Project

Languages Open Resources Online (LORO):
Fostering a culture of collaboration and sharing

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Abstract

As the last ten years have seen the advent of the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement, large numbers of digital content are now available for learners and teachers to use and reuse. Engaging with OER compels educators to address issues of sharing, quality, ownership, and changing professional practices. In this report, we describe the experience of setting up LORO, a repository of languages OER, especially in relation to teachers’ perceptions of barriers and enablers to successful engagement with open content.

Keywords: OER, repositories, culture change, user engagement, sharing, re-use

This report explains the development of LORO (Languages Open Resources Online), a repository of language teaching and learning resources set up at the Open University (OU), UK, in 2010. First we introduce the concept of Open Educational Resources (OER) and describe how languages are taught at the Department of Languages, The Open University, to set forth the philosophy and context behind LORO. We then relate how the project was implemented and present the results of an environmental assessment exercise designed to find out about the views and expectations of OU language tutors with regard to learning repositories and sharing materials. Finally, we conclude with a description of the features and functionality of the LORO repository, and some reflections on the changes in practice that its introduction has sparked at the Department of Languages.

1. Overview of the Open Educational Resource Movement

The Open Educational Resources (OER) movement is inspired by the Open Source Software movement (Wiley, 2009; Baraniuk, 2007), and shares with it 'the simple and powerful idea that the world’s knowledge is a public good, and that technology in general and the World Wide Web in particular provide an extraordinary opportunity for everyone to share, use and reuse it' (Smith & Casserly, 2006: 8).

In recent years there has been considerable interest in developing OER collections, notably since in 2001-2 the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) launched its OpenCourseWare initiative, providing most of its curriculum as online, free study modules, so that anyone could use them and, more importantly, reuse, adapt, remix, and publish them again.
In 2002 UNESCO coined the term 'Open Educational Resources' which was defined as: 'The open provision of educational resources, enabled by information and communication technologies, for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for non-commercial purposes' (UNESCO, 2002). The term has since been redefined to encompass teaching and learning resources, software, and any other tools made available under an intellectual property (IP) license, usually a Creative Commons license, that allows for the 'free use or re-purposing by others' (William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2008).

Since the launch of MIT's OpenCourseWare other OER initiatives have followed, such as Rice University's Connexions, The Open University's OpenLearn or Merlot, from California State University. More recently the University of Nottingham has created Xpert, a repositories aggregator which harvests content from other online sources. These projects are often supported by considerable donations from charitable foundations such as the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, or innovation funding bodies such as the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) in the UK.

In this fairly new field of OER there is already a considerable body of literature devoted to reviewing the organisational, technical and pedagogical issues around setting up specific OER projects – Butcher (2009) offers a comprehensive overview of the large institutional OER projects in Higher Education, and Gourley & Lane (2009) and Sclater (2009) provide accounts of OpenLearn. However, as Kozinska et al. (2010) have pointed out, after the initial years spent creating a critical mass of both resources and users around large OER projects, the OER movement is now starting to focus on conducting research and developing research methods to understand the use and impact of OER (see University of Oxford, 2009), and to 'build a robust evidence base to support and enhance the design, evaluation and use of OER' (OLnet, 2008: 5).

One of the crucial transformations that have affected how OERs are presented to users, according to Baraniuk (2007), is that whereas web 1.0, using a 'broadcast' model, was characterised by the slogan 'Content is King', web 2.0, the remix web, encourages participation and interaction under the banner 'Community is King'. Consequently, one of the central challenges for the OER project is transforming static repositories of OER, which simply provide content, into dynamic hubs where contributors engage with each other while uploading their own resources, and reusing and repurposing resources for other teaching and learning contexts. One of the emerging areas of research, therefore, is around the issues that enable or inhibit the use, reuse and remix of OER.

