Project CoPILOT: Community of Practice for Information Literacy Online Teaching: a case study of an international online community.

UKOER International Case study
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Outline
This case study describes the activities of two UK higher education sector librarians, using existing open educational resources (OER), created to support information literacy and digital literacy teaching, to promote OER sharing internationally. This will start with some background information on the previous JISC / HEA funded project, DELILA in which the OERs were created and what our aims and objectives were at the end of that project. We will also describe post DELILA activities that eventually led to the CoPILOT project proposal and how the aims of the proposal were met.

Our experience has been very positive and we would also like to outline future plans as despite funding finishing, interest in the work of the CoPILOT project shows no signs of slowing down in terms of engagement from participants or interest from other potential partners.
Background
In 2006, two librarians at the University of Birmingham received funding from Eduserv to create 15 re-usable learning objects (RLOs) to support information literacy teaching. The BRUM (Birmingham Re-Usable Materials) project was successful and the RLOs were hosted on a University webpage for anyone to re-use. The project leaders were not at this point aware of Creative Commons licences and how these could be used with learning resources. However, they did receive several requests to re-use the RLOs from librarians in the UK and beyond.

Following BRUM, one of the leads managed two other smaller, internal projects focusing on RLOs. The first project, ReJiG (Repurposing from Jorum into GEL) took study skills resources from Jorum and repurposed them for use at Birmingham and uploaded them on to the University’s Guide to Effective Learning (GEL) webpages. This was only partly successful as the project leads found far fewer relevant learning objects were on Jorum for their needs. Of the ones that they did find, true re-purposing proved somewhat difficult and raised many questions including: what technology is best for re-purposing certain RLOs? Who was the original audience? Can I upload my re-purposed object back into Jorum?

Some of these questions led to the next in-house project, ReLO (Repurposing Learning Objects). This was an attempt to create a learning object passport which could be used to track the life of a learning object, its original use and how it had been re-purposed. This was a very short, practical project and achieved its goal. The ReLO passport was then used in a follow on project, DELILA.

In 2010, the JISC and the Higher Education Academy funded DELILA (Developing Educators’ Learning and Information Literacy for Accreditation) as part of the OER Programme. Jane Secker from LSE was the Project Manager and worked alongside Nancy Graham at the University of Birmingham to lead a team of librarians, repository staff and educational developers. They worked together to take existing teaching materials, including some RLOs and adapt them to become open educational resources (OER). The existing resources, used to support information and digital literacy teaching, were designed to be re-purposed to support the teacher training programmes (Postgraduate Certificates in Higher Education) run at both institutions. The project achieved its objective to release over 50 resources under Creative Commons licences and upload these to Jorum and institutional repositories.

After DELILA, the project leads began discussions on possible next steps and they still had ambitions to develop a community of practice to support the sharing of OERs to support information and digital literacy in the UK. With that aim clearly in mind, they designed and distributed a survey for librarians in the UK and beyond. The survey investigated how librarians currently re-use others’ resources for their teaching and if, in turn, they shared their own resources. The survey was posted on various mailing lists and received 101 responses. The majority of respondents were from the UK, but a significant minority were from overseas, from countries including the US, Canada, Ireland, Spain, Macedonia, New Zealand and Austria.

From the responses (available here: http://delilaopen.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/findingssharingoers_reportfinal1.pdf) it was clear that librarians were keen to see a community of practice in this area develop. In the UK it was relatively easy to organize a meeting of interested parties to look to establishing a committee. It was agreed this committee would report to the CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) Information Literacy Group and undertake a number of functions including collating and disseminating relevant information on information literacy OERs, arranging training on Creative Commons and provide an online space to discuss ideas and share resources. Around this time the information literacy specialist from UNESCO’s Communication and Information Sector made contact and was very interested in our work which linked up two of UNESCO’s key themes: information literacy and OERs. UNESCO were interested in getting involved in helping to develop a community of practice internationally.
CoPILOT

In autumn 2012 LSE and Birmingham bid for JISC/HEA project funds to explore internationalisation of OER. Project CoPILOT used the resources developed as part of DELILA to promote the sharing of OERs internationally. These were shared using the UNESCO online platform WSIS Knowledge Communities (http://www.wsis-community.org/).

