

IL OER international promotion of sharing strategy using online communities

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Introduction and CoPILOT background

This strategy was developed as part of the JISC/HEA UKOER Phase 3: Internationalisation of OER project CoPILOT (Community of Practice for Information Literacy Online Teaching). The short project aimed to use an existing online social community platform, UNESCO's WSIS Knowledge Communities site (<http://wsis-community.org>) to promote the sharing of digital and information literacy open educational resources (OER).

The project was successfully completed with a range of contributions from librarians and information literacy teachers from over 14 countries worldwide. The platform can be visited here: <http://www.wsis-community.org/pg/groups/585111/information-literacy/>

Purpose and audience

This strategy forms one of the key outcomes of the project and is aimed at promoting open educational resources internationally using online communities. It is aimed at educators and librarians working in other countries to help inform their practice when developing digital and information literacy teaching materials. It is based on the experiences of the CoPILOT project which used an online platform to share OER on information literacy.

Resources

As this strategy is concerned with sharing resources, it's crucial to prepare educational material before starting to promote them for others to use. There are a number of issues to consider in the first instance:

- *Are they already OER or do you need to adapt them? If they are OER, is licencing clear?*

- it is far more effective to share open materials as others will be able to easily re-use and possibly re-purpose them. If they are locked down in a virtual learning environment or if your institution does not support CC licencing then it will be less attractive to other potential users. If you need advice about adapting your resources to become open, please see the Creative Commons website for more help <http://creativecommons.org/>

- *Where are your resources currently hosted?* – It's important to think about location for a number of reasons. If your resources are hosted on a departmental website they may be less visible to external audiences than if they were hosted on a national or institutional learning object repository. It's also important that your resources are hosted somewhere stable so that users won't experience any problems accessing and downloading material in the future.

- *Will you promote all of the resources or just carefully selected resources targeted at specific audiences?*

How will you select which resources to promote? – For the CoPILOT project we used resources from a previous project to promote sharing. We selected those with a more generic feel and also looked at those with the best usage statistics. You may have material that is more popular with your students and colleagues and this might be a good reason to open it up to external users as well. However, even subject specific material will appeal to others.

Potential audience/sharing population

Leading on from this is the need to think more carefully about the potential audience for OERs. When adapting resources to be open, it's possible to reach a large number of potential users without knowing anything about them. You should therefore consider the following issues:

- *Which sector will you target?* - In CoPILOT, we used mailing lists to connect with all sectors of librarians as material can be adapted to suit different needs. However, we mainly attracted librarians from higher education. If you do want to reach beyond your sector one idea is to sign up to a relevant mailing list to find

out the key priorities of members of that group. Think about relevance, subject specific resources and context. It will be important to give information about how your resources were originally used but also give suggestions for others not in your sector about how they could be adapted to fit in with new learning outcomes.

- *Language barriers?* – this is an obvious issue but even those with English as a second language may not be used to some of the jargon/technical language used in your organisation. It is also helpful to consider how to promote resources to be adapted into different languages.

- *Technology/software barriers?* – It's important to think about the different technologies that the potential audience will use to access your material. Some users may depend heavily on mobile technologies so you will need to check if your resources are compatible. If possible, develop resources using commonly available or open source software so that adapting/updating material will be easy later on.

- *How will you promote your resources or will you promote activities involving your resources?* – It may be enough simply to host some links to your resources on a website and then promote them via communication channels. However, to engage potential users you could organise some very simple activities based around reviewing the resources or asking users to share their own materials. In CoPILOT we organised 3 sets of activities; the first was to ask participants to view our resources and then upload URL links to material of their own, the second was to take part in various discussion threads on various aspects of sharing and the third was for participants to choose a resource link and describe how they would re-use it in their own context. This was a really effective strategy for building interest and engagement and we would recommend this to others.

- *How does your audience currently communicate? How will you let them know about the resources?* – As mentioned above, a good way to reach out to others is to find out if there are online spaces they currently use to discuss and share ideas. It may be that some communities mainly communicate face to face within organisations and conferences. With other dispersed communities of practice, they may 'meet' on mailing lists or social media networks such as Linked In or Facebook. Think about the way in which you will contact them and how you will communicate (see Communication channels section below).

Linking up with international organisations

If you are aiming to share resources internationally then it will be advantageous to get support from one or more international organisations. We worked with UNESCO on CoPILOT as we had already established links with them.

- *Are there any international or national organisations that you need to work with to help promote your resources and community?* – Think about your professional bodies and any relevant educational/cultural organisations that may have relevance to your work and resources. What are their key priorities and how might your resources help them? Remember that many organisations could be interested in what you are developing but just might not be aware of your work.

Here are some potentially useful organisations:

- United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)
- International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)
- Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)
- American Library Association (ALA)
- British Council
- The Association for Information Management (ASLIB)
- Universitas 21

- *This could be for advocacy, getting to know different networks and for using existing and well established websites* – there are many benefits in forging links with international cultural organisations. Not only can

you exploit their established communication networks but you could also make use of any online spaces they use to host information, news or links to resources.

Using online communities

The use of online communities for communication is now fairly well established, whether it's Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn or another platform. Think about how you already use online communities and how they could be utilised to promote sharing of resources within your community.

- *Is there an online community that you could utilise?* - For CoPILOT we used the WSIS online community which is international network, so we knew it already worked well for users across the globe. Different communities will exist for different sectors and countries, so do some research on existing platforms and try to articulate what your needs for the platform might be.

