Formative, andragogic, interactive reflection (fair) assessment tool : A development project addressing transferrable learning recognition from open life-wide co-operative engagements

Potts, RM and Haywood, PJ

FORMATIVE, ANDRAGOGIC, INTERACTIVE REFLECTION (FAIR) ASSESSMENT TOOL: A DEVELOPMENT PROJECT ADDRESSING TRANSFERRABLE LEARNING RECOGNITION FROM OPEN LIFE-WIDE CO-OPERATIVE ENGAGEMENTS

R. Potts[1], P. Haywood[2]

[1] *University of Salford (UNITED KINGDOM)*
[2] *Middlesex University (UNITED KINGDOM)*

Abstract

Current economic problems have reinforced the already strong sense of uncertainty and risk associated with the end of classic models of public education; potentially limiting opportunities and educational access to the detriment of social trajectories. As digital technologies become pervasive in society. HEIs have an opportunity for expanding engagements and promoting new partnerships of learning and assessment. We aim to collaborate with community and employer led initiatives to create innovative and flexible learning assessment protocols. The FAIR assessment tool provides a progression framework incorporating the recognition of prior learning, initial profiling, personal development mapping, variable assessment mechanisms and routes to accreditation including achievement from real life and work based experiences.

The digital FAIR assessment tool will be an easy to access portfolio building and personal profiling space providing access to supported self-assessment and stepping stones to educational resources and qualifications. Profiling and self-assessment is a means by which to capture experience and its learning impact and value the existing aptitudes of the individual. The aim is to avert failure and build on the existing strengths of the individual or enhance their skills, competencies and attitudinal habits.

The FAIR assessment project will develop a co-operative approach to designing and delivering affordable and accessible education, learning and skills development suitable for post-16 engagement. This context centred experiential learning framework provides a comprehensive open curriculum shell that can absorb or adapt to negotiated and participant derived content.

This project aims to develop confidence in the inexperienced learner; recognising their independent strengths, capitalising on their learning assets and moving forward in their personal journey towards improved educational rewards.

The initiative will have a direct impact on communities in Salford through collaboration with the Salford Community Learning Trust, the City Council, the University, Salford City College and various communityled networks. It has the potential to replicate its processes and sytems in other educational partnerships and is currently corresponding to parallel development in other UK contexts; Bradford, Middlesex and Glasgow.

The combined aim of this practice will:

- Establish a broad and inclusive collaborative framework to review and adapt the digital badges.
- Create a review process that will develop robust systems of 360 degree assessment incorporating personal, peer, associate, mentor, employer and educator input.
- Test a comprehensive progression framework and learner managed portfolio system with individual participants in a supportive and networked environment.

The method of delivery places emphasis on peer to peer guidance, facilitator feedback and employer consultation to develop the functionality and design of the on-line tool. The FAIR assessment too is conceived as a modelled framework constructed from open source software that allows accessible transfer and widespread usability. What is proposed is a reflective and continuous learning tool that will allow the learner to improve and refine their own, personalised educational information personal narrative and expression.

Keywords: Open Mutual Learning, Co-operative Education, Community Learning, Learning Recognition, Open Badges, Community partnership.

1   INTRODUCTION

This paper elaborates on evolving practice; a long-term project in development that seeks to open up educational opportunity and learning recognition to a class or social group of people who have become increasingly ignored and excluded by the power brokers of democracy. The project employs an approach to citizen led innovation where multiple voices and influencers feed into what is, essentially a design problem. The initial goal is to succeed in producing open source digital tools for local adoption that, nonetheless, have wide acceptance and transferrable application. The purpose of these digital tools is to capture, qualify and clarify learning benefit from active social contribution and rhizomatic exchanges of wisdom, creativity and experience in co-operative networks.

