Networked Academic Societies in Collaborative Development of e-Learning Courses

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we describe a framework for supporting Networked Academic Societies towards the collaborative development of e-Learning courses. Academics with common interests in teaching could combine their knowledge into the development of integrated e-Learning courses. This is a hard task, since the communication overhead is rather big to be ignored by busy academics, unless there are specifically designed ICT-based tools which could facilitate the collaboration. Groupware systems could fit this purpose to some extend, but they are rather general and need to be extended by specialised software modules. For this reason we suggest TeachWare as the necessary ICT collaboration system needed to support Networked Academic Societies, for which we provide specifications and give its abstract architecture.

Keywords
Networked Academic Societies, E-Collaboration, Groupware, E-Learning course development, Teachware

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are playing an increasingly prominent role to education practices by providing tools and models for the storage and reuse of digital material for teaching and learning (Friedland & Pauls, 2005). Courseware authoring systems, Learning Management Systems (LMS) and Reusable Learning Object (RLO) models (Harris et. al. 2005) as well as standards (IEEE LTSC 2002) are among them. Although these tools and models are a step forwards, it is argued that in order for learning object resources to be effectively reused and gain a pedagogical/didactic value, new e-Learning course development paradigms are needed (McConnel et. al. 2004).

To date, academics worldwide collaborate mostly towards common research. Academics in different institutions form mostly informal academic communities working towards the development and promotion of research in their area of expertise. However, collaboration in aspects of teaching is scarce, even with co-located academics, since, unfortunately, teaching is not always on of the most important tasks for academics. The end result of research collaboration (e.g. scientific publications) is of rather flexible format, as opposed to the end result of the course development collaboration, which should fit within a more specific framework of specifications, standards and indicators. The rational which drives the current work is the fact that e-Learning, apart from focusing mainly on one part of the delivery (i.e. the target student group), it can also appear as the result the process of distributed collaboration between teachers/academics. Networked collaboration of academics towards the development of common courses would greatly benefit teaching for the following reasons: (a) different ideas and experiences in similar courses could be disseminated as examples of good practice and integrated in the development of a single e-Learning course, and (b) the reusability, adaptability and eventually quality of e-Learning courses will increase. We aim, as a result, to raise awareness derived from a different perspective of e-