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REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE? AN ANALYSIS OF PRACTICES RELATED TO THE SHARING OF INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTION MATERIALS AMONGST ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Much of the work that librarians do involves facilitating access to shared resources. For many librarians this extends beyond providing access to information sources like books and articles to also include resources that we use in our teaching. There is a large amount of anecdotal evidence that suggests that sharing of informational literacy teaching materials is common amongst those who engage in information literacy instruction. This survey gathered responses from academic librarians in the United States and sought to provide insight into questions regarding the prevalence of sharing instructional materials for this group (both inside their workplaces and beyond), the type of resources that are being shared, as well as the means by which items are being shared. Information on motives for sharing instructional materials was also gathered in the survey.

For nearly as long as the Internet has been in common use amongst librarians there have been centralized repositories available to deposit teaching materials. Amongst these efforts perhaps the most prominent has been PRIMO, which is managed by an ACRL Instruction Section committee and provides access to a variety of peer-reviewed teaching materials. LOEX provides links to externally hosted information literacy and library instruction teaching materials, albeit in a fairly limited way. The California State University system created MERLOT, an initiative that hosts teaching materials for all academic disciplines, including information literacy instruction materials. Within the context of the questions posed above this survey sought to gain insight into the use of websites specifically designed to facilitate open sharing versus more informal means of sharing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many papers have been written over the past decade that evaluate different aspects of open educational resources. For instance, there have been papers written about librarians' support for OERs as items housed by a library but little has been written about librarians' use of OERs within the context of their own teaching. This survey is first to address current wide-scale sharing practices of instructional materials amongst academic librarians in the United States. The most relevant preceding study is Graham and Secker's (2012) *Librarians, Information Literacy and Open Educational Resources: Report of a Survey*. In this report the authors surveyed librarians primarily in the United Kingdom in an effort to find out which websites and repositories were being used to share information literacy instructional materials as well as the motivations behind this kind of sharing. A key finding from their survey was that the majority of librarians surveyed were currently sharing resources but in a limited, non-publicly accessible way and therefore the authors argue that raising awareness of existing open resources sites is necessary to encourage sharing.

"To Share or Not to Share: An Insight into an Academic Community of Practice" (Dundon, Exton, & Diggins, 2012) investigated the sharing practices of an academic community in Ireland and the community's willingness to actively contribute to a national open repository of OERs. This study determined that the primary incentives to participating in a shared repository involved helping to create a sense of community spirit and gaining peer recognition The primary deterrents to sharing were a lack of personal reward in terms of institutional recognition and the time constraints involved in sharing materials.

Similarly, the authors of *Open Educational Resources: The Value of Reuse in Higher Education* (White, Manton, & Warren, 2011) state that those in higher education are generally aware of the value of reuse. The data that the authors compiled indicate that time savings may result from OER use but raising the quality of teaching materials student learning is a greater consideration than time efficiency (which may not be assured). The literature on OERs, which is more robust in Europe than in the United States, indicates that there are many nuances to the sharing and reuse of teaching materials and that while reuse is highly valued there are currently structural impediments to doing so.

SURVEY FINDINGS

A call for participation in the survey was disseminated via ACRL's ILI-L (Information Literacy Instruction Discussion List). The majority of respondents completed all applicable questions and provided detailed answers. The design of the survey was informed by the work of Graham and Secker in their previously referenced 2012 survey, which was used as a model in part to facilitate an international comparison of sharing practices. The survey was designed to address the prevalence of sharing instructional materials amongst academic librarians (both inside their workplaces and beyond), the type of resources that are being shared, as well as the means by which items are shared. The survey also sought to gain information on motives for sharing instructional materials. This survey defined "teaching materials" as "any resource that can be reused to support learning".

113 academic librarians participated in the survey. Amongst the survey participants 106 (or 94%) reported looking for existing teaching materials to supplement the resources they use in their teaching practice. This corresponds with the finding in Graham and Secker's (2012) study that a significant majority of instruction librarians are interested in utilizing shared materials.