2. A culture of sharing

Central to the OER movement is the willingness for content creators to share their educational resources, usually under Creative Commons licences, which enable others to use and also ideally to adapt the materials to suit their own needs and contexts. However, as Byskov Lund (2010) explains, 'it is not easy to make teachers share materials'. Indeed, in their survey of educational repositories in Europe, EdReNe (2009: 93) report on a study that Becta –the now abolished UK government agency for educational technology– conducted on the barriers and enablers to teachers using, repurposing and sharing Digital Learning Resources (DLRs). Becta's study looked at school teachers' attitudes to accessing, repurposing and sharing resources, and found the following:

• As far as accessing DLRs, some of the drivers identified were time saving and curiosity about other teachers’ work. However, barriers included concerns about quality, issues of trust, and the sheer volume and discoverability of resources.

• In terms of re-purposing DLRs, one important benefit was the amount of material available, but the barriers included: difficulties in navigating one's way through that wealth of materials; insufficient or inadequate teacher training; concerns about...
copyright; time implications of repurposing; and teachers' need to feel ownership of the resources they use.

- Finally, in terms of sharing DLRs, the Becta study identified some drivers, including technology as an enabler to sharing, efficiency and time saving, the furthering of one's knowledge and employability; and also some barriers, such as lack of time, lack of training, lack of a sharing culture, concerns about copyright, the feeling that one's work might be 'stolen' by others, and concerns about 'looking stupid in a very public forum'. Ultimately, the study concluded that teachers prefer to feel part of the community before they are comfortable sharing their resources.

The next section describes the system of supported distance language learning at the Open University, and outlines the main advantages of creating a repository of resources for languages teaching and learning in this context.

3. The context

3.1 Language teaching at the Open University

Since 1995 the Open University (OU) has been offering language modules under its successful model of supported distance learning. Students work independently with structured learning materials produced by the institution (print, audio-visual and web-based), whilst also being supported by a regionally-based tutor or Associate Lecturer (AL) who offers advice, gives individualised feedback on assignments, and runs regular group tutorials. More recently, a system of blended tuition has been adopted for all language modules, which means that some tutorials take place face-to-face while others are held on Elluminate, an online audio-visual conferencing system. A total of 18 modules in French, Spanish, German, Italian, Chinese, Welsh and English for Academic Purposes are currently run by Department of Languages (DoL).

Although, typically, modules at the Open University have high student populations (from several hundred to over one thousand), and up to 50 Associate Lecturers (ALs) may be teaching the same module at the same time, each AL is individually responsible for the preparation and running of tutorials for their group of students (approximately 20 students per tutor). Initially, languages ALs were expected to create the teaching materials they required for these group sessions. However, with the advent of electronic tuition the Department of Languages decided to create materials for online teaching sessions as a way of providing examples of suitable activities for online classrooms and easing the workload of individual tutors. These materials were initially presented as ready-made tutorials following the syllabus of each module, and tutors were given access only to the tutorial resources needed for the module they supported. However, as these materials were made available to tutors through each module's website in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), tutors had no automatic access to the resources for other courses, levels and languages.

Most ALs have been making use of these resources, but almost all of them have also been producing some of their own materials from scratch. Sharing of these materials has so far been infrequent and restricted to a few trusted colleagues. Although many regions were pooling resources and used staff development events to allow ALs to prepare teaching sessions jointly, attempts to share resources electronically across regions had previously been achieved through various uncoordinated, localised sharing schemes where materials were presented on a variety of formats (paper-based or electronically). No neat solution for sharing across the whole community was available.

There was clearly a lot of scope for improvement to the status quo. The first step taken was to disaggregate the ready-made tutorials given to tutors into individual activities so that tutors would have greater freedom and encouragement to mix and match activities
according to their groups’ size, needs and preferences, and to the timing of the tutorial session in relation to the syllabus, for example. The second step was to find a system that, unlike the VLE, would allow all tutors to access all resources irrespective of the module they taught.

### 3.2 Potential benefits of a teaching and learning repository

The creation of a digital repository for language teaching resources was perceived as potentially beneficial in the OU context in terms of workload and professional development, and to provide a source of inspiration and new ideas.

It was felt that the likely impact of such a repository would be in three main areas:

- **Access to all resources provided by the Department of Languages:**

  Each AL at the Department of Languages had access only to the teaching resources provided for the module they supported. This is one of the disadvantages of the VLE, as it locks content allowing only users linked to a particular module to access it.