The paper will offer some local context and a degree of outline to the national perspective affecting communities experiencing exclusion. We have purposefully sought to avoid well worn labels and terms such as 'hard to reach' or 'vulnerable communities' as our experience of working with a very wide range of stakeholders is that dominant cultures actively impose values that demand change rather than respecting relevant practice and activism that has evolved in physical and social spaces over time. We would make the claim that there are no 'hard to reach communities', rather that there are groups of people who are easy to overlook or ignore and the systems that are provided are poorly communicated and therefore difficult to access. As much as the democratically elected state may seek to further empower their voters, at the same time they effectively apply standards to the whole of society that are confusing, deliberating and very often lack clarity and transparency in the way that they apply to individual aspirations with different priorities other than social mobility.

The second half of the paper describes our progress in designing technology tools that may be adopted by our colleagues within the co-operative networks that we work with and then adopted or adjusted by others. We make no current conclusion other than to emphasise that these are outcomes from practice at the moment. The project will have succeeded once we have found and secured functioning systems that attract use from, for example; PhD students, long-term unemployed, primary school pupils, ex-offender networks, local allotment societies, asylum seeker networks, and any active communities that need to offer learning recognition as a benefit to their members.

1.1   Background context

An acute experience of many former industrial cities and regions is a structural shift towards the knowledge economy, which itself is a truly global phenomenon. The key question is how to ensure the knowledge economy is a fair economy. During prosperous times in the UK, until the recession in 2008, many neighbourhoods remained almost untouched by the wider success and opportunities created in high growth city-regions, commercial hubs and professional enterprises. The onset of recession has made employment prospects for young people much bleaker, with a double disadvantage for those from low-income neighbourhoods. Within this context, and specifically related to a realignment with a prioritised knowledge economy, there are a number of factors that provide a rationale for any University's desire to work closely and co-operatively with the public sector of the City and proximal region and, most importantly, with social and interest communities operating in the third sector. In reference to the Salford context, the University is, by default, a permeable organism (composed of and reacting to independent and free thinkers) that feeds from knowledge exchange and creativity emerging from associated external communities and individuals. In constructing this interpretation there is an acknowledgement that the dynamic relationships referenced have an ecology running counter to the traditional expectations of a higher education institution: that of a hierarchical and homeostatic foundation of knowledge capital.

Within Salford, as with other urban conurbations the harsh realities associated with post-industrialisation invite direct action as a means of combating disadvantage and sourcing alternative strategies leading to change. Documented evidence supports a link between educational access and attainment and improved career opportunities, earning potential, effective citizenship and life choices. The purpose of inclusion and participation in education is thus to enable communities in all sectors to share experience and knowledge and thereby impact positively on public health, wellbeing and economic contribution. Yet gains in widening participation have not been comprehensive. Whilst the University has striven to form positive and compassionate relations with its near neighbours many communities are taking the lead; reacting to drivers for change by forming their own working partnerships and acting co-operatively to develop their own capacity and enlarge the pool of future activists and social entrepreneurs. One question that institutions, and specifically higher education institutions, might need to consider for the future is how they can respond positively to this form of

'radical democracy'; this is especially important when they have the potential to catalyse, initiate and enhance activism. The University has a relationship with and inspires life-wide learning initiatives but how do we capitalise and grow our presence and effectiveness in this area and how do we realistically and effectively value the contribution of all?

1.2 Salford City Area and impressions of poverty

1.2.1 Local knowledge

Salford was the very heart of the 19th Century industrial revolution and pre-dates Manchester in terms of its regional importance. The development of Salford is attributed to a shared tradition of domestic cloth production and textile manufacture together with the surrounding area during the industrial revolution. In 1894 the Manchester ship canal and the Salford Docks were opened, and the cotton trade flourished. The commercial centres of Manchester and Liverpool have since dominated Salford in terms of shear scale of population and global reputation but Salford, as a concept, remains central to the identity of the region and its citizens are rightly proud and fiercely independent.

In the decades following the Second World War there was a significant economic and population decline in Salford. During 1970s the docks as industrial ports fell into decline and were abandoned in 1982. Having purchased the docks in 1984 the Salford City Council started a significant regeneration of the docks at Salford Quays. Now it is commercial and residential area that includes several cultural institutions that tend to surround the recent high value development of MediaCityUK as the major platform for regional regeneration.

