

Rationale

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ABOUT VOICES RATIONALE

What is the pedagogical foundation of Voices groups?

We conceive Voices' groups as an adaptation of the business concept of communities of practice (CoP) to the field of Puerto Rican Studies. In essence, CoP are "process of social learning that occurs and shared sociocultural practices that emerge and evolve when people who have common goals interact as they strive towards those goals." You can read more about this concept in Wikipedia at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communities_of_practice [2]. There are some defining characteristics that make CoP a very useful mechanism to articulate scholars interactions among themselves and with the more general public. From the cited page:

"The knowledge that is shared and learned in communities of practice is social capital. People connect at various levels and across departments, both internally and externally of the company or organization, without the constraints of a formal company structure. As people connect with each other they are able to share their expertise and learn from other members. Benefits include the following:

- Problem solving
- Developing new capabilities
- Leveraging best practices
- Standardizing practices
- Time savings
- Increase in talent
- Avoiding mistakes
- Creating new knowledge

People are the best conduits of information. Studies have shown that workers spend a third of their time looking for information and is five times more likely to turn to a coworker rather than an explicit source of information (book, manual, or database). Time is saved by conferring with members of a CoP. People have tacit knowledge which is not found in a book. For example, one person can share the best way to handle a situation based on his experiences, which may enable the other person to avoid mistakes and shorten the learning curve. In a CoP, members can openly discuss and brainstorm about a project which can lead to new capabilities. The type of information that is shared and learned in a CoP is boundless.

CoPs are usually formed within a single discipline in order to focus efforts in sharing knowledge, solving problems, or innovative ventures. Given the complex nature of the technological and global age in which organizations function, multidisciplinary participation provides an advantage in these efforts because of the expanded focus and even holistic goal that can be achieved. These communities are much less common than single disciplinary communities of practice, but are growing in importance in developing scientific fields in which knowledge from one branch is unable to advance without contributions from other branches.”

What is the pedagogical foundation of asynchronous learning?

Here is what Wikipedia says about this pedagogical approach: “Asynchronous learning is a student-centered teaching method that uses online learning resources to facilitate information sharing outside the constraints of time and place among a network of people[1]. Asynchronous learning is based on constructivist theory, a student-centered approach that emphasizes the importance of peer-to-peer interactions[2]. This approach combines self-study with asynchronous interactions to promote learning, and it can be used to facilitate learning in traditional on-campus education, distance education, and continuing education. This combined network of learners and the electronic network in which they communicate are referred to as an asynchronous learning network[3]. The online learning resources used to support asynchronous learning include email, electronic mailing lists, threaded conferencing systems, online discussion boards, wikis, and blogs. Course management systems such as Blackboard, WebCT, Moodle, and Sakai, have been developed to support online interaction, allowing users to organize discussions, post and reply to messages, and upload and access multimedia [4]. These asynchronous forms of communication are sometimes supplemented with synchronous components, including text and voice chat, telephone conversations, videoconferencing, and even meetings in virtual spaces such as Second Life, where discussions can be facilitated among groups of students [5].”

References:

1. Mayadas, F. (1997, March). Asynchronous learning networks: a sloan foundation perspective. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 1.
2. Wu, D., Bieber, M., & Hiltz, S. (2008, Fall). Engaging students with constructivist participatory examinations in asynchronous learning networks. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 19(3), 321-330.
3. Mayadas, F. (1997, March). Asynchronous learning networks: a sloan foundation perspective. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 1.
4. Bourne, J.R. (1998, September). Net-learning: strategies for on-campus and off-campus network-enabled learning. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 2(2).
5. Bourne, J.R. (1998, September). Net-learning: strategies for on-campus and off-campus network-enabled learning. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 2(2).

Why would encouraging and supporting communities of practice be beneficial to the field of Puerto Rican Studies?

As an area studies, Puerto Rican studies as a field is both disciplinary in the sense that there is a body of knowledge that is specific to the field, with shared assumptions about a body of knowledge and dedicate faculty and departments across the country, and inter-disciplinary as the method and training of its faculty includes multiple other disciplines (thus the designation as a specialized area studies). Voices is a structured interaction of the field of Puerto Rican studies, and promotes the formation of affinity groups within the field to expand and share knowledge, thus an experiment in collective learning within an academic discipline. In the final analysis, Voices is an application of a business approach to organizational learning to an academic context where knowledge production, use and applications are more diffused (i.e., there is void of formal organizational structures) and competitive (i.e., other disciplines offer more regular contexts for faculty interactions, funding opportunities, and publication outlets).

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What is the role of OpenCourseWare in Voices?

Voices intend to promote sharing of curriculum and other teaching material following MIT's OpenCourseWare model. According to Wikipedia "MIT OpenCourseWare (MIT OCW) is an initiative of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to put all of the educational materials from its undergraduate- and graduate-level courses online, free and openly available to anyone, anywhere, by the end of the year 2007. MIT OpenCourseWare can be considered as a large-scale, web-based publication of MIT course materials."

Through Voices, Centro joins this growing movement in academia. Centro librarians will support faculty at Hunter, CUNY and other Puerto Rican studies departments and faculty to post their courses in Voices. All Centro-owned materials will be made available free of charge to those who become members of Voices, including the general public. Membership will be simply a registration which request that the user follows Centro licensing agreement for the use of the material.

>According to Wikipedia "OpenCourseWare, or OCW, is a term applied to course materials created by universities and shared freely with the world via the internet. The OCW movement began at MIT with the launch of MIT OpenCourseWare in October 2002. Since then, a number of universities have created OCW projects, some of which have been funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. According to the website of the OCW Consortium, an OCW project:

- is a free and open digital publication of high quality educational materials, organized as courses.
- is available for use and adaptation under an open license.
- does not typically provide certification or access to instructors.

MIT's experience suggest that "The main challenge in implementing the OCW initiative had not been faculty resistance, but rather, the logistical challenges presented by determining ownership and obtaining publication permission for the massive amount of intellectual property items that are embedded in the course materials of faculty, in addition to the time and technical effort required to convert the educational materials to an online format. Copyright in MIT OpenCourseWare material remains with MIT, members of its faculty, or its students."

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