  A digital repository would mean that all resources for all languages and all levels would be stored on one searchable platform accessible to all staff.

- **Re-use and sharing of resources produced by ALs:**

  ALs working on the same module used to prepare similar tutorial resources, but had little opportunity to discuss or share these with colleagues, beyond regional staff development events.

  A digital repository would allow resources to be shared with colleagues and adapted as required, thus providing the community with culturally and linguistically richer and more up-to-date materials.

- **Access to Open University tutorial materials for the wider language-teaching community:**

  Through the OpenLearn project, the Open University has made a proportion of their learning materials freely available online for use by students and educators (see Sclater, 2009). Tutorial materials for languages, however, were still restricted to a narrow group of OU tutors.

  A digital repository would allow language teaching professionals across the world to access and re-use teaching resources produced at the Open University.

Having decided on the desirability of having a digital repository of resources for language teaching and learning, the Department of Languages sought funding that would allow the development of such a tool. The following sections describe the implementation of the LORO project.

### 4. Developing a digital repository for language teaching materials: the LORO Project

From April 2009 to June 2010, the Department of Languages at the OU was funded by JISC to develop LORO, an integrated repository of language teaching and learning resources based on the Language Box, the lightweight repository for languages established as a proof of concept by the Faroes team at the University of Southampton.

The LORO project was carried out in two stages, as shown in the table below:
**Stage 1: Environmental assessment, technical development and seeding**

*(April 09 – Jun 10)*
- environmental assessment survey and follow-up focus groups
- development of the LORO site
- uploading of OU tutorial resources produced by central academic teams
- encouraging users to search and browse LORO

**Stage 2: User engagement (ongoing since May 2010)**
- encouraging users to share their own resources through LORO
- staff training and support activities
- user survey and analysis of user statistics

4.1 Stage 1: Environmental assessment, technical development and seeding

At the start of the project a survey was conducted to establish languages ALs’ range of experience and views on using online repositories. To this purpose an online questionnaire was emailed to all 316 ALs, of whom 129 responded (40.8%). Contributions were anonymous and the sample was both self-selected and random as all tutors had an equal chance to participate. Subsequently, focus groups with a subset of 33 questionnaire respondents were conducted via audio-graphics conferencing (using Elluminate) to provide deeper insights on the same themes and to validate the data. Focus group discussions were recorded and the co-occurring online text chat was also saved separately after the session. The online medium for both the questionnaire and the focus groups could conceivably bias the representativeness of the sample, offering the views of those who are more positive or open to using online tools. However, email and online conferencing tools are regularly used by all staff at the Department of Languages where they are becoming the default modes of communication. In this sense, the bias for this particular group would be minimal. This initial environmental assessment exercise investigated issues around ICT expertise, creation and sharing of tutorial resources as well as awareness of, and expectations from, digital repositories; the results are reported in detail in section 5, “Environmental Assessment: Main findings”.

The technical development of LORO was carried out by colleagues at the University of Southampton’s School of Electronics and Computer Science in collaboration with the LORO project team. LORO is based on Web 2.0 principles and powered by the open source repository software E-Prints; its functionalities are based on those of the Language Box (see Davis et al., 2009) although customised to the needs of the OU Department of Languages. The development site was initially hosted by Southampton and later on migrated to the Open University servers.

The first step in organising the upload of resources to LORO was to work with all our existing centrally-produced materials for tutorials and organise them into self-standing ‘resources’ or ‘learning objects’. Between September 2009 and February 2010 around 700 OU teaching resources were uploaded to LORO, to seed the repository with a critical mass of content that would make it worth using. All resources uploaded to LORO in this initial phase were labelled, tagged and described; initially organised by module, as this is a helpful categorisation for Open University teachers; and mostly designed specifically for an online learning environment (although easily adapted for use in face-to-face teaching). The materials cover the seven languages taught at the OU and range in CEFR level from A1 to C1.

A small number of ALs received training in how to use LORO and were given the job of uploading the OU resources and providing technical testing and feedback on usability,
functionality, etc. for the technical developers and the LORO team. Involving ALs at this stage meant that a group within the larger body of tutors became very familiar with the new repository, which enabled them to continue, if they chose to do so, to act as LORO champions and assist other colleagues.

