LEARNING THROUGH SHARING :
OPEN RESOURCES, OPEN PRACTICES, OPEN COMMUNICATION

The OnStream project.
A case study of collaboration between teachers of Russian from three educational sectors in the UK.

Terry King, UCL.

ABSTRACT

Using OER to address the problem of the isolation of teachers in supplementary (Saturday) schools, we organised collaboration between teachers of Russian, in London, in three supplementary schools, a mainstream secondary school and a university. The aim was for them to share resources and pedagogical approaches.

The project began with a meeting for identification of common needs and goals. A Moodle space was set up and subsequent activity was via an on-line discussion forum for exchanging ideas, and a resource bank for sharing materials. Early on, the supplementary teachers visited the mainstream school to observe three lessons.

The ensuing resource bank was substantial; 4 short films of lessons in each sectors 20 items of teaching materials, 2 PowerPoints by teachers for classroom use and 7 PowerPoints by their students on study topics.

In our first venture into on-line OER, we found the development of a culture of sharing among teachers faces many obstacles.

1) **The differing context of the production and use of the created materials**. At the initial meeting we felt we had much in common and mutual help was possible. However, in the discussion forum, the supplementary teachers were concerned to establish they worked in a very different context to the others. They were part-timers, teaching in the target language to small classes mixed in age with varying knowledge of that language.

2) **Pedagogical styles.** The videos and observed lessons showed a variety of approaches, teacher-centred and pupil-centred. The resources ranged from the open-ended (e.g. web links with suggestions on their use or original writing for re-use) to the closed (e.g. worksheets for completion by the students). Worksheets predominated, possibly because they are easier to share.

3) **The problem of non-take-up of resources**. Creating a resource reflects the creator's own take on teaching. Ownership remains critical when the materials are offered to others. Resources alone are not enough; their quality and the way they are used matters.

4) **Psycho-sociological factors** inherent in sharing with strangers. Some of the contributors to the forum were defensive and hesitant, others over-assertive.

Yet, on the positive side, everyone recognised the benefits of sharing. The work is on-going. We are setting up a public web site to make the resources available to anyone. In this second phase it is hoped that the rich possibilities of Web 2.0 tools can be exploited.