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EDUCATION

Needed—An OJS Plugin for Facilitating Journal-Based Continuing Education Activities:
Specs to Guide Software Developers

Glenn M. Hymel
Department of Psychology, Loyola University New Orleans
&
Massage Therapy Foundation

Marcus A. Banks
Frederick L. Ehrman Medical Library, New York University School of Medicine
&
Massage Therapy Foundation

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Abstract

The Massage Therapy Foundation plans to launch by summer or fall 2008 a new peer-reviewed e-journal, viz., the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork: Research, Education, & Practice*. This publication effort will use the Open Journal System (OJS), inclusive of the various OJS plugins to offer value-added services to its readers.

An innovative feature of this planned open access e-journal will be the inclusion of a continuing education (CE) option for readers. As a result of its ongoing work on this CE aspect of the e-journal, the Foundation has identified a need for the current array of OJS plugins to be augmented by the development of an additional generic plugin that would focus on CE activities. More specifically, this new plugin would provide readers with the option of earning CE credits through possible activities such as (a) reading and analyzing a pre-designated article in a given issue of a journal and (b) completing a multiple-choice competency test of the article's content coverage. This paper, accordingly, addresses certain technical specifications intended to inform and guide those OJS software programmers who may be interested in developing this new CE plugin. These specifications—pertaining to information needing to be provided as well as tasks needing to be performed—span certain educational, assessment, and administrative requirements. These specified requirements, in turn, necessitate the following six components that would operationally define the CE plugin: (a) CE Activity ID & Focus; (b) CE Activity Requirements; (c) CE Activity Award Authentication; (d) CE Participant ID; (e) CE Activity Participant Confirmation Process; and (f) CE Activity Award Certification.

In dialogue with OJS software programmers, we anticipate that the eventual development of this new and unprecedented plugin might encourage the other 1,000 journals currently using OJS to consider adding to their journal format and coverage some form of an article-specific CE activity. Furthermore, this type of collegial interaction resulting in a new plugin development would exemplify the type of OJS user input encouraged by the Public Knowledge Project and, accordingly, may serve to inspire others to pursue additional journal enhancements that necessitate further software developments.

Needed—An OJS Plugin for Facilitating Journal-Based Continuing Education Activities: Specs To Guide Software Developers

The Massage Therapy Foundation (www.massagetherapyfoundation.org) is currently planning for a summer or fall 2008 launch of a new peer-reviewed e-journal, viz., the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork: Research, Education, & Practice*. The Foundation—a non-profit 501 (c)(3) public charity organization headquartered in Evanston, IL—will use the Open Journal System (OJS) software to govern the management and publication of this open access journal (see: Public Knowledge Project, 2006; Willinsky, 2005, 2006). Plans also include the use of various current OJS plugins to offer value-added services to readers.

An innovative feature of this planned open access e-journal will be the inclusion of a continuing education (CE) option for readers. As preparations for developing this aspect of the journal continue, the Foundation has identified a need for the current array of OJS plugins to be augmented by the development of an additional generic plugin that would focus on CE activities. More specifically, this new plugin would serve the function of giving readers the option of earning CE credits through possible activities such as (a) reading and analyzing a pre-designated article in a given issue of a journal and (b) completing a multiple-choice competency test of the article's content coverage. For a nominal CE registration fee, readers of the Foundation's planned journal, for example, would have the opportunity to further their knowledge about specific aspects of massage therapy and/or related areas as reflected in a pre-designated CE article in a given issue of the journal. It must be emphasized, however, that the registration fee for CE participants would not compromise in any manner a journal designed as open access.

This paper, accordingly, addresses certain technical specifications intended to inform and guide those OJS software programmers who may be interested in developing this new CE plugin. These specifications—pertaining to information that would need to be provided as well as tasks that would need to be performed—span the following three areas: (a) educational features, (b) assessment plan, and (c) administrative procedures.

In the context of a pre-designated article for CE credit, the *educational features* specifications include such considerations as the article's bibliographic information as well as its goals and objectives. Additionally, these specifications also identify the CE provider and accreditation source(s). The *assessment plan* specifications provide information regarding the technical characteristics of a competency test (e.g., validity and reliability indices) if one is indeed used, the process for completing the competency test or other assessment mechanism, the provision of evaluative feedback, and acknowledgment of one's CE credit award status. The *administrative procedures* specifications enable the process of initially identifying prospective CE participants, registering for the CE activity, paying the registration fee, and receiving appropriate documentation certifying one's completion of the CE activity.

Proposed CE Plugin Components

The educational, assessment, and administrative aspects of the proposed CE plugin characterized above imply a sequence of steps or tasks required to disseminate and obtain information pertaining to prospective CE participants. Figure 1 labels those six CE plugin components that would be needed to implement this new option for OJS users. Each component represents, in effect, a plugin interface with its associated fields.

Figure 1.

OJS Continuing Education (CE) Plugin Components: Proposed

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- Component #1: CE Activity ID & Focus
 - Component #2: CE Activity Requirements
 - Component #3: CE Activity Award Authentication
 - Component #4: CE Participant ID
 - Component #5: CE Activity Participant Confirmation Process
 - Component #6: CE Activity Award Certification
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CE Activity ID & Focus

The first of six components—or interfaces with designated fields—(Figure 2) for this proposed CE plugin is rather self-explanatory in terms of identifying the bibliographic citation for that article in a given issue of a journal that is the focus of the intended CE activity. Typically, only one article per journal issue would be cited for this purpose.

