**Assessing existing materials to determine suitability – Phil Race ©**

Different ways can be deployed to integrate existing materials into course curricula. A crucial first step is an analysis to determine what level of correlation exists between the materials and the course curriculum for which they are envisaged. Phil Race (Professor, University of Leister, UK) has written extensively on learning and teaching and has developed a useful list of questions that can assist in assessing the suitability of learning resources:

The following list of questions is worth reflecting on (and adding to) when appraising the choice of, or usage of, individual learning resource materials and media.

* How up‑to‑date is the material covered? How quickly will it date? Will it have an adequate shelf‑life as a learning resource and will the up‑front costs of purchasing it or developing it be justified?
* What is the cost if any? While many OERs are free, some are not. However, even where there is a cost involved, it is still necessary to assess whether it is worth paying the fee or not. It may well be cheaper to purchase material than to develop it from scratch.
* If there is a cost, how expensive is the material? Can students realistically be expected to acquire their own copies of it? Can bulk discounts or shareware arrangements be made? If the material is computer‑based, is it suitable for networking, and is this allowed within copyright arrangements?
* Where students can't have their own copies of a resource, are you going to be able to guarantee sufficient access to students? This is particularly crucial when large groups are involved. Could lack of access to essential resource materials be cited as grounds for appeal by students who may be unsuccessful when assessed on what is covered by the resource material?
* How significant is the 'not invented here' syndrome? Can you work with the differences between the approach used in the material and your own approach? Can you integrate comfortably and seamlessly the two approaches with your students? If you criticize the learning resource materials your students are using, you're quite likely to destroy their confidence in using the material, and their belief in the quality of the content of the material as a whole.
* Are the materials appropriate for the identified target group?
* What alternative ways are there for students to learn the topic concerned? What complementary ways are there in which students can combine other ways of learning the topic with their learning from the resource material in question?
* How is the resource material or medium demonstrably better than the cheapest, or simplest way of learning the topic?
* Will it make students' learning more efficient? How will it save them time, or how will it focus their learning more constructively?
* Will the resource material or medium be equally useful to all students? Will there be no instances of disadvantaging of (for example) students learning in a second language, women students, mature students, students who aren't good with computers, and so on?
* What additional study skills outcomes will students derive from using the material? Are these outcomes assessed? Could they outweigh the intended learning outcomes?
* How can feedback on the effectiveness of the resource material be sought? What part should be played by peer feedback from colleagues, feedback from student questionnaires, observations of students' reactions to the material, and assessment of students' learning?