Salford has a population of 233,600 and data demonstrates that over 27% of the population have no formal qualifications, rising to 38% in some of the lower super output areas [1]. This data relating to areas of multiple-deprivation has not significantly changed in 10 years, during a time of major public investment with the development of Salford Quays and MediaCityUK. Labour Government investments into; formal education, community education, learning trusts and adult qualifications took the national average for no qualifications from 36% down to 22% in the period between 2001 and 2011 [1]. A similar impact was felt generally across Salford where the rate fell from 42% to 27% [1] and yet the wards most in need have defied that improvement. Greater Manchester has more people who have low or no skills than anywhere in the UK.

The unemployment rate in Salford currently stands at 16.7%. 39% of the population is, however, described as economically inactive in Census (2001) [1] data. 38.2% of Salford's eligible working population is claiming a key government benefit and a large proportion of these are claiming ESA and incapacity benefit. Youth unemployment is especially high in the region, as generations of unemployment have taken their toll on work ethics and skills, contributing to Salford's status as one of the most economically deprived regions in the UK. Salford is the 18th most deprived of the 324 English local authorities [1]. In the most deprived areas 6% households use loan sharks, 20% households had no bank account, and 50% households pay fuel bills by a pre-payment method.

1.2.2 Confidence and learning conflicts

Economic transition and turbulence has exacerbated the sense of uncertainty and challenge facing inclusive public services, specifically limiting opportunities for educational access to the detriment of individual social trajectories. In response, voluntary sector organisations generally need to grow their engagement and reach, seek partnerships with public institutions, interact with communities at distance, collaborate with multiple agencies and create fresh opportunities in life-wide learning in order to raise the aspirations of both active and inactive citizens. There is a danger that recession, austerity and diminished social services will lead to ever deepening trauma for individuals and complex families resulting in further isolation from areas of social capacity building such as qualifications based learning. Breaking this cycle of exclusion is a priority for many local community driven initiatives where the option of partnering with professional institutions offers hope in realising and developing improving social capital. The basic principle is that investing in citizen led social contribution via supporting its inventions and recognising the learning that it generates will improve the momentum and sustainable trajectory of community leadership and deepen the impact of independent local activism and social enterprise. Embedding a tailored approach to problem solving for the individual that cuts across organisational differences is the means by which those citizens will begin to control and determine their own rate of access and inclusion.

The Co-operative Learners Action Network (CLaN) platform is a means of creating inward investment by capitalising on the contributions of local citizens and organisations to sustainable livelihoods and

informal welfare in City Regions. The main focus of benefit is the active individuals who dedicate their own time and resources to the future security, cohesion, culture and prosperity of their communities and make an active contribution to the neighbourhoods they can reach. The programme seeks to encourage; knowledge exchange, practice sharing, educational experience and personal value as a consequence of active citizenship. The aim is to co-create a network and forum through which co-operation, collaboration and individual need may correspond. There is an embedded challenge for everybody involved; to start to recognize and articulate the impacts from their actions and learn from their experiences. The digital realm supporting the platform will be structured entirely from open source architecture and draws down support from the local Universities, Tenants and neighbourhood networks, Union Learn, Mozilla, BBC Innovation, and City Councils.

1.2.3 Where, when and how to get ahead

The purpose of a flexible to access CLaN is to respond positively to individual circumstances and the complex lives (Fig.1) of those who find it hard to reach standard educational resources and provision.

It is necessary to appreciate, understand and take account of the variety of contexts influencing an individual's potential pro-active engagement with learning (Fig.1). The purpose of a flexible and access learning framework is to respond positively to individual circumstances.

