E-learning and Free Software – issues and applications

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Introduction

➔ What we should talk about today:
- The use of Free Software in Schools
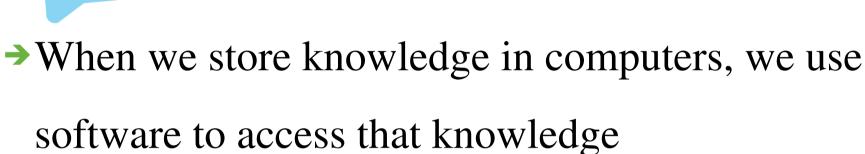- E-learning applications
- COVCELL Project for language training

Why Free Software?

➜ *Everyone* uses computers, all the time, from preschool to retirement

➜ Hammer and nails of the future is a keyboard and mouse (they are our new tools!)

➜ We need to be able to understand and adapt our tools

Software as knowledge

➔ A large part of our knowledge is stored through or in a computer

➔ Computer software is a knowledge asset and a cultural artifact for the future

Knowledge

➔ When we store knowledge in computers, we use software to access that knowledge

➔ Access to the software controls our:
   - ability to study, work,
   - free time and vacations,
   - ability to participate in a democratic process

Why Free Software?

➜ Schools should encourage learning, and Free

Software removes the barriers for learning
- Equal access for all to knowledge
- No limitations on what you can study
- Can even study the software used to study!

➜ Software is as important today as the printing press

before it: it's a cultural technique

Getting it right

➜ Our values are impressed upon us by our parents

➜ We may think we know, but we don't

➜ Confucius says: Real knowledge is to know the extent of ones ignorance

➜ Real power of freedom and collaboration will only be realised in the next generations!

The role of the school

➜ Schools play an important role in shaping this

➜ Schools ought to:
- Use Free Software in administration and teaching
- Allow students to use the same software at home
- Teach Free Software
- Encourage sharing and cooperation generally
- Use Free Software e-learning tools

Saving money?

➔ It's popular to implement Free Software to save money, for instance by reusing old computers

➔ Todays tip:
- Don't use the new computers for Microsoft Windows!
- Use the old computers for Windows, and the new ones for Free Software!
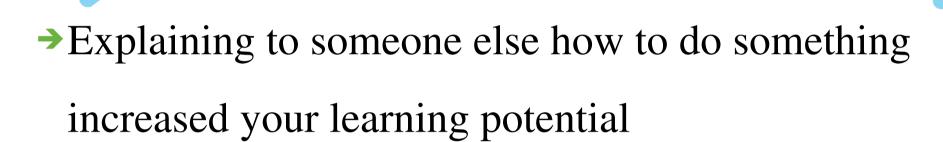- Which would you rather work with?

E-learning applications

➜ Moodle
- Extensible e-learning platform with support for common e-learning features, such as:
  - Assignments
  - Chats and forums
  - Lessons
  - Quizzes
  - Wiki
  - Workshop

Moodle and SELF

➔ Moodle is built around a "social constructionist" learning philosophy

➔ Learning is not a static transfer of knowledge: information received is tested again previous knowledge and used to form new knowledge

Constructionism

➔ Explaining to someone else how to do something increased your learning potential

➔ The process of taking notes is an interesting example of this

Social Constructivism

➔ Social groups building together, and for each other

➔ Moodle courses collaboratively create cultural artifacts with shared meaning

➔ Students and teachers alike immersed in a course with a social constrictivist approach learn by teaching each other

Connected and separate

➔ In discussions, people with separate behaviour tries to remain objective and distant, defending their own position.

➔ Connected behaviour is more understanding of differences

➔ Moodle encourages a healthy amount of connected

Covcell

➔ Cohort-Oriented Virtual Campus for Effective Language Learning

➔ Implements several useful tools for language learning and learning generally

➔ Shows the extensibility of Moodle

User presence and chat

➜ Instant Messaging within Moodle

➜ Shows the currently online students within the environment of the course you study

➜ Encourages quick and efficient communication between students and students, and students and teachers

Whiteboard

➔ Collaborative work between two or more students around a common workspace, whiteboard

➔ Coupled with the chat features to provide real-time discussions

Audio/Video conferencing

➔ One-to-one or multi-person video and audio chats

➔ Often coupled together with the Whiteboard

➔ Especially useful in language learning

➔ Allows for moderated chats and efficient online courses

Audio recordings

➔ Extension to the assignment module to allow for the submission of audio recordings

➔ Records and plays directly through the web browser

➔ Allows for feedback and grading by the teacher

Summary

➜ Schools should use Free Software

➜ Moodle is an example of an e-learning platform with a compatible philosophy with the SELF Project

➜ COVCELL shows the extensibility of Moodle to facilitate language learning online