

THE OPEN BOOK

PEERAGOGY IN ACTION

by Joseph Corneli, Charles Danoff, Anna Keune
and Amanda Lyons

Peer-produced Learning



We have been writing the missing manual for peer-produced peer learning: the “Peeragogy Handbook” (peeragogy.org). Throughout this work we have asked and aimed to address questions like these: What would a motivated group of self-learners need to know to agree on a subject or skill to learn, find and qualify the best learning resources about that topic, then select and use appropriate communication media to learn it together? What would these people need to know about learning to put together a successful learning programme?

It is clear to us that the techniques of ‘peer production’ that have built and continue to improve Wikipedia and GNU/Linux have yet to fully demonstrate their power in education. We believe that the Peeragogy Handbook can help change that by building a distributed community of peer learners/educators, and a strongly vetted collection of best practices. Our project complements others’ work on sites like Wikiversity and P2PU, and builds upon understandings that have developed informally in distributed communities of hobbyists and professionals, as well as in (and beyond) the classrooms of generations of passionate educators.

A TO Z

Here, we present Peeragogy in Action, a project guide in 4 parts. Each part relates to one or more sections of our handbook, and suggests activities to try while you explore peer learning. These activities are designed for flexible use by distributed groups, collaborating via a light-weight infrastructure. Participants may be educators, community organisers, designers, hackers, students, seasoned peeragogues, or first timers. The guide should be useful for groups who want to build a strong collaboration, as well as to facilitators or theorists who want to hone their approach. Together, we will use our various talents to build effective methods and models for peer produced peer learning. Let's get started!

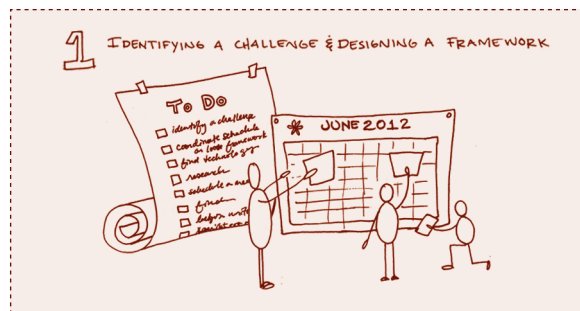
Part 1: Identifying a Challenge and Designing a Framework

Setting the initial challenge and building a framework for accountability among participants is an important starting point.

- > **Activity**—Come up with a plan for your work and a ‘contract’ for your group. You can use the suggestions in this guide as a starting point, but your first task is to revise the plan to suit your needs. Helpful questions can be: what are you interested in learning? What will your main outcome be? What problem do you hope to solve? What steps do you need to take to accomplish this? How collaborative does your project need to be? What sort of support do you anticipate needing personally? What problems won't you solve?
- > **Technology**—Familiarise yourself with the collaboration tools you intend to use (e.g. Wordpress, Git and LaTeX, YouTube, GIMP, a public wiki, a private forum, or something else) and create a first post, edit, or video introducing yourself and your project(s) to others in the worldwide peeragogy community.
- > **Suggested resources**—The Peeragogy Handbook, parts I (‘Introduction’) and II (‘Peer Learning’). You may also want to work through a short lesson called ‘Implementing Paragogy’, from the early days before the Peeragogy project was convened (<https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/User:Arieded/ImplementingParagogy>). For a succinct theoretical treatment, please refer to our literature review, which we have adapted into a Wikipedia page (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peer_learning).

THE OPEN BOOK

- > Further reading—Boud, D. and Lee, A. (2005). ‘Peer learning’ as pedagogic discourse for research education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(5):501–516.
- > Observations from the Peeragogy project—We had a fairly weak structure at the outset, which yielded mixed results. One participant said: “I definitely think I do better when presented with a framework or scaffold to use for participation or content development.” Yet the same person wrote with enthusiasm about models of entrepreneurship: “freed of the requirement or need for an entrepreneurial visionary.” In short, there are trade-offs to be made—hopefully in an informed fashion.