Figure 2.

CE Activity ID & Focus (Component #1) Specs

CE Activity ID & Focus

-
- Journal Name: _____
 - Year: _____
 - Volume #: _____
 - Issue #: _____
 - First Author's Surname: _____
 - Article Title: _____
-

CE Activity Requirements

The second component or interface of the proposed CE plugin provides the prospective participant with information regarding the requirements for completing the CE activity. As shown in Figure 3, one possible context within which a CE activity might occur—in fact, this is the context being planned by the Foundation—relates to a designated reading assignment followed by a multiple-choice competency test with a requisite criterion score for a passing grade. Having already acknowledged the article of focus in the previous plugin component, this second component also provides information on the goal(s) and objective(s) of the assigned article so as to give direction to the reader's efforts and to provide a basis for those items that constitute the CE competency test. Furthermore, when testing per se is used, the participant is indeed entitled to basic psychometric information regarding such features as the validity and reliability of the instrument. Of course, alternative assignment and assessment possibilities obviously exist beyond the example just given (e.g., the Medical Library Association's Independent Reading Program at www.mlanet.org/education/irp/), and provisions are made in the plugin for these other options to be acknowledged.

Figure 3.

CE Activity Requirements (Component #2) Specs

CE Activity Requirements

- Reading: _____
 - Other: _____
 - Goal(s) & Objective(s): _____
 - Testing: _____
 - Other: _____
 - Requisite Passing Criterion: _____
 - Other: _____
 - Technical Features of Test: _____
-

CE Activity Award Authentication

The third of six components (Figure 4) authenticates the CE opportunity for prospective participants by virtue of citing that organization, association, institution, or individual formally designated as the CE provider. Additionally, acknowledgment of the originating accreditation source(s) for the CE provider further validates the professional authenticity of the CE opportunity. Using our current context as an illustration, the CE provider would be the Massage Therapy Foundation; one accreditation source among several possibilities would be the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) that has a continuing education division (www.ncbtmb.com/continuing_ed.htm). Finally, in this component the actual number of CE contact hours is cited for prospective participants.

Figure 4.
CE Activity Award Authentication (Component #3) Specs

CE Activity Award Authentication

- CE Provider: _____
 - CE Accreditation Source(s): _____
 - CE Contact Hours: _____
-

CE Participant ID

The fourth component of the proposed CE plugin simply allows for obtaining the necessary identifying and electronic contact information for a reader who chooses to participate in the CE activity (Figure 5).

Figure 5.
CE Participant ID (Component #4) Specs

CE Participant ID

- Name (First, MI, Last, Credentials): _____
 - Username: _____
 - Password: _____
 - Email: _____
-

CE Activity Participant Confirmation Process

The fifth component of the CE plugin provides for the actual registration and submission of the CE activity's competency testing responses. As indicated in Figure 6, features of this step in the process include designating the following: the destination of the registration submission (e.g., the designated website of the CE provider), mode of registration (presumably electronic), registration fee, and payment option/options (e.g., secured credit card payment as specified by the CE provider). Also, this component provides for the specification of the destination to which the test item responses are submitted (again, e.g., the CE provider's website) and the mode of submission (again, presumably, electronic).

Figure 6.
CE Activity Participant Confirmation Process (Component #5) Specs

CE Activity Participant Confirmation Process

- Destination of Registration Submission: _____
 - Mode of Registration Submission: _____
 - Registration Fee: _____
 - Payment Option(s): _____
 - Destination of Test Item Responses Submission: _____
 - Mode of Test Item Responses Submission: _____
-

CE Activity Award Certification

This sixth and final component (Figure 7) of the proposed CE plugin provides feedback to the participant acknowledging the CE contact hours earned by virtue of the successful completion of the prescribed activities. This is documented by providing via a specified delivery mode (presumably electronic) a CE certificate detailing the nature of the CE activity successfully completed and any other standard information as may be required by the accrediting source.

Figure 7.
CE Activity Award Certification (Component #6) Specs

CE Activity Award Certification

- CE Contact Hours Earned: _____
 - CE Certificate Delivery Mode: _____
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Anticipated Outcome & the Expansion of OJS

In dialogue with OJS software programmers, we anticipate that the eventual development of this new and unprecedented CE plugin will encourage the other 800-plus journals currently using OJS to consider adding to their journal format and coverage some form of an article-specific CE activity. Such a service would be consistent with ongoing trends in the CE realm of professional development efforts across many disciplines and professions (see, e.g.: Holm, 2000; Rasmusson, Hall, & Renlund, 2007; Weir & Hoey, 2002), thereby making any given

journal more service-oriented, multifaceted, and attractive to its readership. Finally, this type of collegial interaction resulting in new plugin development would exemplify the type of OJS user input encouraged by the Public Knowledge Project and, accordingly, may serve to inspire others to pursue additional journal enhancements that necessitate further software developments.

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Author Note

Members of the Massage Therapy Foundation's e-Journal Committee include the following: John Balletto, Marcus Banks, Amanda Baskwill, Karen Boulanger, Glenn Hymel, Alison Pittas, Robin Pollini, Kevin Stranack, and Lesley Teitelbaum.

Responses to this paper are indeed encouraged and should be forwarded to Glenn M. Hymel at the following email address: hymel@loyno.edu.