Curator, creator and integrator

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Abstract

In this research-in-progress paper the focus is on the three roles of educators, namely, that of curator, creator and integrator with regards to student-content interaction in the Department of Economics at the University of South Africa. We consider and demonstrate how these roles are played out in an open distance learning environment using the derivation of the IS curve as an example. We show that, if the aim is to provide students with a map that he or she can use to explore – without getting lost – and reach his or her destination, it not only involves the location and evaluation of content available on the World Wide Web (WWW), but also the creation of content and the integration of this content.

Key terms: content creator, curated lists, curatorial teacher, derivation of IS curve, integrator, student-content interaction, vodcasts.
Introduction

Stephen Downes (2010) identifies 23 roles for educators in the 21st century. The focus of this paper is on three of these roles, namely, that of curator, creator and integrator with regards to student-content interaction in the Department of Economics at the University of South Africa.

Curator

George Siemens (2008:16) describes the role of a curatorial teacher as someone that

... acknowledges the autonomy of learners, yet understands the frustration of exploring unknown territories without a map. A curator is an expert learner. Instead of dispensing knowledge, he creates spaces in which knowledge can be created, explored, and connected. While curators understand their field very well, they don't adhere to traditional in-class teacher-centric power structures. A curator balances the freedom of individual learners with the thoughtful interpretation of the subject being explored. While learners are free to explore, they encounter displays, concepts and artefacts representative of the discipline. Their freedom to explore is unbounded. But when they engage with subject matter, the key concepts of a discipline are transparently reflected through the curatorial actions of the teacher.

Jeff Gobb (2010) advises lifelong learners to find a good curator. He then describes the attribute of a good curator as someone that is skilled at:

- locating and evaluating valuable content.
- organising and connecting content so that it is as accessible as possible.
- creating and re-purposing content when it adds to the underlying value.
- capitalising on the Social Web to build connections and context.
- building trusted relationships with learners and other curators.
- designing learning experiences (in a much broader sense than traditional approaches).

To answer the question of what the implications are of taking on the role of a curatorial teacher in economics, we used as our focus the teaching of the IS-LM model, a leading theoretical economic model within macroeconomics.

The first task we set ourselves was to locate and evaluate the content available on the WWW. A Google search of the term “IS-LM model” returned 641 000 results. When the search was narrowed down to the “derivation of the IS curve” (a threshold concept), it yielded 17 600 results. These resources can roughly be classified in the following broad categories:

Table 1: Categories of resources on the WWW
## Publishers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Textbook</th>
<th>Interactive content</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Various</th>
<th>Lecture notes</th>
<th>Slides</th>
<th>Video clips</th>
<th>Blogs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though the majority of resources from educational institutions are open and available, the usability thereof is constrained by the context in which it is used. These resources are usually in support of a face-to-face lecture. The absence of this lecture limits the re-usability of this material in a different context. However, video clips showed some promise and it was decided to investigate it further.

Most of the video clips were located on YouTube and we were able to identify 10 appropriate video clips. This enabled us to compile a curated video clip list for the derivation of the IS curve. The list provides the following information for each video clip: who the creators are; what it is about; the approach followed; why it was included in the list (a very important factor); and, lastly, a link to the video clip on the WWW.

In the next part of the paper we will show you how the information contained in the list could be used as part of teaching.

### Creating content for e-learning

The development of electronic content material was an exercise in “learning by doing”, pushing the boundaries of institutional limitations, trying to reconcile rigour and relevance, developing electronic resources in a print-based environment, dealing with the ever-present connectivity question whilst trying to keep the student body and faculty members on board.

The content material was developed over a number of years and ranged from repacking print-based material in an interactive web format, developing knowledge granules, animated voice over lectures, a DVD and, currently, the development of vodcasts and curated lists.

As these resources were always regarded as add-ons to existing print-based materials, two major problems came to the fore. Firstly, students tend to view additional material as material “that can be ignored” and, consequently, underutilised these resources. Secondly, the study material is in different formats and fragmented: some study material is in a print format; some are on a CD-ROM, some on a DVD and some other material are on myUnisa.

### Integration

To address these problems we are currently working on a way to integrate the various resources.
Figure 1 is a screen capture of the landing page for the derivation of the IS curve. The resources on the left are populated with data that can be obtained from curated lists. This forms the exploration part of the student’s journey.

Figure 1: Screen capture of landing page.

**Derivation of the IS curve**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By the end of this section you should be able to derive the IS curve with the aid of diagrams.</td>
<td>Derivation of the IS curve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Investment and level of output</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IS curve</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pre-knowledge**

Before you attempt this section make sure you have a good understanding of the goods market and the investment function.

**Pre-test**

Take the pre-test before you start.

**Textbook reading**

Read the following extract before you start.

Figures 2 and 3 are screen captures of what the student will encounter once he or she clicked on the continue button. The emphasis is now on the key content material that the students needs to master and the role the lecturer plays is one of the “sage on the stage”, in other words, it is the lecturer that selects the material and determines how it is presented to the student.

Figure 2: Screen capture of content page for derivation of the IS curve.

**Derivation of an IS curve**

**Data**

**Related**

**Image**

**Power point**

**Figure 3: Screen capture of the content page for derivation of the IS curve.**
The content is in different formats (interactive, text and video clip) and is complementary to each other and not simply a substitute for one another. For instance, the interactive content derives the IS curve using symbols, while the derivation in the video clip is done using a numerical example, and in the text it is broken up into a number of steps. In compiling the curated list, emphasis was placed on the requirement that the material must complement each other, since this is where most value is added.

**Conclusion**

As economists we are trained in dealing with the scarcity problem of satisfying unlimited needs with limited means. This is in stark contrast with our experience as developing curators as we attempted to reconcile unlimited means with limited needs. The challenge, thus, remains: how to provide the student with a map that he or she can use to explore – without getting lost – and reach his or her destination.

**References**