Part 2: Inviting Others

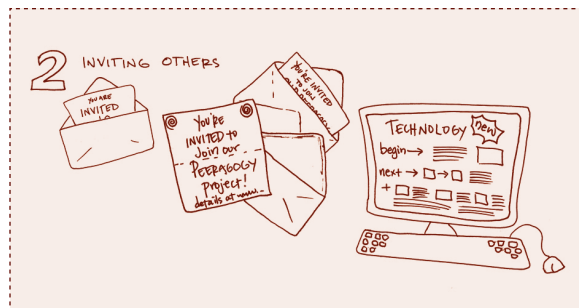
Other people can support you in achieving your goal and make the work more fun too.

- > Activity—Write an invitation to someone who can help with your project. Clarify what you hope to learn from them and what your project has to offer. Helpful questions to consider: What resources are available or missing? What do you already have that you can build on? How will you find the necessary resources? Who else is interested in these kinds of challenges?
- > Technology—Pick a tool that’s new to you and could potentially be useful during the project. Start learning how to use it. Locate some people around the world who share similar interests.
- > Suggested resources—The Peeragogy Handbook, parts III

A TO Z

(‘Convening a Group’) and IV (‘Organizing a Learning Context’).

- > Recommended reading—Schmidt, J. Philipp. (2009). Commons-Based Peer Production and education. Free Culture Research Workshop Harvard University, 23 October 2009.
- > Observations from the Peeragogy project—We used a strategy of ‘open enrolment’: new people were welcome to join the project at any time. We also encouraged people to either stay involved or leave—several times over the past year, we required people to explicitly reaffirm interest in order to stay registered in the forum and mailing list. This choice cut down on ‘dead weight’. Nevertheless, the project continued to accumulate content, which gave newcomers the discouraging feeling that there was a lot to catch up on. We’ve aimed to sum up the high points in the handbook!



Part 3: Working in Teams

Solidifying your work plan and learning strategy together with concrete measures for ‘success’ can move the project forward significantly. Working in teams and sharing information with others will help you to develop your project.

- > Activity—Concretise your ideas by, for example, writing an essay, making visual sketches, or creating a short video to communicate the unique plans for organisation and evaluation that your group will use. Then, edit the pages of the Peeragogy Handbook boldly: by this time you should have identified at

THE OPEN BOOK

least one section that needs to be improved. Make the necessary revisions.

- > Technology—Take time to mentor others or be mentored by someone, meeting up in person or online. Pair up with someone else and share knowledge together about one or more tools. You can discuss some of the difficulties that you’ve encountered, or teach a beginner some tricks.
- > Suggested resources—The Peeragogy Handbook, parts V (‘Co-Facilitation and Co-Working’), VI (‘Assessment’), and part VII (‘Patterns, Use cases, and Examples’).
- > Recommended reading—Argyris, Chris. “Teaching smart people how to learn.” *Harvard Business Review* 69.3 (1991); and, Gersick, Connie J.G. “Time and transition in work teams: Toward a new model of group development.” *Academy of Management Journal* 31.1 (1988): 9–41.
- > Observations from the Peeragogy project—Perhaps one of the most important roles in the Peeragogy project was the role of the ‘Wrapper’, who prepared and circulated weekly summaries of forum activity. This helped people stay informed about what was happening in the project even if they didn’t have time to read the forums. We’ve also found that small groups of people who arrange their own meetings are often the most productive.

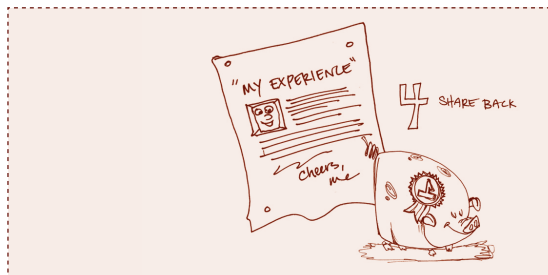


Part 4: Share Back

Wrap up the project with a critical assessment of progress and directions for future work. Share any changes to this syllabus that you think would be useful for future peeragogues!