Uploading of resources was timed to coincide with module start dates and ALs were informed that their resources were now available on LORO rather than distributed by module. Instructions on how to access the materials and the link to LORO were posted on OU module websites, and most users found the process of browsing and downloading from LORO straightforward.

4.2 Stage 2: User engagement

In the second stage of the project starting in May 2010 all language ALs were encouraged to become actively engaged with LORO by searching and browsing LORO, expanding their user profile and uploading their own resources. A range of staff development opportunities were offered to support ALs at this stage of the project in order to meet training needs previously identified in the environmental survey. Training sessions were conducted online via Elluminate and aimed at giving practical guidance on how to upload resources to LORO. Potential benefits of sharing such as professional enhancement, community building and peer feedback were discussed. The sessions also included information on copyright, attribution of ownership, and on how to enhance the usability and visibility of resources through descriptions, labelling and tagging. The online sessions were well attended and the recordings of the sessions and accompanying training materials were made available online to all OU language ALs.

In order to evaluate the use of LORO so far, statistical data on users’ engagement has been collected from March 2010 onwards and a second survey was conducted in July 2010 in order to gather responses on how well ALs thought that LORO was meeting the requirements expressed in the environmental survey a year earlier. The analysis of these results is still on-going and will be made public at a later date.

In the following section we report the findings of the environmental survey carried out at the beginning of the project. The data provide an insight into relevant practices and attitudes of OU languages ALs and will be used as a basis for further investigation into the impact of LORO on professional development and teaching and learning.

5. Environmental survey: main findings

The first environmental survey (Tomás, 2009) with Open University ALs was carried out in June/July 2009 and informed the LORO project by investigating practices and attitudes as well as perceived barriers and enablers to using repositories, with a view to identifying training needs and informing the development of the repository. The survey was followed by three focus group discussions that took place on Elluminate with a subset of the survey respondents. Hereafter we will present the findings from both the survey and focus groups.

5.1 ICT expertise

Results show that OU language ALs have a positive attitude to using ICT tools (see table 1). The levels of self-reported ability to perform several ICT-related tasks reveal a group of teachers who are generally confident with ICT. Almost all ALs work with word processed documents, use the internet and handle digital audio files, while well over two thirds also use presentation software and spreadsheets and have experience in tutoring via computer conferencing systems. The electronic medium is the most popular method of storing materials, alongside traditional paper storage.

5.2 Creation and re-use of materials
The majority of ALs prefer to create their own materials, and 95% of them say they produce some of their materials from scratch at some point during the delivery of the course. Almost all ALs (89%) use the teaching resources provided by the institution but they adapt them to suit their own teaching style or their groups' particular needs and dynamics (97%). The internet is used extensively for material preparation. The focus groups suggest that the internet is particularly useful for finding grammar activities on specific points, videos, pictures, audio files, authentic language samples and up-to-date information. The survey reveals that, if a resource is used, it will nearly always be adapted and modified irrespective of where it may come from.

5.3 Awareness and knowledge of online repositories

In comparison with materials produced by the Department of Languages and general and language-specific internet sites, learning materials repositories appeared to be the least preferred online tool used to develop teaching materials (see table 1). The lack of knowledge about learning materials repositories and what they offer, as well as the lack of skills or confidence on how to use them, were the main reasons given by tutors for not using online repositories.

**Do you share your own tutorial materials (handouts, forum messages, activities, etc) with other tutors? (tick all that apply)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents (n=129)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes %</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I send them if somebody asks me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I share them with certain colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I offer them to colleagues (through forums or at staff development events)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often share my teaching materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I send them to my regional/national centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I upload them to a teaching materials repository (Jorum, for example)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Sharing of materials and modes.

