



Opening digital doors through communities of practice

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Project background

This poster illustrates an Irish Higher Education sectoral initiative, the National Digital Learning Repository (NDLR). Many repositories for sharing educational resources or publications (JORUM, MERLOT) have been established in recent years to enable access to educational materials



Similarly the NDLR was established in 2004 in Ireland to enable the sharing of digital learning content across Universities and Institutes of Technology in Ireland. The NDLR mission is "to promote and support Higher Education sector staff in the collaboration, development and sharing of learning resources and associate teaching practices". (NDLR 2009) The project provides an online repository to support sharing of teaching and learning digital resources. A major enterprise of the project has been the instigation of twelve communities of practice (CoPs) to support the development of shareable and reusable resources.

Project evaluation

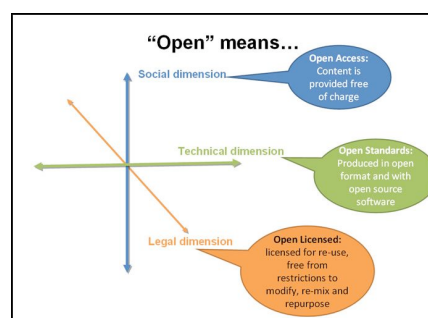
In 2008 the NDLR completed an evaluation and the subsequent findings are currently guiding the future planning of this national collaborative project. The evaluation examined the NDLR repository system and the structure and organisation of the communities of practice. Investigation into user experience, licensing rules of NDLR content, collaboration, sharing mechanisms was tool place. Recommendations comprised of: upgrade of the NDLR repository system; alterations to existing licensing conditions; open access for NDLR educational resources; merger of certain communities of practice.

Communities of practice

Twelve communities of practice (CoPs) of various subject disciplines were established in 2004. The development of CoPs was based on the theories of Wenger (2002) who described a community of practice as a group "who share a concern or a passion about a topic", these community members are often intrinsically motivated to 'deepen their knowledge'. The aim of NDLR CoPs was to plan and develop necessary elearning resources or reusable learning objects (RLOs) for specific subject areas which would be made available through the NDLR for the Irish higher education community.

The 2008 evaluation built a picture of the CoPs and how the CoPs were experienced by those participating in them. A key finding was that the CoPs were instrumental to the primary success of the NDLR project and essential to the future sustainable development of the project. However the report suggested restructuring the communities of practice to become SMART (sustainable, manageable, active, relevant and reflective, targeted) CoPs. Innovation in learning object development within CoPs would be continued through the release of timely funding to the CoPs.





Open education resources

Digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research (OECD, 2007).

NDLR licensing and access

The NDLR is striving to provide an online repository that will host open education resources. These resources will be provided for use with a Creative commons licence



Supporting communities through social networking

Web 2.0 technology currently supports the CoPs through the use of blog tools. However, in the future web 2.0 tools will be further developed in order to facilitate communication among community members. A social network space is proposed using the eportfolio tool *Mahara*.

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