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Editorial: eInclusion and eLearning

Following the Riga Ministerial Declaration of June 2006, an important ministerial event is scheduled to be held in Lisbon the 2 and 3 of December 2007 exclusively dedicated to analyze eInclusion signals and the intensification of political and policy actions (like the "2008 eInclusion initiative" and "i2010") aimed at promoting the Knowledge Society.

eLearning has an important role to play in these agendas, for example through promoting digital literacy and fostering eSkills. Furthermore, eLearning should play a decisive role in broadening access of otherwise excluded groups to lifelong learning. It goes without saying that eLearning faces significant challenges in contributing to the "new skills for new jobs" renovated Lisbon Agenda (Lisbon 3.0). Against this background, this edition of the eLearning Papers presents four articles that link together the themes of eLearning and eInclusion. Collectively, the articles provide an illuminating snapshot of the current landscape, covering a spectrum that bridges what is happening at the EU trans-national level and the member states policies, and what is happening at the 'chalk-face'.

Two of the papers reflect summative perspectives. The paper by **Kerstin Junge and Kari Hadjivassiliou** provides a comprehensive mapping of the most recent initiatives undertaken by the European Commission and by member states in pursuit of the ambitious goal set to half the digital literacy gaps between "at risk groups" and the average population by 2010.

This perspective is complemented by **David Casacuberta's** resume of best practices gleaned from EL4EI, a European Union project funded by the eLearning Programme. They conclude that more recent eLearning strategies are moving towards a new paradigm, based on more informal teaching environments.

The remaining articles focus on specific eInclusion scenarios. The paper by **Kirsti Ala-Mutka and Yves Punie** considers how new models and methods in lifelong learning can help to meet the challenges facing Europe's ageing society.

The paper by **Vincenza Benigno, Stefania Bocconi and Michela Ott** is pitched at the other end of the learning spectrum, and looks at the issue of Universal Access to Education. It focuses on the strong potential that ICTs offer for reducing discrimination among students.

In the concluding article of this edition of the eLearning Papers **Per Arne Godejord** outlines how blended eLearning approaches can be used to develop ethical awareness in students.

Joe Cullen, Tavistock Institute
Roberto Carneiro, Director, eLearning Papers

Kerstin Junge
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Kari Hadjivassiliou
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“By and large, the early measures reflected a functional understanding of digital literacy which simply refers to a person’s ability to use hardware and software effectively.”

Keywords
Digital literacy, eSkills, research, information society, i2010

Full text
http://www.elearningeuropa.info/files/media/media14196.pdf

What are the EU and member states doing to address digital literacy?

In 2006, EU member states set themselves an ambitious objective: to half the digital literacy gaps between ‘at risk groups’ and the average population by 2010. Having committed themselves to turning Europe into the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world by the end of the decade, it became important to ensure that people were not going to be left behind and that employers have access to the skills driving the anticipated economic growth.

To this end, the EU and the member states began to implement a comprehensive set of policies aiming to increase the digital literacy levels among European people. By and large, the early measures reflected a functional understanding of digital literacy which simply refers to a person’s ability to use hardware and software effectively. Targeting predominantly population groups that data suggest are particularly affected by digital illiteracy (the unemployed, the disabled, women and older people), measures focuses on providing basic ICT skills and ensuring that all pupils were digitally literate upon leaving school.

Increasingly, however, the discourse in the EU and the member states is moving towards an understanding of digital literacy mostly simply described as ‘media literacy’. As such, it encompasses a significant cognitive and evaluative dimension lacking from the functional understanding. The most recent initiatives undertaken by the European Commission as part of the recent i2010 programme are under this title, as well as in the member states, where media literacy was initially used only by some countries in relation to ICT training at schools.

A more sophisticated understanding of digital literacy, however, requires more sophisticated approaches to measuring success. One of the key challenges for the near future is therefore to find indicators that are less broad-brush and more able to deal with the diverse subject and implementation modes required to make digital literacy policies a success. It is only when we gain a better understanding of what works and what does not that we can start to make inroads into the persistent digital illiteracy in Europe today.

David Casacuberta
Transit Projectes, Spain

“The practice of digital inclusion has to combine both technical and cognitive approaches.”

Keywords
eInclusion, cognitive approach, community of practice, teachers, education, disabilities

Full text
http://www.elearningeuropa.info/files/media/media14197.pdf

Digital Inclusion: Best practices from eLearning

E-learning 4 E-inclusion (EL4EI) is an EU-funded project seeking to build a community for those with valuable expertise regarding the use of eLearning for digital inclusion. The project seeks to gather and catalogue relevant best practice cases and, ultimately, to compose an eLearning charter which will be a reference tool for professionals working towards social inclusion.

In this paper we describe the new methodology used to analyse, filter and present results and describe some of the key results gathered so far.

Thanks to the innovative ways suggested for the recovering and processing of material, and a cognitive approach instead of a pure technological one, our project is able to clearly point the way towards important new solutions. So far, one of the most valuable achievements of this project has been to clearly indicate the need of a new paradigm, one based on more informal teaching environments, wherein the communication among peers is fundamental and damaging stereotypes regarding new technologies are avoided. The practice of digital inclusion has to combine both technical and cognitive approaches.

EL4EI demonstrates that teaching technical skills involving the use of a computer or Internet turn out to be useless if unaccompanied by motivation and contextualisation. Of course it goes without saying that these practices are all unviable without a necessary minimum of infrastructure, i.e. access to a computer and the internet. The battle against the digital divide must be waged on both fronts.