LEARNER ENGAGEMENT SCOPE

CONTEXT	Access	Employability	Career Boost	Well-Being	Independence
EMPLOYMENT ENVIRONMENT	Engaging with qualifications or learning progression.	Enhancing both the role and flexibility within organisation.	Accelerated progression or routes to personal leadership.	Enhanced vocational satisfaction & 'life-wide' skills.	Routes to leadership or self-determination.
WORKLESS	Developing routes into training.	Access to experience or relevant volunteering.	Step-up or step-into experience at an equivalent or higher level.	Health benefits & motivation.	Personal choice & responsibility.
INDEPENDENT LEARNING	Personalised and bespoke development.	Business development & diversification.	Unique capacity and professionalism or service.	Motivation and future proofing.	Growing capacity and unique advantage.
3rd / 4th Age (retired)	Engagement with relevant level skills & personal development.	Volunteering or civic role capacity building	Enhancing impact from volunteering or personal goals.	Health benefits and active citizenship.	Initiating fresh enterprise or activities.

Fig 1 The table demonstrates some of the complexity behind the range of learner motives.

The engaged curriculum is one that encourages the student to manage and map all of their learning experiences and to view their progression through the lens of a balance of: creative experience, skills development, theoretical knowledge, contextual practice, enterprise and personal development. Within these six developmental strands the learner can pursue; specialist learning, joint curriculum learning, experience or work initiated learning and a skills centred approach to learning (Fig. 2), all of which promote the option of progression irrespective of differing and distinctive qualification frameworks and awarding bodies so long as the actual learning is evidenced and thoroughly endorsed by experience givers and peers.

EDUCATIONAL LINKS AND PRACTICES			
OPEN ACCESS/ ENGAGE & ENTERTAIN	FLEXIBLE PROVISION	PARTNER WORKING & COLLABORATION	INTERNATIONAL REACH: LOCAL TO GLOBAL
Informal engagement and participation 3rd and 4th Age learning and knowledge exchange. Public Lectures and Interactions. Open Source Knowledge Archive Open Source, Research Observatory.	Voluntary Association. Work / Experience Based Learning. Supported Work Initiated Learning. Distance provision. Skills based training. Short/bite size programmes.	(Lifelong learning) Alumni development, Enterprise, Communities, Learning, Network, institutional collaborations. Knowledge Transfer / Exchange. Validation and Accreditation Real World Research & Solutions.	Digitally Enabled Teaching Collaborations. International Exchange Agreements International & European Networking. Global Solutions: Placements, Research projects, Partnerships, etc.
Improved/relevant learner Experience - Flexible Learning/Teaching Delivery/Open Learning - Quality and Flexibility of Learning Progression - Public Engagement programme - Enabling Networks - Lifelong Learning support - after-care - mentoring and payback engagement.			

Fig. 2 Example of a diverse range of learning experiences.

The project seeks to design and launch an interactive online environment promoting learning through experience and building life-wide skills within co-operative learning networks. The purpose is to support approaches to mentoring and learning guidance, peer to peer knowledge exchange and flexible education and training by enhancing personal development rewards and learning recognition derived from active citizenship, cultural participation and social contribution. The specific target audiences are people currently accessing the support of this and other agencies for basic needs; help into employment, health and well-being, community capacity building, and active volunteering. People on the margins of social inclusion with complex needs. Therefore the development of bespoke and tailored action plans that meet the individual's need and specific circumstances is crucial. The project develops open to use tools promoting negotiated learning and personal development through any source of mentoring and advice. The aim is to build on the strengths and assets of the individual as a means of overcoming issues and barriers to engagement. The main thrust is individual suitability and relevance; highlighting the recognition of prior experience or wisdom and offering opportunities for contributing positively to Community Philosophy programmes and Schools of Participation for the sake of personal and onward development. The goal is to link the many sources of agency within the neighbourhood, city and region by enabling the individual to design their own access and pathway into participation.

2   METHOD: CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING AND ACTIVISM

The core theme of our joint initiative with communities is the design of a unique and innovative CLaN, that promotes learning by experience, is accessible to all and satisfies individual needs. The vision offers every person the opportunity to achieve by providing a learning environment where individuals can develop long term support and a learning plan that is valuable within the context of their circumstances, endorses all forms of learning and inspires them to develop fresh goals and achieve their purpose. They are temporary, member led, communities that develop educational recognition from meaningful activity. They are a means by which the learning that takes place through employment, community enterprise, social activism and good citizenship can be recorded and valued.

