

Chapter 5.16

European National Educational School Authorities' Actions Regarding Open Content and Open Source Software in Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides an overview into policies in the area of e-learning that ten European countries, all members of European Schoolnet, have taken regarding open content and free and open source software (FOSS) to be used to support and enhance learning. Additionally, it elaborates on European Schoolnet's initiatives to support open learning resources exchange in Europe. European Schoolnet (EUN) promotes the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in European schools, acting as a gateway to national and regional educational authorities and school networks towards Europe. A variety of actions have been initiated by a number of European

educational authorities from analysis and feasibility studies to the development of educational software based on open source as well as open educational content.

INTRODUCTION

European Schoolnet is a network of 27 national educational authorities in Europe in the area of compulsory education (K-12). European Schoolnet provides insight into the educational use of information and communications technologies (ICT) in European schools for policy-makers and education professionals. This goal is achieved through communication and information exchange at all

levels of school education using innovative technologies, and by acting as a gateway to national and regional school networks.

In recent years, European Schoolnet and a number its members have, little by little, begun a trend towards awareness building, piloting, development, and the rolling-out of open source software programs for schools, as well as investigating open content as a possible addition to a more conventional content provision.

This chapter introduces some of these policy-level actions; however, it cannot be regarded as an exhaustive summary of policy initiatives in the field of ICT and education. There are two main focuses for the chapter, the policy initiatives and EUN initiatives.

First, the chapter introduces a number of emerging initiatives lead by ten EUN member countries in the area of open source and content for education. Initiatives are categorized in four main sections: awareness raising of Free Open Source Software (FOSS), development of LMS and learning platforms, promotion of the use of Linux on desktops and educational servers, and finally, the promotion of open content. The following countries are featured: Estonia, Spain, and Slovenia as an example of countries basing part of their policy initiatives and actions on open source development; Belgium's Flemish Community and the Netherlands, which run major campaigns to raise awareness of the FOSS issues; Ireland and Finland, as well as France, with smaller scale policy initiatives to familiarize schools with alternative solutions; and finally the UK and Lithuania carrying out feasibility studies with FOSS.

The second part presents two European Schoolnet's recent initiatives in this regard: Xplora, which promotes science education in Europe, and secondly, the EUN's Learning Resources Exchange, which promotes the use and reuse of educational content across Europe. The latter introduces the implementation of a digital rights management framework and briefs on the current development of a learning toolbox to sup-

port collaborative learning based on open source development.

BACKGROUND

European Schoolnet (EUN) was funded in 1996 with the mandate of the Council of the European Union. The members of European Schoolnet represent national and regional educational authorities such as the Ministry of Education (MoE) or National Board of Education. Its mission is twofold: on the one hand, EUN works closely with national and regional policy-makers and shapers by setting up special interest committees, involving them in transfer of best practices, and in e-learning research and development. On the other hand, EUN works directly with a large network of European schools through special online events organized in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders.

European Schoolnet is committed in following open standards in e-learning research and development that it conducts in the field, partnering up with different stakeholders from public, private, and industry partners. This has resulted in services that allow multiple players' access to the field. Furthermore, the use and development of open source software in education is becoming more of a concern in different EUN member countries, whereas the promotion of interoperable content-based services, such as federations of learning resources repositories, has long been in the centre of EUN's attention. It is important to note that the members of EUN all lead their own policies based on their national policymaking, and that EUN only has an advisory role for its members.

Apart from reporting on European Schoolnet's partners on their national initiatives, this review will also extend to other national policymakers whenever the information was made available. Mostly, this review relies on contributions from European Schoolnet's partners.

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