Project CoPILOT selected the most generic and well used DELILA resources (based on usage stats from Jorum and from the nature of the resources), uploaded links to these resources on to the Knowledge Communities platform that UNESCO uses (http://www.wsis-community.org/) and then ran just a few short activities based around sharing resources. LSE and Birmingham worked with UNESCO to prepare the site and to populate it with several pages. The CoPILOT project site is part of the Information Literacy Community which is open for anyone to view at http://www.wsis-community.org/pg/groups/585111/information-literacy/. We also added Twitter (a Project CoPILOT account was set up, now @CoPILOT2013) and blog feeds and discussion threads. One of the key outcomes was to be a strategy for promoting sharing internationally.

Due to the short project timescale, small activities were planned, aimed at encouraging participation and to test how well the WSIS site was suited to online sharing and discussion.

Several international mailing lists were used to promote the site and there were around 50 expressions of interest in joining the project. Two UK JISC lists, LIS-INFOLITERACY and IL-OERS were used to send out requests for international contributors. An international information literacy list was also used as was an online newsletter for the global initiative Universitas 21 (of which University of Birmingham is a member) and a list of respondents to the post DELILA survey. Personal contacts and Twitter were also utilised to spread the word.

New recruits were asked to identify their home country and provide basic details of their area of focus.

Thirty-five of these individuals eventually signed up to the site and participated in activities and discussions. One interesting aspect of using the mailing lists above was that many of those that emailed with expressions of interest had heard about the project from further mailing lists/blogs etc. As part of a post project survey, the leads have asked participants where they heard about CoPILOT as information about new communication channels will be invaluable for future work. The results of this survey will be posted on the project website at http://delilaopen.wordpress.com/project-co-pilot/.

As can be seen by the picture below, the project site was split into different sections for different activities. A welcome page contains key information and instructions. There are activity pages for each of the three activities, which were time released and short.
The first activity was to upload between 1 and 3 links to information or digital literacy resources. The resources could be produced by the participant or just a resource they had used that was produced by someone else. The idea was to start sharing recommended links, so that other participants would see resources that they may not have known about.

The project leaders added the DELILA resource links and this encouraged seven participants to add 18 links in total, with resources added in English, Spanish, French and German. This was a really positive outcome as one of the key challenges was having no control over the participant’s level of engagement with the activities. The success of the project was completely reliant on contributions from the participants.

The second activity was to contribute to online discussions. The project leaders initially set up three discussion questions around the use and sharing of OERs and then sent a message to all participants to encourage contributions. The average number of posts to these threads was approximately 10 and the subsequent discussions provided some useful insights into current activity and attitudes towards sharing. Please see below for details.
Table 1: Responses to discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion topic</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Responses by unique country</th>
<th>Which country?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advantages and disadvantages of sharing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>UK, US, Germany and Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you look for OERs before creating content</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>UK, US, Ireland, Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you use open licences on your own content</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you organised training on OERs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>UK, Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are your own IL resources available to others</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>UK, US, Australia, Germany, Spain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the project progressed, more questions were added and further discussions took place. The responses need to be analysed more closely but participants were mixed in their experience of sharing and of searching for existing teaching resources. All respondents were keen on sharing resources but, as with previous studies, they often did not know how or where to share.

The third activity was to look at the resource links from the first activity and plan how to re-use or re-purpose one of them. The project leads assumed that this would be the most time consuming activity and therefore used Amazon voucher prizes to encourage participation. Four participants contributed to this activity, from the UK, US and Australia. This was really encouraging and something to build on in future sharing initiatives.

Statistics from the LSE learning repository on the DELILA resources show an increase in downloads during the time of the project as well as use from outside the UK. We are still awaiting figures from the University of Birmingham repository and from Jorum.

