



Network of Clearinghouses for Educational Software

Initiative by Bálint Magyar minister
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*Herbert Simon claims that the concept of **knowledge**, which until now was considered to mean **possession**, is gradually becoming to mean **access**. Providing access to state or EU-financed, high quality educational software or content may be the chance ICT culture needs for faster progress.*

*International surveys like IEA and TIMMS show that there is a significant **common curriculum content**.*

We have torn down the walls among EU and accessing countries and what do we see now? We just erect new walls with bricks of property rights. And these virtual walls are more resistant than real ones.

Educational software and digital content development should be a **very significant investment** for countries intending to focus on improvement of teaching and learning through ICT according to the eLearning Action Plan¹. The European Union is underperforming in reaching the goals of the Lisbon Strategy.² One of the factors of failure is the low level of available content. The European content market is much more fragmented and undeveloped than in the US.³ So the countries of the EU should invest more in content development and it should be done in a more effective way. It seems natural to consider the redundancy of parallel design, production and testing of new products and content, and investigate the barriers and possibilities of sharing, on a non-profit basis the results of huge intellectual and financial investment.

Transferability

Is the educational content developed in one culture transferable to another different educational system to reduce costs and widen the content market? International surveys based on common curriculum content show that there is a significant body of knowledge considered basic that constitute a compulsory part of education all over the world. Science, math education and foreign language learning are most evident references, but successful international assessment projects in social science, arts and literature provide ample evidence for the existence of a common ideal of erudition in more culture-specific disciplines. **Educational software does travel well.**

Common Market

Making common market requires more than open coordination. Standardization, legal clearing, and identifying common needs are essential. The eContent Programme⁴ has started this process, but it should be accelerated, because of the previously mentioned delay in the Lisbon Strategy.

Clearinghouse Network

Our experiences show that such efforts could be more targeted and efficient if a **network of clearinghouses for educational content** was set up to monitor and evaluate products, publicize best practice and catalyze further development in the field.

We would like to provide a model for this effort through the **establishment of the Hungarian Educational Software Clearinghouse (HESC)** as a part of the eCampus programme of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Telecommunication and Informatics, that will **collect, catalogue, clear for copyright, evaluate, and eventually translate** into different languages best examples of digital teaching aids. We would like to invite governments and major commercial software producers in the area to consider the exchange of some of their products for the mutual benefit of establishing a large array of tried and tested, reliable software for schools and adults alike according to the 4th Recommendation of European eLearning Summit Declaration⁵.

This centre will serve as a non-profit brokerage system, an archive, a research institute and an educational facility at the same time. Experts associated with HESC would search for high quality products, negotiate copyrights for sharing, provide a translation, organize local field tests and in-service (distance education) courses for teachers and policy makers on most efficient use. Regular web-based and hard copy publications would feature selections of shared software complete with assessment results and indications for use.

We invite member states of the European Union to consider launching this initiative and initiate the establishment of a range of similar centres. If educational software development becomes a coordinated international effort, ICT will stand a better chance to realize its potential and modernize education. Sharing of content will also help close the digital divide and increase the equity of opportunities for less advantaged countries in making full use of the potentials of infocommunication technology to reach the goals of the Lisbon Strategy.

*Therefore we propose that all educational digital database and content, developed by EU and state funding, should be accessed by EU citizens for free for non commercial and educational use. **If we all pay for it, we all should be able to reach it.***

We believe that it is also in the interest of the non-profit content provider to reach the broadest audience possible and show, for example, treasures of cultural heritage or achievements of national science.

We in Hungary are ready to share. Let us not build new virtual Berlin walls!

¹ eLearning Action Plan (<http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/elearning/index.html>)

² "Efforts are being made in all the European countries to adapt the education and training systems to the knowledge-driven society and economy, but the reforms undertaken are not up to the challenges and their current pace will not enable the Union to attain the objectives set." – "EDUCATION & TRAINING 2010" THE SUCCESS OF THE LISBON STRATEGY HINGES ON URGENT REFORMS (Draft joint interim report on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe) {SEC(2003) 1250}

³ Indicators for European digital content for the global networks: Final Report for DG Information Society www.edis.sk/ekes/kneldok/dokument/executive_summary_content_indicators2.pdf

⁴ eContent Programme (www.hltcentral.org/usr_docs/call_docs/eContent/call2/econt_en_wp_200101.pdf)

⁵ „Budgets for learning resources must allow institutions to make substantial purchases of digital content. Digital content, no less than traditional resources, must also be seen as essential elements in effective learning delivery that deserve to make equal demands on institutional budgets. The creation of small learning 'objects' (based on open standards) could facilitate the development of new business models for content development and encourage innovative procurement mechanisms. To ensure that a critical mass of quality content is readily available in all Member States, the private sector should pursue design and development models that facilitate content localisation and adaptation; commercial platforms for exchanging metadata tagged content produced by educators, institutions and publishers could support this process. New approaches should be explored to copyright and IPR for collaborative content development involving public private partnerships." (europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/elearning/doc_en.html)