- *Repositories* – learning object repositories sometimes have a community element and this can be a very powerful way of sharing a large number of resources in one online location. Think about which repositories hold relevant material for information literacy resources, such as Jorum (www.jorum.ac.uk), InfoLit Global (<http://infolitglobal.info>), PRIMO (<http://www.ala.org/CFApps/Primo/public/search.cfm>) or ANTS (<https://dspace.ucalgary.ca/handle/1880/43471>)

Communication channels

Effective communication is probably the most important thing to get right to ensure that you reach your intended audience and build engagement. This will ensure you get the contributions that you need in order for sharing to take place.

- *Mailing lists for your sector/subject area are great for spreading the word* – emailing list were the main way in which we connected with potential participants for the CoPILOT project. We started with 2 or 3 relevant mailing lists and then found that members of those mailing lists sent the message on to different lists around the world.

- *Audit of communication s channels used by your audience* – this is something we wish we had done more thoroughly. If you have time, conduct some research on what other channels already exist and how you can get access to them. For example, JISC has a great website with all of their mailing lists listed (<http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk>)

- *Write a communication plan and don't just rely on emails. Promote your work at conferences; perhaps even produce a flyer or business card.* – If you have access to a project management tool, these often include communications plan template. If not, think about all potential contacts, how often you need to send messages to them, what will be in the message and how your messages might impact on them.

Messages/instructions

As mentioned above, a key part of your communication plan will be on the content of your messages. You should think carefully about wording your messages effectively. If you have any marketing/PR contacts, use them for advice on crafting your messages to maximise your impact.

- *Plan what messages to send to which lists etc.* – It's important to ensure that messages are appropriate for the intended audience. It's also important to think about spacing of messages (one a week, one a fortnight) so that you don't bombard people with unwelcome messages. If you're sending the same message to different lists always remember to apologise for cross posting!

- *Once you have your sharing space set up, how will you instruct new members?* – The WSIS has a Message to all Members function and most online communities are based around communicating with members so this should be a basic function. You could also set up an email distribution list for your members to ensure control of messages.

- *Again think about language barrier* – If you have targeted participants who have English as a second language, remember to keep messages and instructions clear. Also think about cultural norms in terms of how casual/formal you are when sending messages.

- *Plan when best to send messages (time differences etc.) and what deadlines you will set* – Remember time differences and try to send messages at the most convenient for as many people as possible. Also, if you are including activities, try to give realistic deadlines to give participants as much chance as possible to contribute.

If possible you may find it effective to launch the platform at a face to face event so people can try it out in a group but also meet some of the people who are participating. Online communities often have issues over people not knowing each other and finding it difficult to build a rapport and trust with people they have never met.

Role of moderator

When we were setting up the WSIS platform we were advised by our UNESCO partner that one of us needed to take on the role of moderator and this worked really well.

- *Consider someone taking on the moderator role full time* – the moderator will need to give at least one hour per working day to replying to messages, ensuring everyone has registered with the platform, understood instructions, and helping with access problems if necessary.

- *Encouraging contributions and participation* - Online communities are rarely self perpetuating. They often need to be nurtured and encouraged, particularly in the early stages and the moderator is key to this working. Be prepared to send out a few reminder/encouragement emails about online activities before deadlines.

- *Look for synergies between people and try to encourage them to get in touch with each other* – This can be a great way for participants to get more out of the community than they may have planned. You could start the ball rolling by setting up an activity designed to match up participants to those with similar interests.

Activities and structure of the site

Make sure your online community is well structured so people know where they are and can find resources and contribute to discussions easily. The moderator may need to tidy up the space periodically if people put materials in the wrong place.

- *It's good to centre any activity on your resources* – We organised activities around the central theme of the site and these were carefully structured with bite size activities included.

- *Offer a prize to encourage participation* – Giving away vouchers can always be a good way to encourage participation and to reward good contributions.

- *Use discussions to find out more about your community* – Not only did we use the discussion functionality to encourage participation and help participants make connections but it also meant that we found out more about the attitudes and practice of the members of our community.

Evaluation

One key part of the project plan was how to measure success. It was important to have quantitative goals to aim for.

- *How will you know you've been successful?* – This could be based on the number of participants, the range of countries they come from, the number of posts/contributions each member makes. You could also think

about other measures – how many different mailing lists did you reach? Have members suggested their own activities and discussion threads?

- *Try to ensure that you can get statistics out of your online platform easily to monitor discussions and resources that are being shared* – It is really great to show how many hits your site has had for reporting and promoting the use of online communities in general. Speak to the administrator to ensure this is technically possible.

- *What other impact are you looking for?* - International promotion should focus on breadth of coverage, links made, mailing lists found and attendance at international conferences and events.

Conclusions

The CoPILOT project was completed successfully because we followed the suggestions outlined above. We were surprised at how active the participation was; especially as the project timescale was very short. Considering the points outlined in this document should help to share OER using online communities.

Sharing IL OER using online communities

- 1. Prepare your resources to be OER and clearly licenced*
- 2. Host your resources somewhere accessible*
- 3. Choose generic resources to appeal to more than one sector*
- 4. Use well established lists/websites and other communication channels*
- 5. Have a clear plan of attack and TEST EVERYTHING*
- 6. Have one of the project team take on the moderator role*
- 7. Encourage participation and contributions*
- 8. Measure impact, survey your participants*



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