Table 1: Do you look for existing teaching material to supplement the resources you use for instruction?
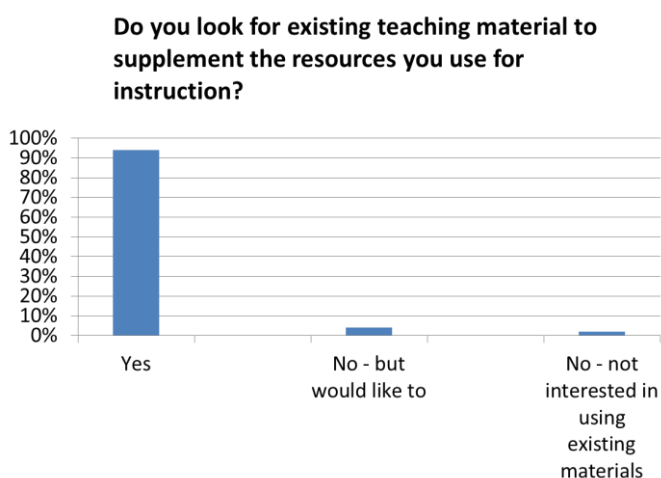
The survey's participants varied greatly in the ways in which they sought shared materials. The most commonly used resource to find materials was described as a "web search" and sometimes more specifically as a "Google search" (50% of participants). Additionally, 34% reported finding resources via a listserv like ILI-L, while 26% reported finding resources through personal connections, e.g., those they work with. Roughly 17% of respondents reported finding resources via LibGuides, books, and articles respectively. In spite of being purposefully designed to make information literacy instruction materials easily accessible, only 19% of respondents reported finding materials via PRIMO. Similarly, 15% reported using MERLOT. A wide variety of other resources received a small number of responses. For instance, blogs and wikis were mentioned in just a few responses. It should be noted that participants were allowed to list more than one method for finding materials and a majority did so.

As reported in Table 2, finding openly available worksheets was of particular interest to respondents as were web-based tutorials and lesson plans, followed by quizzes and slides. This question allowed respondents to submit a response under 'Other'. By far the most common response for 'Other' was video resources, which 15% of survey participants said they had found and used.

Table 2: What kind of materials have you used?
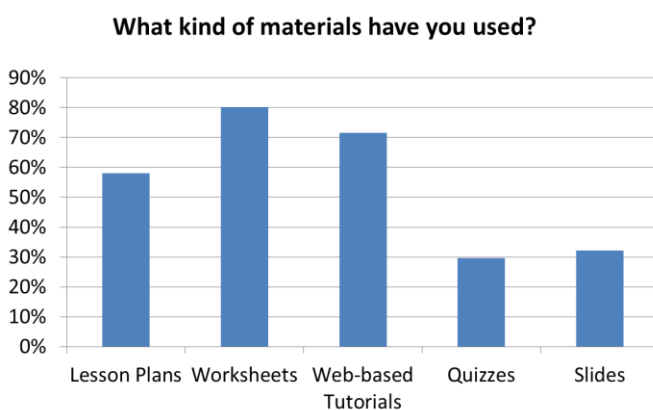
Although a vast majority of participants reported looking for existing material to supplement the resources, they use for instruction only 42% reported sharing instructional materials with librarians outside their institution. Over 50% reported sharing materials with just those working at their institution while 9% reported an interest in sharing but do not currently do so.

Table 3: Yes / No responses
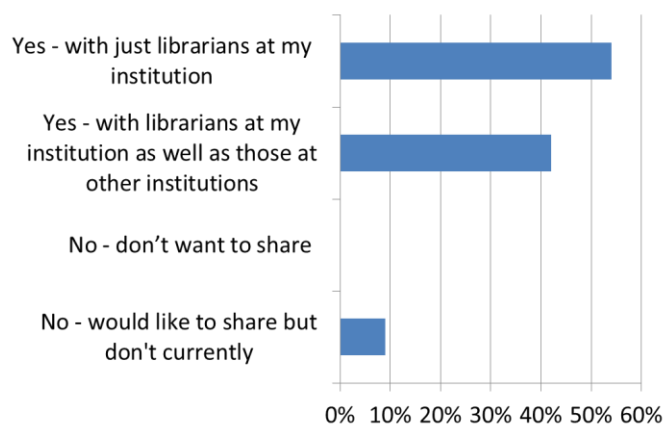
For those sharing with *just colleagues at their institution* the most commons means of doing was via email (24%), followed by a shared drive or intranet (22%), in-person via informal conversations (20%) or through resource sharing meetings (18%). Additionally, LibGuides were mentioned by a number of respondents (15%), which may serve as de facto open resources given their findability on the open web, even though they may not have been purposefully developed to be shared with librarians outside of one's institution.

The sharing methods utilized by those sharing with just colleagues at their institution bears significant overlap with the librarians who share materials with both librarians at their institution as well as librarians at other institutions. Amongst the latter group 32% mentioned using each of the following – email, listservs, and meetings. LibGuides were used by 16% and conferences were referenced by 13%. MERLOT was only mentioned by 6% and PRIMO was not mentioned by any participants. Social media appears to have some impact in sharing as it was referenced by 13% of participants. Given the significant percentage of librarians who use social media in a professional capacity it could have been expected that there would have been a higher response rate for this method of sharing.

