Date: Mon, 15 May 2006 10:29:21 -0400
From: Jim Farmer <jxf@immagic.com>
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To: Catherine Casserly <CCasserly@hewlett.org>
Subject: Sharing Open Content - Hewlett and IMS

I believe it would be helpful if Rob Abel, newly appointed as CEO of IMS Global Learning Consortium, learned more about the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's direction in eLearning and open content. Perhaps you could suggest whom he should contact.

Some background. In February Utah State University's John Dehlin gave a brief presentation on the open content initiatives at the MoodleMoot. But perhaps more important he had the opportunity to meet with Moodle's Martin Dougiamas and Open University's Jason Cole (formerly from San Francisco State University and author of "Using Moodle"). We discussed the advantages if all open content were available in the same format and all learning systems would natively use that content. John's presentation has been referenced several times; I am deeply grateful that he gave up his weekend to be with the Moodlers in Savannah. (Now materials from last September's conference at Utah State University have been shared with many in the Moodle community).

Subsequent to that discussion the Hewlett Foundation gave the grant to Open University UK for open content. From my ten years of observing OUUK, their content is very effective, especially for the time and location constrained students and students who otherwise would not be admitted to a college or university. A valuable legacy of Diana Laurillard.

IMS has two specifications that may be relevant. One is the forthcoming specification—with a release for public comment expected in August—of a "common cartridge" primarily from the publishing industry. The other is content packaging available as a public draft.

In a meeting with Rob Abel, Charlie Leonhardt, Georgetown University, and I suggested benefits if the producers of open content would be able to meet with IMS representatives to both learn more about the specifications effort and perhaps to contribute some suggestions. I said I would like to see a meeting before these two specifications were issued.

There is a second reason for the proposed meeting. The value of the two specifications is, in turn, dependent upon which learning management systems support the specifications and subsequent testing to ensure interoperability. Jason Cole has a major role; OU UK is funding further Moodle development, including SCORM compliance, and OU UK has taken responsibility for Moodle assessment. As it happens, the leading authority on the implementation of eAssessment, Niall Sclater, is responsible for the Moodle implementation at OU that begins later this month. I learned several weeks ago that 66% of the UK's further education colleges have implemented Moodle since the 2005 survey a year ago. Two million more students now using Moodle.

During a meeting of publishers and the Sakai Board, a representative from Pearson raised the question about Moodle. From his comments I assume the publishing industry sees the Moodle market for eLearning content large and growing.

Discussions with Blackboard staff confirm their commitment to implementing the IMS standards. And I hope some interoperability testing would demonstrate exchange of unmodified content between Blackboard and Moodle (and identify any differences in interpretation of the specifications). A combination of Moodle and Blackboard would effectively establish a standard.

Charlie and I were impressed at Rob Abel's commitment to the implementation of IMS standards; our discussions focused on the strategy for doing so. And for broadening the participation in the IMS specification processes. When JISC's Sarah Porter was in Washington, DC she said JISC officials were impressed by his plans and confident of his ability to make change. I hear the same from the Open University's IMS representative.

If you could suggest the person to whom Rob Abel could contact to learn more about the Hewlett Projects, it would be helpful. If it would be useful, I have a series of notes summarized here that could be shared.

And if would also be helpful if John Dehlin could, within the scope of a Hewlett grant, take leadership of organizing the open content providers response to the specifications. I believe this should be done immediately, I had suggested a one-week workshop with IMS. If done early enough, the exchange will have impact on the IMS work that would be largely completed before next September's conference.

Thank for your assistance. Any suggestions appreciated.

jim

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