They provide an adaptable structure for experience led learning to suit the needs of diverse communities of interest. They make use of an open assessment framework and digital portfolio to issue transferrable credits and clarify access routes to qualifications. They promote learning exchange through a single hub resource that signposts opportunity, relevant support and services.

The project will:

- Consult with; community leaders, employers, career services, education providers and informal learners regarding the design of a one-stop advice and guidance resource.
- Consult on and design an intuitive interactive digital profiling and portfolio environment that will support the individual and their advisors in tailoring their own access and development plans.
- Create a networked digital infrastructure to enable co-operative exchange and promote social learning.
- Design digital tools for; recognising prior learning, initial individual profiling, personal development mapping and pro-folio representation.
- Deliver training on digital literacies and use of the infrastructure.
- Pilot the project within neighbourhoods close to each learning partner of in preparation for role out and dissemination.
- Enhance current initiatives led by community activists that link citizen experience between social housing neighbourhoods and develop learning exchange and knowledge sharing.
- Create an integrated tailor made approach to combat poverty.

2.1 Priorities for learning partnerships

- A new Adult Learning Framework for Open Curriculum design and co-production.
- Radicalising access to learning and education through real-world engagement.
- A new models of partnership with employers & communities supporting learner progression.
- Flexible delivery in part-time and experience based (life-wide) learning.
- Affordability and financing solutions.

We can open up access to formal qualifications for new categories of learners, ranging from: young adults from families and communities with low participation rates in continuing learning, to activists and volunteers motivated by their own citizenship, to those experience unemployment, redundancy or career shift, to mature and third age learners entering or re-entering education for qualifications.

We can aim for fully inclusive educational access and value for adults post compulsory education. The primary focus is the invention of a framework to positively support regular and sustained educational engagements with adults effective within their workplace, community or home. Such a learning model is primarily targeted at individuals and communities currently remote from education. It may be used by those actively pursuing personal and professional development in the community or work place. It has to be an approach that supports skills recognition and conversion for those redirecting their career or vocation or deciding to realise learning assets from their accrued experiences. The model and framework for flexible real-world community education has to build confidence, raise aspirations, stimulate learning exchange and translate experience into recognised learning. It needs to offer a means of progressing into formal learning as well as a means of experiencing learning gain in any specialist field through a simple and overarching part-time model that makes use of the learner's context and life-wide activities as liberatory practices supporting their knowledge acquisition, evolving learner identity and University engagement.

2.2 Open and FAIR Learning Recognition

The project pilots the development of an on-line 360 degree assessment environment integrating work experience and life-wide skills. The purpose is to explore fresh approaches to support learning outside of academia and, as a consequence, build confidence, aspirations and recognition of experience in life-long learning environments. This has immediate potential for Work Based Learning frameworks and part-time modes of study or continuing learning but increasingly relates to added value realised through extra-curricular engagement, student volunteering and work placement. The solution captures diverse forms of evidence and aligns learning outcomes with authentic contexts, balancing self-reflection with peer testimonial, employer approval and educator evaluation.

The collaboration brings together partners from: the Institute of Work Based Learning at Middlesex University, the Centre for Lifelong Learning at Strathclyde Unviersity, Student Life at the University of Salford, the Centre for Participation Studies at Bradford University. There are two immediately relevant fields; those of the Social Innovation and Pedagogic Practice. The intention is to model methodologies from this project suitable for roll out in external contexts for learning across discipline interests.

The FAIR assessment tool is a user centred approach to assessments and on-line portfolios in which participants will be able to showcase their skills, provide evidence of their competences, and profile their aptitudes with the support of digital media. It is an interactive and flexible space where academia and members of the community can congregate and learn from and with each other to offer better opportunities for progression into qualifications.

The project offers opportunities for personal portfolio development leading to a single, recognisable, assessment and progression framework that maps into formal education and training but also allows the beneficiary to control their rate of progression and future direction and the diverse qualities in their experience.

