teachers are rarely skilled in resource-discovery. Finding good quality materials, indeed where to start can often be a daunting task.
- The Internet is rarely a source of good quality materials for teachers to use freely. What teachers do reuse is often quite surprising!
- Reuse can stimulate innovation and high quality learning. Despite this without motivation and opportunity academics have little impetus or reason to adopt reusability in their teaching practices.
- The specificity of each educational context matters. How we teach and in what context varies greatly and what may be useful in one context is often not so in another.
- Creativity and imagination are the most important qualities and academic needs when trying to reuse materials.
- Neither prior skills nor experience nor good technical support necessarily lead to positive outcomes.
- Teachers are fairly exposed when trying to reuse materials and institutional support structures are often not set up to accommodate new ways of working.

This paper will present the ACETS methodology as a means by which learning activities and the resources they use can be evaluated. In particular it will demonstrate the use of IMS Learning Design as an abstraction model for comparing otherwise disparate learning activities. It will also present the findings of the Project in more detail as a reality-check on what really happens when academics are presented with the opportunity to reuse existing materials in their teaching.

You can view the project and download ACETS exemplars from the ACETS website at <http://www.acets.ac.uk/>