

2010-01-05

Tech Architecture Small Group, January 5, 2009

Attending: Michael Barbouche, Jesse Friedman, Morgan Passiment, Valerie Smothers

Valerie summarized the work to date. The group has compared the current requirements for educational trajectory data to LEAP2A and done an analysis. Almost everything we seek to represent can be represented in LEAP2A using. LEAP2A is a specification for representing e-portfolios that is built on top of the Atom specification for blog feeds. When you open a LEAP2A or Atom file, it usually opens in the browser, displaying the title and content of each entry.

The group took some of our fictional "Pat" student's data and represented it in LEAP2A with Simon's help. This provided a good illustration of how educational trajectory data would look using the LEAP2A specification. Jesse then imported the file into the Mahara e-portfolio system, which leverages LEAP2A. Valerie asked Jesse to talk a little about the import and the implications of his findings.

Jesse commented that the selection tag is a key part of Mahara. It allows portfolio users to select specific portfolio entries for inclusion in a "view" of their portfolio. A view might be compiled to demonstrate a specific competency, for example. That is displayed as a web page when it is exported and includes formatting. If two tags overlap (example - there is a mahara email tag and a leap2a email tag), both tags are included. When importing, Mahara puts everything in generic data holders.

Valerie summarized that while base data can be imported and exported successfully, it would take some work to get Mahara to the point where it could import or export the kind of categorization of activities that the working group is seeking to establish. Jesse agreed that it would take some work, but added that we have an excellent starting point.

Jesse recommended using existing LEAP2A structure where we can.

Jesse added that Simon has talked with a Mahara developer in New Zealand, Penny, and she is testing out import of our test package as well.

Morgan clarified that we are seeking to refine LEAP2A to use it for educational trajectory. She asked Jesse to provide an overview of Mahara.

Jesse explained that Mahara is an open source portfolio package out of New Zealand (www.mahara.org). It is loosely tied to Moodle. It's a very user focused portfolio that lets learners fill out cv information and organize their work. Once you have a web page or "view" of you work, you can share that with others. It has been rolled out with success at UCSF. It is currently in a pilot phase with first year medical students. Everything is uploaded by the user. Some have asked for Mahara to connect to evaluate, the evaluation system, but that is philosophically at odds with the purpose of the portfolio.

Morgan asked if the group would be defining extensions to LEAP2A. Valerie commented that they may; Jesse added that the group would be defining more contextual information, such as how the category tag is used to represent different characteristics of an activity - whether it is leave or personal enrichment, whether it is paid or unpaid, etc.

Valerie commented that the question of whether something should be a category or an extension was one she was still wrestling with. Jesse explained that there is an existing tag called category. We can use that tag for our purposes, or we can create something new that is more specific to our needs. Morgan commented that we are looking for a balance, using the existing structure in an effective way and adding where needed.

Michael commented that many groups are in different places when it comes to their technology. We need to allow all levels to participate in sharing data. Many have no robust infrastructure and will be transmitting at a higher level of granularity.

Morgan emphasized that what buckets are important is the key question. The evidence may come in different formats. The larger group needs help in understanding that is what they need to do.

The group agreed that before proceeding with representing the data, we need to know what the "buckets" (ie categories of activities) are.