2.3   Credit where credits due

Profiling and self-assessment is a means by which to capture experience and its learning impact and value the existing aptitudes of the individual. From this point the structure, expectations and content of learning opportunities presented or sought by the individual may focus on either building their existing strengths or balancing their skills, competencies and attitudinal habits. Improvement, success or achievement may be captured via digital badges rewarded through self-assessment, employer assessment, educator assessment or all three. The accumulation of digital badges prepares the individual for accreditation into formal or structured learning when required and develops the evidence based portfolio of the individual in preparation for appropriate future employment. The purpose of a flexible to access learning framework is to respond positively to individual circumstances and the complex lives of those who find it hard to reach standard educational resources and provision.

The framework has been designed so that it may absorb learning experiences, evidence of learning and very different inputs. More importantly, it is designed to grow the individuals personal control over the way they might balance their options, manage their portfolio and express their abilities. The initial assessment of any individual learning or achievements is, inevitably, a self-assessment and the framework accommodates for that in the way that evidence is described and through developing approach to assessments within the framework by use of digital badges. Profiling should enable both the learner and their potential mentor or tutor to: gain an awareness of their individual and personal learning needs, gain a full awareness of prior and actual learning, decide priorities in terms of development and progression opportunities, decide priorities in relation to the context for further learning and experience.

The project has so far assumed that flexible engagement and progression into learning will be best supported by the adoption of Digital Badges, adjusted for adoption appropriate to our needs. This feature will demand a dedicated facility within the learning environment.

"A badge is a symbol or indicator of accomplishment, skill, quality or interest. Badges can be used to represent achievements, communicate successes, set goals, and motivate behaviors."

They can support learning that happens in new ways and new spaces beyond the traditional classroom. These include online courses, short programs, work experiences and life skills. Digital Badges can capture and reward a diverse range of skills and competencies and can be managed through self-assessment, employer assessment or educator/trainer assessment or a mixture of all three. One of their key benefits is that they can link informal learning into formal programmes and facilitate the accreditation of learning or experience (Fig. 3 and Fig.4). They can cover hard skills like completing a course, mastering a specific programming language or math concept, soft skills like critical thinking, communication or collaboration, community recognition like reputation and status, new skills like digital literacies, specific, granular accomplishments or activities like leaving helpful comments for other learners, logging into an online learning web site for 10 consecutive days"
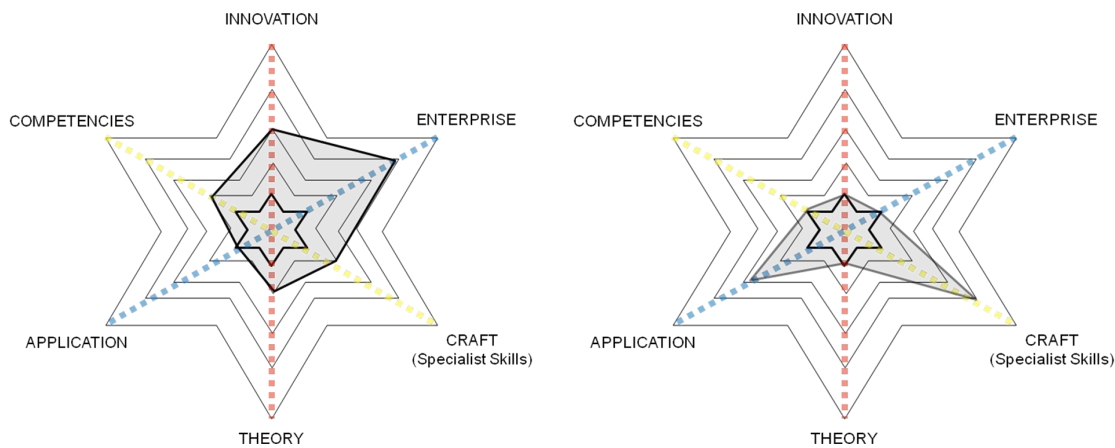
Fig. 3 and 4 Example of different strengths in learner's progressiona dn performance.

