Interoperability: Tools and Specifications

Author Michiel van Geloven, SURF Educatie<F>, Pierre Gorissen, Fontys Hogescholen

Contact: Lorna Campbell (lmc@strath.ac.uk), Boon Low (boon.low@strath.ac.uk)

Theme: Technology issues related to education

Summary

CETIS is the Centre for Education Technology Interoperability Standards. The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) is funding it. CETIS supports the UK Higher and Further education. It advises Universities and Colleges on the strategic, technical and pedagogic implications of educational technology standards. There are a number of Special Interest Groups (SIG's), in some of which Dutch people participate (presentations, mailing list).
Lorna Campbell is co-ordinator of the CETIS Educational Content Special Interest Group (EC-SIG) and assistant director of CETIS. Boon Low is a member of the CETIS Metadata SIG and involved in a couple of projects to create tools for interoperability.

During this session Lorna Campbell gave an overview of why we need learning technology standards and specifications, what those standards try to accomplish, who is developing standards and specifications and how the standards relate to educational practice.
Boon Low demonstrated the IMS Question and Testing Interoperability (QTY) specifications.

Why do we need learning technology standards and specifications?
Learning technology standards and specifications prevent content from being 'locked into' proprietary systems (and e.g. version problems); they make sure that (educational) content can be reused and be shared; finally they facilitate interoperability (between different 'players').

What do learning technology interoperability standards do?
They enable users to locate appropriate content, plan educational scenarios (EML, Learning Design), deliver educational content tailored to learners' requirements (EML, Simple Sequencing, SCORM). It also enables them to share content between systems and ensures that educational content is accessible to all users.

Who is developing specifications?
Specifications are being developed by: IMS Global Learning, ADL (Advanced Distributed Learning), CEN/ISSS WSLT, Dublin Core Metadata Initiative, IEEE Learning Technology Standards Committee (LTSC), ISO Sub Committee 36. URLs for each of the groups are available on the slides of the presentation. There are many groups, but they often consist of the same people (many of them Belgian).

Standardisation is not only about metadata specifications. The human side of using metadata is much more complicated: if a course developer needs to fill in a 4-page form to code each of his learning objects, he probably won't do that. The cultural issues also play a role. A lecturer might want to use courses that have been developed by others, but might be reluctant to share his own courses.

Future plans

- Pierre Gorissen (Fontys/DU) has given a presentation on the DU during a SIG meeting last March.
- People from the Netherlands that are interested in interoperability and reuses, are invited to join the mailing list and participate in the discussions.
- Slides from the presentation held by Lorna Campbell will be made available.

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