Building the Ecosystem VO Transcript

Background: Guitar music

Voice-over:
Building an ecosystem means thinking carefully about applications, both in the sense of applying methods and technologies, and in those technological applications themselves. Applications are facilitators. They allow for the performance of tasks and, ideally, they benefit the user by allowing him to achieve specific goals. For an application that is designed to facilitate writing – specifically the development and documentation of writing skills by students and the assessment of student writing by faculty and administrators – the concept of community is key. As writing pedagogy is embedded within a larger ecosystem of local values and practices as we argue, then the technological infrastructure should make those values visible and integrated into the application as much as possible.

In this video, Ron and Elizabeth are using <emma>'s Forum feature to demonstrate the value of having multiple spaces for discussion and community-building in a writing CMS, while debating some of the key questions that arise when thinking about how a technological application like this one should fit into the larger goals of improving student writing and our assessment of that writing and spreading writing intensive pedagogy across campus. A discussion forum on <emma> is, by default, a public space. Unlike other spaces on <emma>, like the project folders where students can choose whether or not to give access to a document to their peers, anything posted on the forum is viewable by anyone enrolled in the same course. This public dialogic space can, if used effectively, help instructors build on the architecture of pre-writing and drafts – of ideas in progress – by opening a discussion up for a little spirited back-and-forth on the ideas raised in and by previous work. The ecosystem of a course in <emma>, then, can be viewed as a microcosm of what we hope to build campus-wide – a space for stakeholders to research, write, and debate writing pedagogy and assessment in order to develop a system that is native to the local culture and, thus, sustainable in the long term.

As Ron notes in a posting on the forum thread you're seeing, the application is the tool, but it is how we use the tool that matters. And, we can already discern the ways that the application has to evolve in response to local initiatives, such as the WCP and its capstone eportfolio requirement, and FYC's increasing attention to multimodal composition. For example, as Ron notes, <emma> has a good deal of multimedia capability in that it allows for the posting of images and audio files and linking out to external sites, but, currently, it does not allow for the uploading of video files such as the ones we have composed for this article. This is something that, as compositional practices and products change, must be reflected in the technological infrastructure that supports our local ecology. The ever-evolving nature of electronic storage, for example, is far from settled, particularly as the availability of cloud storage increases and institutions see the efficiency afforded by such storage. Though the boundaries of the virtual

world are becoming ever more murky, the technological infrastructure must remain tied to the local values and practices of our pedagogical ecosystem.