



Exploring Interdisciplinarity in the Arts and Humanities: the OpenAcademy Teaching and Learning Community

Grahame T. Bilbow

The Higher Education Academy (United Kingdom)

Grahame.Bilbow@heacademy.ac.uk

The world is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. Academic researchers are increasingly turning their attention to the fertile regions that lie between the traditional boundaries of disciplines. University teachers are finding that the disciplinary furrows they plough are sometimes inadequate to prepare their students for later life. Students are increasingly realising the need to prepare themselves for a world where they may have to move between traditional disciplines over the course of their working lives.

This paper explores the potential for building and promoting an interdisciplinary community that is capable of enhancing university teaching and learning across the Arts and Humanities.

The paper reports on **OpenAcademy**, an online community resource for university teachers, recently piloted by the UK's Higher Education Academy. Although initially intended to encourage interdisciplinarity among university teachers in the STEM cluster, including the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, this paper reports on what we have learnt from **OpenAcademy** and the potential value of such a resource for university teachers outside STEM, namely within the Arts and Humanities.

The **OpenAcademy** STEM community has been built upon a foundation consisting of three components: (i) channels of communication to facilitate on-going synchronous and asynchronous engagement between those involved in STEM teaching and learning, primarily practitioners and educational researchers, but also postgraduate students on PG Cert programmes), including guest blogs, user reviews, links to Twitter and Facebook, and so on, (ii) a bank of learning materials to support practitioners across STEM disciplines, including those new to teaching (a learning toolkit, webinars, and links to other resources), and (iii) a searchable cross-disciplinary archive of authoritative documents in STEM. The **OpenAcademy** community is adaptive to the user, in much the same way as Amazon and other user-centred communities are.

Our findings suggest that the **OpenAcademy** community encourages university teachers to develop an interdisciplinary orientation that successfully complements the disciplinary orientation teachers tend to adopt by default. We are optimistic that this more holistic orientation has the potential to improve the quality of university teaching and learning across the Arts and Humanities cluster, as well as within particular disciplines.