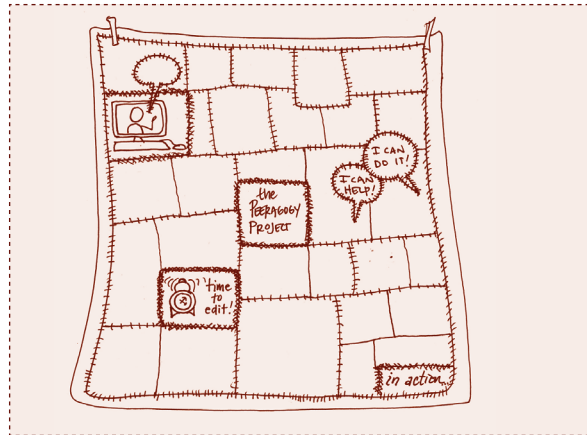
A TO Z

- > Activity—Identify the main obstacles you encountered. What are some goals you were not able to accomplish yet? Did you foresee these challenges at the outset? How did this project resemble or differ from others you've worked on? How would you do things differently in future projects? What would you like to tackle next?
- > Writing—Communicate your reflection case. Prepare a short written (or video, or photo, ...) essay, dealing with your experiences in this course. Share the results by posting it where others in the broader Peeragogy project can find it.
- > 'Extra credit'—Contribute back to one of the other organisations or projects that helped you on this peeragogical journey. Think about what you have to offer. Is it a bug fix, a constructive critique, pictures, translation help, PR, wiki-gnoming or making a cake? Make it something special, and people will remember you and thank you for it.
- > Suggested resources—The Peeragogy Handbook, parts VIII ('Technologies, Services, and Platforms') and IX ('Resources').
- > Recommended reading—Stallman, Richard. "Why software should be free." <http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/shouldbefree.html> (1992).
- > Observations from the Peeragogy project—When we were deciding how to license our work, various Creative Commons licences were proposed (CC Zero, CC By-SA and CC By-SA-NC). After a brief discussion, no one was in favour of restricting downstream users, so we decided to use CCO. In connection with this discussion, we agreed that we would work on ways to explicitly build 'reusability' into the handbook content.



Micro-Case Study: The Peeragogy Project, Year 1

Since its conception in early 2012, the Peeragogy Project has collected over 3700 comments in our discussion forum, and over 200 pages of expository text in the handbook. It has given contributors a new way of thinking about things together. However, the project has not had the levels of engagement that should be possible, given the technology available and the global interest in improving education. We hope that the handbook and this accompanying syllabus will provide a seed for a new phase of learning, with many new contributors and new ideas drawn from real-life applications.



Affiliations

Knowledge Media Institute, The Open University, UK
School of Art and Design, Aalto University, FI
Mr. Danoff's Teaching Laboratory, Chicago, USA
Visuals for Change, Brooklyn, USA

Joseph Corneli is a Ph. D. student at the Knowledge Media Institute of The Open University, UK, where he does research on how people learn mathematics. He is a member of the board of directors of the US-based nonprofit, PlanetMath.org, having previously earned a bachelors degree from New College of Florida.

A TO Z

Charles Jeffrey Danoff is the Owner of Mr. Danoff's Teaching Laboratory, an Educational Publishing and Services firm opened in 2009; specializing in developing Open Educational Resources for EFL/ESL students and teachers.

Anna Keune (M.A. in New Media) is a Designer/Researcher at the Learning Environments Research Group of the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture since the beginning of 2011.

Amanda Lyons is a Visual Thinker & Facilitator of learning at VISUALS for CHANGE. Amanda helps educators and facilitators foster deeper learning and connection through visual communication tools, experiential education and organization development methodologies.

