The Community Café: creating and sharing open educational resources with community-based language teachers

Kate Borthwick and Alison Dickens
University of Southampton
UK
K.Borthwick@soton.ac.uk
A.M.Dickens@soton.ac.uk

Abstract: The Community Café project ran from 2010 – 2011 and was a collaboration between the University of Southampton; Southampton City Council and Manchester Metropolitan University. It was funded by the JISC to create, publish online and share a collection of digital resources for community languages teachers in the Southampton area.

The project addressed a particular problem: the scarcity of up-to-date, online resources for community languages. Community languages are defined as "…languages spoken by members of minority groups or communities within a majority language context" (Cilt). The Southampton area, for example, is home to a wide range of community languages, including Gujarati, Bengali, Chinese, Afghan Farsi, Hindi, Malay, Malayalam, Persian, Punjabi, Polish and Urdu. These languages are often learnt in informal situations rather than within the mainstream education system and have historically been undervalued by society in favour of English and other modern European languages. Teachers of these languages are often reliant on creating their own materials as a range of teaching resources in these languages is not available. Materials that do exist are often of inconsistent quality, unsuitable for their local, UK context, and are paper-based. Teachers also have limited access to training for the creation and repurposing of material, as they operate outside of the mainstream system and receive very little funding for their activities. In short, this was a community group who could benefit greatly from access to open resources; training in using technology in teaching; increased numbers of OERs and the networking possibilities social media sites offer to make contacts with other teachers across the UK.

This paper will describe the mix of informal and formal methods used to successfully engage the community languages group in Southampton. It will expand on the collaboration between this group and the university, and summarise project findings reflecting on the issues, challenges and pleasures of such a collaboration with a community group that has limited time and IT-literacy, to create and share open educational resources. It will also offer comments on issues of sustainability related to such community projects focussed around the sharing of open educational content.