According to the current research the five most promising strategies in terms of establishing best practice in the use of e-learning for social and digital inclusion are:
- combining teaching ICT with other non-digital knowledge equally important to social inclusion
- communication to the target groups
- establishing peer to peer teaching systems
- creating informal environments
- using teachers similar to the students themselves, especially in cases of e-learning focused towards women.

Ageing Societies, Learning and ICT

Kirsti Ala-Mutka
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“There is evidence that older people want to learn, but meaningful and real opportunities for this desired learning are scarce at the moment.”

Keywords
ageing society, lifelong learning, intergenerational learning, eInclusion, older population

Full text
http://www.elearningeuropa.info/files/media/media14198.pdf

As the share of older people increases, there is a need to improve their well-being and possibilities for integration in the knowledge society. In ageing societies, learning plays a key role in addressing challenges such as increasing social and health costs, re-skilling for employment and participation, and intergenerational sharing of experience and knowledge. It is important to recognize older people as a heterogeneous group, in terms of self-confidence for learning, learning skills and interests, health and social connections, among others.

In general, older people's learning motivation is related to improving their everyday lives, to keeping themselves active, to sharing their knowledge with others and to connecting with other learners. ICT can help in providing new and flexible learning opportunities, which connect older people with each other and with younger generations. For older people, learning usually takes place in informal settings rather than in formal education and it is driven by their own interests and needs rather than by formal requirements.

It is important to carefully develop both the content and conditions of the learning opportunities for older people. There is evidence that older people want to learn, but meaningful and real opportunities for this desired learning are scarce at the moment. More attention needs to be paid to developing relevant and accessible learning opportunities and more user-friendly tools adapted to older people. Supporting learner-centred opportunities and personal learning skills is becoming part of lifelong learning for everybody in the knowledge society, where older people make up one group of learners and mentors, interacting and integrating with others.

The whole role of learning is changing, together with the availability of a new wave of promising ICT applications and research is needed to determine how learning can best be supported and provided in an ageing society.

This article is being published in the EuroPACE publication "European Networking and Learning for the Future. The EuroPACE approach." by Annemie Boonen and WimVan Petegem (eds.), Garant, Antwerp, November 2007.

Inclusive education: helping teachers to choose ICT resources and to use them effectively

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“Teachers need to be aware of the ICT potential and they must be able to acquire the suitable knowledge and operational skills to choose and use appropriately this type of resources.”

Keywords
Accessibility, inclusion, best practices, educational multimedia, universal access, resources, teachers, schools

Full text
http://www.elearningeuropa.info/files/media/media14199.pdf

This paper looks at the issue of school inclusion by referring to the concept of Universal Access to Education. It focuses on the strong potential Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) provide to avoid any kind of discrimination among students. The paper also argues that teachers play a fundamental role in capitalising the opportunities offered by new technologies to support the full inclusion of all students in mainstream education systems. In this perspective, to view the Universal Access to Education as a concrete and reachable goal, teachers need to be aware of the ICT potential and they must be able to acquire the suitable knowledge and operational skills to choose and use appropriately this type of resources.

Findings of the Teachers’ View about new Technologies and Inclusion Questionnaire proposed by ITD-CNR to approximately 300 Italian teachers show that the majority of them (75%) acknowledge that ICT tools and resources may have a great potential to foster and actualize inclusive practices in schools. Notwithstanding this, almost all of them declare that they still need specific information and guidance on how to choose and use the appropriate ICT products to these ends.

Two pilot research projects addressing these needs are presented in this paper. One is designed to provide teachers with full and effective information about the accessibility features of educational software. The other is oriented towards the dissemination of know-how and good practices to support the construction, sharing and reuse of “inclusive” pedagogical plans. Such projects have given birth to two specific online services respectively providing information on the accessibility features of educational multimedia products and bringing to light best practices in school inclusion.

The basic idea is, in fact, that the process of inclusion can be fostered by means of new technological tools, but in turn it requires changes and modifications in educational contents, approaches, structures and strategies.

Perspectives on project based teaching and "blended learning" to develop ethical awareness in students

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"To fight sexual abuse of children in digital media using project based teaching in relevant fields of education, is just such an example of a global ethical theme."

Keywords
Ethical issues, social informatics, didactics, project-based learning, blended learning, web 2.0, child sexual abuse

Full text
http://www.elearningeuropa.info/files/media/media14200.pdf

This paper describes a unique educational project that is being implemented in the undergraduate study of Computer Science and Teacher Education. Since 2002, Norway's Nesna University College has been using the example of sexual abuse of children in the teaching of Social Informatics, and in the distance education course "ICT and Learning". This project, run in cooperation with Save the Children Norway and the National Crime Squad, is part of the Department of Computer Science use of "blended learning", where the access to blogs, youtube, podcast, LMS and Facebook together with real tasks is meant to create an environment for intrinsically motivated learning.

Using true projects as tools, students get a "real" world orientation and their work suddenly gets a value beyond just the demonstrated competence of the pupil. The project has given the students a unique opportunity to get involved emotionally and practically in the field of Social Informatics. The Computer Science students have provided both Save the Children and the National Criminal Investigation Service with reports on various topics such as secure chat, camera phones and possible abuse, etc. This exceptional cooperation between higher education and public and private organizations makes the project not only unique, but might also be a major factor to boost the willingness of students to learn Social Informatics and improve their skills in the various topics of the subject.

In an increasingly globalized world, we should also strive to make both Computer and Teacher education more global, with global ethical themes (Kirkwood, 2001) that are recognizable and relevant both nationally and internationally. To fight sexual abuse of children in digital media using project based teaching in relevant fields of education, is just such an example of a global ethical theme.

Nesna University College is the only Computer Science education in the world which has sexual abuse of children as the main topic on the Computer Science curriculum.