The purpose of the Framework is to engage anybody within that range and establish habits of reflection, recording, valuing and balancing learning or experience leading to wisdom. Therefore, the concept is designed to harness types of learning as contributing to aspects of personality that can grow the confidence and a self-awareness relating to improving achievements and performance.

The framework can accommodate specialist input and training as much as it celebrates soft skills and increasing confidence in the use and application of emotional intelligence.

The conceptual framework for a flexible learning and access platform. The aim is to grow aspiration through the developed of awareness, aptitude and attitude of the learner. The framework responds to the accumulation of experience and a growth in the positive attributes of the individual as they expand their, wisdom, creativity and expertise. These are the elements around which the learner can be helped or mentored to support their learning balance (for progression) or to focus their attention primarily on their existing strengths and thereby promote a particular identity or craft that they hold to be important.

Each of the three areas of learners strengths depend on a particular type of learning experience. They further imply skill sets that might be specified at a sub-level and mapped on to a progression diagram (Fig.5).
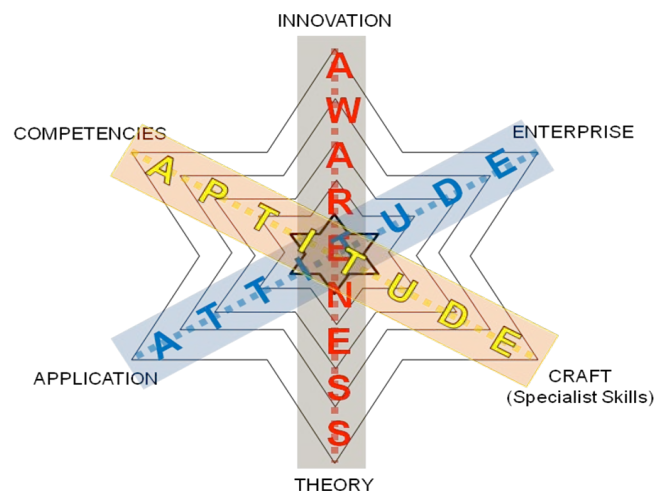

Fig. 5 Conceptual framework for flexible learning and access platform.

2.4   All round support, all round achievement

The concept facilitates a participatory practice environment (Fig. 6) that extends beyond the educational institution and triggers new learning in enterprise, community and informal settings. It generates fresh lines of research concerned with mutual peer learning and transformative pedagogic practices.

It is a reverse communications tool that sets the assessment regime through user interactivity and varies the evidence base to best fit the student experience. As a 360 degree process both the educator and the student enter into a collaborative and negotiable process with other assessors.

The FAIR assessment tool makes emphasis of andragogic learning that happens as a consequence of the student's active engagement both within and external to the University.

It celebrates:

1. Self-concept: an understanding of assets and strengths in the learner's personality that facilitate their self-direction.

2. Learner Confidence: the appetite for personal development based on the learners evidence of self-worth and their appreciation of wider acceptance in support networks.

3. Experience: and the wisdom accumulated from reflecting on life-wide activities and those skills and habits that are nurtured in the process of doing.

4. Readiness to learn. The individual's preparation for open learning in functioning and social roles outside of the pedagogic environment.

5. Orientation to learning. The individual perspective and personal bias evident in the personality of the learner and their specific strengths as they consider problem centred experiences other than subject centred curriculum based learning.

6. Motivation to learn: Feeding the individuals desire to do more and to evidence their contribution to their peers and to wider society through increasing their capacity and the range in their achievements.

The pilot exploits the use of digital technologies to provide opportunities to bridge the gap between academic and external or extra-curricular learning.
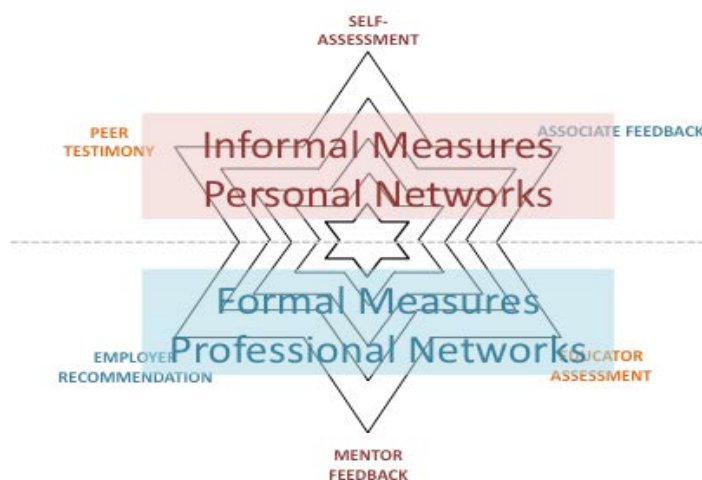

