

Analyzing and supporting interaction in complex scenarios: the case of DS106

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Summary:

DS106 promotes learners to build a digital identity + personal infrastructure, but how can be the global course infrastructure be improved?

Description:

DS106, a (fortunately-not-so-massive) open online course on digital storytelling offered by University of Mary Washington for both regular students and anybody with an internet connection, pivots on a blog (ds106.us) that aggregates all the activity of the course participants, but without being the centre of anything. Course main goal is to provide people with competences to fully tell their own real-life stories by using new available web 2.0 technologies.

Each participant in the course has to create a digital identity and a personal infrastructure (her own domain, blog, twitter, flickr, youtube and other web 2.0 services) and then start producing and sharing content, but also meta-content: new assignments, tutorials and how-tos, ranking or commenting on other participants' creations, and so. The result is a huge collection of resources (and users), connected to each other, which may be difficult to grasp for newcomers (and teachers as well), especially when the number of users and resources increases after each course edition. Visualizing all the activity around DS106 is not a trivial issue.

Interaction in such a complex scenario implies receiving information from multiple channels and maintaining a personal collection of resources, as the course has a very flexible structure so students can focus on a particular subject according to their interests (i.e. visual assignments exposed through flickr) and/or enter and leave the course at any moment. Regarding people, maintaining a network of colleagues implies maintaining multiple identities through the ds106 site in itself, but also twitter, blogs, and so. The totality of DS106 is a very complex learning scenario which is the result of hundreds of personal infrastructures hooked up to the ds106 blog.

We would like to discuss how interactions in this networking infrastructure can be analyzed in order to support all the elements (students, resources, comments, assignments, etc.) so additional services can be devised and implemented without interfering with the natural flow of the course. These services could include assessment, network activity visualization, recommendation systems and reputation schemes (for both students and resources), among others. Basically, knowing who is who and what is what in the whole DS106 universe, as well as the relationships between whos and whats.

Nevertheless, adding new services to a learning scenario cannot be accomplished from a top-down approach only. Final users (in this case, DS106 students) need to be taken into account, as their needs may not coincide with course designers. Users may be reluctant

to use a recommendation system if it is too intrusive or may negatively perceive a reputation scheme, so it is very important to design these additional services from a end-user (i.e. bottom-up) perspective.

In this session we would like to discuss with other participants in the DS106 course as well as with experts in social networks, open repositories, blogs and other web 2.0 services the possibilities of visualizing such a learning scenario and the technical details of a potential practical implementation. Following the basic premise “if it works, don’t touch it”, how can we extend DS106 to incorporate new services and user requirements?

Prezi presentation: <http://prezi.com/lto-kzmoip6k/analyzing-and-supporting-interaction-in-complex-scenarios-the-case-of-ds106/>

Audio: <http://openedconference.org/2012/program/archive-of-sessions/day-3/day-3-1030am-c485/1>

Alan Levine’s Reflection: <http://cogdogblog.com/2012/10/22/ds106-complex-universe/>



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