The types of materials shared look nearly identical for all of those who participated in the survey with the exception that those who share outside of their institution were more likely to share web-based tutorials. This may reflect a correlation between the amount of time a resource takes to develop and the likelihood of its creator(s) making an effort to share it, in other words, if something requires a large investment of time its creator(s) may be more likely to see value in making an effort to share that resource widely.

When asked what they viewed as the advantages of sharing instructional materials both those who shared with *just librarians at their institution* and those who also shared with *librarians outside their institution* cited very similar values, albeit in somewhat different proportions. The vast majority in both groups cited one or more of the following – saving time, exposure to new ideas, and the value of different viewpoints and

working collectively. Amongst those who share with just *those at their institution* 37% cite saving time, 24% cite the value of different viewpoints and working collectively, and 19% cite the value of exposure to new ideas. In contrast, those who share instructional materials with librarians *outside their institution* are more likely to favor the value of different viewpoints and working collectively (38%), followed by mentions of saving time and exposure to new ideas (26% for each).

The survey's participants were asked to provide feedback regarding how the sharing of resources could be improved. Amongst those who *do not share outside their institution*, responses diverged widely. Only a small percentage thought that there were **not** ways in which sharing could be improved. Amongst responses from those who thought action could be taken to improve sharing there was a significant lack of consensus. Some mentioned better maintenance and awareness of existing clearinghouses. There was a wide variety of additional responses, which included mentions of "better metadata" and "better incentives". For those who share outside their institutions there was a standout recommendation as a majority (53%) made mention of better use of a centralized, easy to find website (many suggested it be associated with a professional group like ACRL or ALA). This response indicates that many participants were not aware of PRIMO's existence.

A vast majority (81%) of participants in the survey reported that efforts to share instructional materials with other librarians have either little or no impact in their job evaluation or tenure review.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that access to shared teaching materials is highly valued amongst instruction librarians. In response to this survey the key benefits of sharing were identified as the following: time savings or less "reinventing the wheel", exposure to new ideas, and the value of different viewpoints and working collectively. The resources that librarians surveyed were most interested in finding are: worksheets, lesson plans, and web-based tutorials, which indicates that sharing these types of materials is most likely to lead to their reuse. While there are significant opportunities available online for sharing and finding shared materials, responses to this survey indicate that still more could be done to support sharing practices. Like Graham and Secker's (2012) work this survey indicates that awareness raising of existing open resources sites is necessary to encourage robust sharing.

The issue of workplace-based incentives likely plays a role in the imbalance between the librarians who use shared materials (a vast majority) and those who actively share materials themselves (a minority). To incentivize those not sharing outside their institution to share more broadly there needs to be more institutional support for sharing. As one survey participant put it

As a profession, the more that sharing is seen as being valuable in the evaluation sphere the more we'll feel

empowered and encouraged to share. Some may rightly feel more pressure to highlight original works than remixed or reused works. We need to deal with this and develop new values around valuing reusing and sharing.

Given that a vast majority (81%) of participants in the survey reported that efforts to share instructional materials with other information literacy practitioners has either little or no impact in their job evaluation or tenure review a relatively easy means of increasing sharing could involve incorporating acknowledgement of sharing efforts into the evaluation process. This recommendation is informed by the aforementioned study "To Share or Not to Share" (Dundon, Exton, & Diggins, 2012) and its conclusion that peer recognition is a primary incentive in sharing teaching resources. Making a greater volume of instruction materials publicly accessible could work to enhance librarians' teaching practices by providing increased opportunities for comparison and feedback. Greater efforts amongst librarians to make materials publicly available would also parallel growing interest in contributing to and using OERs amongst those who teach semester long courses.

When asked if "there are ways that you think sharing and reuse of instructional materials can be better supported?" many of those who took the survey referenced a centralized, easy to find resource as necessary for improvement. This and low use of PRIMO amongst survey respondents indicates that many are not aware of PRIMO as a sharing resource. However, limited use of PRIMO could also indicate that there are features of this resource that could be improved. For instance, PRIMO could look to the success of Teachers Pay Teachers, a website that allows teachers to share (albeit for a fee) their original content and lesson plans. Since its inception in 2006 use of Teachers Pay Teachers has grown rapidly and the site now has millions of users and a vast array of teaching resources. A key difference between these resources is PRIMO's peer-review selected materials versus Teachers Pay Teachers open opportunity to submit materials, with items subsequently ranked by popularity. In the future PRIMO and similar resources should consider this kind of format. Even if it is not possible for librarians to place materials in a centralized repository like PRIMO, findings from the survey indicate that it is nonetheless beneficial to share teaching resources via other means that are available to major search engines given that those surveyed quite often search for materials through the open web.

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