5.4 Attitude to sharing

The survey revealed that there was no strong culture of sharing teaching materials among OU ALs (see table 1), a similar situation to what other researchers have found in other contexts (Byskov Lund, 2010). A certain amount of informal sharing happened between close colleagues; within some regions ALs were encouraged to circulate resources they had created which they felt had worked particularly well, and these were then shared with other colleagues. The lack of a sharing culture is not particularly surprising since at the time of the survey ALs did not have a formal system for sharing their resources, and they would not therefore volunteer their materials widely to each other. Although the overall reaction to the idea of sharing materials was positive, some ALs raised concerns and mentioned the barriers that would prevent them from sharing their own materials, such as lack of time and remuneration, working with an unreliable system, lack of reciprocity (unequal participation of users), (lack of) quality and usefulness of materials, lack of feedback on own materials, fear about copyright issues, and concerns about ownership and attribution not being acknowledged (see table 3). It is also important to understand that sharing is not necessarily a universally accepted concept and that in some cultures there may be considerable reluctance to accept this principle, as exemplified in this quote from one of the tutors: 'I'm not a fan of sharing. I prefer private property.'

5.5 Enablers and barriers to sharing
Another topic that this survey sought to understand was which aspects would encourage or discourage ALs to use a languages repository. Among the former, respondents cited a user friendly online system, easily accessible and quick to use, and to a lesser extent, contributing to the creation of a large, frequently used collection of materials (see Table 2). Notably, publishing and showcasing their own materials was only important for around a third of respondents.

Which of the following would encourage you to use a repository? (n=129)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A user friendly online system that is easily accessible and quick to use</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing to the creation of a large, frequently used collection of materials</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An effective way of storing, reviewing and linking to or referencing my materials</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being identified clearly as the creator</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to publish and take down my own materials</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Encouraging factors to use a repository.

Accordingly, most ALs found that a complicated or slow system would discourage them from using a repository and around half of them had concerns about their work being misappropriated or misused (see Table 3).

Which of the following would discourage you from making your materials available to others? (tick the three most important to you) (n=129)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A complicated, hard to use or slow system</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People appropriating my stuff without acknowledgment</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People misusing my stuff, e.g. adapting inappropriately</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sure that I have copyright clearance before sharing can be a problem</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I lose control over what happens with my materials</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t like to place my own work in a public area</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t trust the technology</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t want others to use my stuff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Discouraging qualities of a repository.

5.6 Users’ expectations of a repository

ALs were asked what they would like a languages repository to do for them and results, summarised in Table 4 below, show that the highest expectations, although not universally shared, relate to access to materials as a source of inspiration, and the ability to adapt those materials.

What would you like a languages repository to do for you? (tick the three most important to you) (n=129)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Give me access to materials as sources for ideas or inspiration</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Allow me to adapt materials I found  
Allow me to find materials produced by other ALs  
Allow me to store and manage my own materials  
Allow me to access materials produced by course teams  
Give me access to a wider pool of materials (stuff from other cultures)  
Allow me to view materials from other languages and levels

Table 4. Functions of a repository.

6. The LORO repository

This final section explains the main features of the LORO repository.

The LORO home page allows users to log in as OU staff or guests (any user can create a guest account) so as to access the full functionalities and features of the repository.

![Figure 1. LORO Home page (http://loro.open.ac.uk)](http://loro.open.ac.uk)

Without logging in, users can still search, browse (by language, tag, CEFR level, or module code, which is helpful to OU users) and download resources, but cannot leave comments on resources or upload their own content.

Each resource usually contains a teaching activity and can include a single file or several files, such as teachers' notes or lesson plans, whiteboards or presentations for use in the (virtual) classroom and, in some cases, worksheets, images, sound files or other additional documents. Most file types can be previewed by the user in a preview box, and those that cannot, i.e. Elluminate whiteboards, are also saved as images and presentations.
Each resource page displays the title and a brief description of the materials contained in the resource, their purpose and/or suggestions on how to use them, and very simple metadata:

- the name of the person who has added the resource to the repository, when it is not labelled as an OU resource, and the date in which it was uploaded;
- a number of tags designed to help find resources when browsing;
- the language and CEFR level;
- the attribution, that is to say, the name of the person who created the materials, or if adapted, the name of the original author and that of the person who has adapted it; and
- copyright information

All resources in LORO are published with one of two Creative Commons licenses, which include the following:

- Attribution, which means the author of the original resource must always be acknowledged if the resource is reused, repurposed or republished;
- Non-Commercial, which means that users must not make a commercial gain by publishing that resource; and
- a choice between No Derivatives, where the author states a desire for the resource to be used ‘as is’, and Share Alike, where the author allows users to change that resource as they want.