Fig. 6 Participatory practice environment.

3 CONCLUSION: DIGITAL BADGING IN OPEN LEARNING CO-OPERATIVES

Using a social approach to learning through reflection, digital badges are designed to advance flexible and interactive real-life educational process by linking guidance and support to feedback, testimonial, evidence and reward. The accumulation of badges relates to open curriculum shells that develop the learning personality and digital identity of the individual, preparing them for future qualifications and employment. Digital Badges are provided by Mozilla through an open source environment. The CLaN has redesign the badges to support 360 degree inputs and feedback. They are employer friendly and can apply to existing training. They are flexible and can be repurposed to suit varied learning needs. They are scalable and can apply to very short engagements. They are adaptable for 'life-wide' learning as well as specific contexts. They can map into formal learning and form part of an accreditation. The badges directly link to evidence of achievement and an individual's digital portfolio.

The reward of the badges is managed by a professional host adding transparency to their quality and value.

Open Badges are an infrastructure to provide accreditation of skills provided through Mozilla. Through collaboration with the Badges and Skills Lead at the Mozilla Foundation the project will build on and remodel the current design and platform exploiting the merits and logistics of Badges for community/ institutional accreditation, and overcoming difficulties of online assessment that facilitate progression in and out of learning provisions.

Improvement, success or achievement may be captured via digital records (badges) rewarded through self-assessment, employer assessment, educator assessment or all three. The accumulation of rewards and evidence contributes to a strengthening portfolio and prepares the individual for accreditation into structured learning or employment when required. The purpose of the FAIR assessment tool is to respond positively to individual circumstances and the complex lives of those who find it hard to reach standard educational resources and provision.

The FAIR assessment project will develop a co-operative approach to designing and delivering affordable and accessible education, learning and skills development suitable for post-16 engagement. This context centred experiential learning framework provides a comprehensive open curriculum shell that can absorb or adapt to negotiated and participant derived content.

This project aims to develop confidence in the inexperienced learner; recognising their independent strengths, capitalising on their learning assets and moving forward in their personal journey towards improved educational rewards.

The initiative will have a direct impact on communities through collaboration with local management authorities, third sector groups, housing trusts and Colleges (example: the Salford Trust, Salford City Council, Salford University and Salford City College) with the potential to replicate its processes and systems within wider educational partnerships.

The blended resource will support portfolio and qualifications transcripts alongside rich media; audio-visual testimonials, employer testimonials and peer profiling. Preparing for a long-term collaboration or co-operation between organizations and individuals will benefit from an agreed set of values and procedures. The necessary foundations and structure of a replicable architecture for forming learning communities requires research, development and testing. Consultation to date informs our current assumptions. The foundation stones or principles of co-operative behaviour would include; open access to shared sources of learning and supported environments, agreed standards of responsible educational practices, a commitment to active participation, citizenship and co-creation of learning opportunities, the goal of reciprocity and mutuality. The necessary architecture for flexible learning consists of; a system of collective ownership and governance, the use of a communal digital platform, a framework for leadership that supports equal contribution, the adaptation and general adoption of a digital badge ecology within the network.

One of the most consistent themes from the workshop was the need to empower the potential learner so that they can control and negotiate their own access to education with improved confidence and so that they can become effective in paying forward their learning and supporting their peers.

REFERENCES

[1]   Office for National Statistics. (2011). Census for England and Wales. Retrieved 2nd May, 2014 from http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/index.html