Table 1: Number of countries downloading resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>LSE repository</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learning from OER: internationalisation

The CoPILOT project plan outlined several key issues related to the international nature of the work. In the early stage when messages were sent out to potential contributors, the project leads assumed that there would be a language barrier. No one has so far indicated that this was an issue but a post project survey will address this question explicitly.

One thing learned from the responses from different mailing lists is that in future a more thorough audit of possible communication channels should be undertaken. UK lists were already well known to project leads but a list of other country specific lists would be invaluable.

A technical barrier was discovered when emailing invitations from the WSIS to participants. A few test emails were sent to UK HE institutional email addresses with no issues. However, many participants did not receive the email invitation from the WSIS site and further emails had to be sent to alternative addresses. This lengthened the process of registration for many participants and may have discouraged some from signing up.

Another barrier to online, international working is that there are few or no chances of meeting face to face with one another. Despite the ability to add a photo to personalize your profile on WSIS platform, not many
participants decided to do this. In future, it could be possible, with the right timing to coincide any international online activities with an appropriate conference. That way, at least some participants could meet for discussions and networking.

The role of moderator was quite challenging as we needed to reply to multiple discussion threads and try to encourage more people to get involved. In the project planning stages, the UNESCO IL specialist had suggested that a moderator would need to spend a considerable amount of time each week overseeing activity on the site otherwise participants would become apathetic about contributing. This is a key role for any online community, especially an international one as contributors will have many differences to overcome (time, language, sector, culture).

Another key question was what happened to the 15 or so others that had originally expressed interest but did not register. Were people lurking? Was it just a very busy time being in the first term of the academic year? Did it lead to some people downloading DELILA resources but not participating in the project further? The project leads will be contacting those non responders to find out the reasons behind their perceived non-participation.

**Conclusions**

Project CoPILOT has produced some interesting outcomes. All of the project aims and objectives were met and some very useful lessons were learnt. In terms of internationalization, the use of existing mailing lists is a good idea, and the current list can be built upon by finding out how people heard about the project. A list of key communication channels will always help to send your message as widely as possible.

The activities were also successful and this was partly due to developing short, manageable tasks that would not take much time or effort. The key lesson learnt is that it might be better to use lightweight tasks in online communities to encourage contributions. Once trust and understanding are established it would be useful to test out more involved tasks but the CoPILOT experience was one of ‘less is more’.

As the project timescale was very short, we did not have the time to explore other international spaces for sharing OERs or if creating the CoPILOT space was required or helpful. Further work will need to be done to ascertain if this is the case.

In terms of future activity on WSIS, the plan is to continue using the site to discuss, share and collaborate with participants. A directory function will soon be a part of the site which will be a good way of sharing links and resources with many others. Time spent moderating the site will be the biggest task and as long as UNESCO funds the maintenance of WSIS, the project leaders believe this is manageable.

Next steps for the project team will be to survey participants and non-participants, develop new activities and discussions and to disseminate these findings as widely as possible. The work of the CoPILOT committee in the UK will also continue during 2013, with a training event on use of Creative Commons for librarians currently being organised and strategic planning of further work on the WSIS site.

The project leads will be delivering presentations and workshops at a number of events in the UK during 2013 and will use these opportunities to further explore sharing of resources both in the UK and beyond.

As part of the project plan, a strategy for promoting OER internationally is currently being developed and will be released with a Creative Commons licence through the WSIS site, the DELILA website and other communication channels. With the University of Birmingham’s announcement of the Future Learn MOOC partnership, OER project work on information and digital literacy (and the subsequent knowledge gained) will be invaluable in supporting wider open learning initiatives.
References
DELILA (2012) Available at: http://delilaopen.wordpress.com/

Project CoPILOT (2012) Available at: http://delilaopen.wordpress.com/project-co-pilot/

WSIS Knowledge Communities: http://www.wsis-community.org/

Future Learn http://www.futurelearn.com/