Metadata in LORO also includes the number of times a resource has been downloaded, and this information is closely linked to the visibility choices that users can make when uploading content to LORO: keeping content private while the user is still working on it or not ready to share it, or sharing it openly with the whole community of language professionals inside and outside the OU. For OU users, there is a third choice of sharing their content with other OU users only rather than making it completely open. Only those with OU accounts will then be able to access those resources.
In addition, a toolbox allows all registered users to download the resource as a zip file (as opposed to individually downloading each of the files it contains), email the author of the resource, bookmark the item and make another resource based on that one. If registered users have already uploaded materials to the repository, the toolbox also displays a link for them to edit their own resources. Finally, there is also section of the resource page to add comments and notes for all users or for the author of the resource.

Registered users have a profile page which functions as their home, where they can modify their profile – usually name, location and any personal information they decide to make available to others; manage their resources (i.e. upload new materials, delete, edit and organise existing resources in collections) and keep a record of their bookmarks and saved searches.
7. A growing culture of sharing: final note

The evidence of our initial questionnaire and focus groups is that a certain amount of sharing was already taking place, previous to the development of LORO. However, sharing was informal, mostly took place between known colleagues and close networks, through personal contacts and emails or in face-to-face staff development meetings at regional events. Sharing resources was acknowledged to save time, or, in the words of one AL, 're-inventing the wheel' and gave ALs the chance to 'get inspired by other colleagues' work'. It also led to improving the student learning experience by providing ALs with a wider variety of resources and teaching approaches and ideas, and a richer pool of cultural knowledge. Existing practice had been characterised by the Department of Languages providing tutorial resources for each module through the VLE, which meant that the content was locked in and only accessible to certain users for a certain period of time. The Department wanted to move from a culture of informal sharing to a more transparent, formalised system that would provide easy access to all teaching materials.

Clear institutional support and a clear vision at the outset has facilitated the development of LORO, resulting in a repository that is fully embedded with the departmental procedures for course development and delivery and making available over 1,500 resources (over 300 hours of languages Open Educational Resources) for seven languages. LORO has started a significant culture change within the institution in the way in which materials are sourced, produced and distributed or shared.

Users have been involved in the project in many ways: they have been consulted through surveys to find out about usage as well as user satisfaction, kept up-to-date through regular newsletters and training events, and given opportunities to participate in the project as technical testers, uploaders of materials or trainers and supporters of other users. The community aspect needs to be encouraged and nurtured, but there are some signs of increased awareness of the potential of such a platform for facilitating community development, as indicated in this quote from an AL:

'LORO has indeed given us tutors a platform in which we can develop and grow as a community of practitioners that goes well beyond the language or level you teach, or the region you work in. Maybe we are not doing it yet, but the bones are there to start communicating with other tutors, independently of whether you like sharing or not. (...) I feel that LORO has opened up the boundaries for all tutors to engage with each other by choice (not because the OU organises a staff development day, for instance), 24/7 in a space where regional limits do not exist.'

At the Open University’s Department of Languages, the LORO initiative has started a process which aims to make OERs a central part of language teaching. With its two strands of Open University resources on the one hand, and materials uploaded by individuals on the other, LORO is effectively both an institutional and a 'community of users' repository. One of LORO's strengths is that it builds on an 'existing community of practice with defined needs' (EdReNe 2010b), which 'seems to be one of the most promising strategies' encouraging 'ownership and trust, often cited as essential requirements for sharing' as well as offering 'important roads to support sustainability of services [...] as the underlying needs of the community will remain'. A sustainable system, which reliably addresses the needs of its users, would be expected to benefit not only the existing community of OU language ALs, but also the wider community of languages practitioners who, it is hoped, will engage with and help to shape LORO in the future.

References:


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