

Interview with Jan Hylén

By Lambert Berenbroek, Lectoraat eLearning, december 2005



‘Open Source Software and Open Content’

Jan Hylén

Nederlands:

- Zie ook: optreden Jan Hylén op Surf onderwijsdagen 2005:
<http://www.surf.nl/owd2005/index.php?do=featured>
- CV: zie:
http://www.oecd.org/document/44/0,2340,en_2649_37455_35509932_1_1_1_37455,00.html en http://www.surf.nl/owd2005/upload/cv_jan_hylen.doc
- Zie ook discussie n.a.v. optreden Jan Hylén op Surf onderwijsdagen:
http://weblog.leidenuniv.nl/iclon/veranderblog/archives/2005/11/18/over_open_educational_resources_en_de_pr_strategie_van_mit.html

Jan Hylén also attending the Surf Education Days 2005, held a presentation about Open Source Software and Open Content (such as the MIT Open Courseware project and the Open Access initiative). Jan Hylén is working at the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). I had an interview with him at the Surf Education Days.

The OECD groups 30 member countries sharing a commitment to democratic government and the market economy. With active relationships with some 70 other countries, NGOs and civil society, it has a global reach. Best known for its publications and its statistics, its work covers economic and social issues from macroeconomics, to trade, education, development and science and innovation.

The Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) carries out studies and promotes an international dialogue about education across OECD countries.

The OECD Directorate for Education has six strategic objectives which were developed by the Chief executive officers of the education ministries in OECD member countries in 2003:

- Objective 1: promoting lifelong learning and improving its linkages with society and the economy
- Objective 2: evaluating and improving outcomes of education
- Objective 3: promoting quality teaching
- Objective 4: rethinking tertiary education in a global economy
- Objective 5: building social cohesion through education
- Objective 6: building new futures for education.

The most important topic Jan Hylén is dealing with working at CERI is a study on Open Educational Resources (OER). According to the definition he gave at this interview and his latest article on the subject OER consists of:

- 1) open courseware and content;
- 2) open software tools (e.g. learning management systems);
- 3) open material for e-learning capacity building of faculty staff;
- 4) repositories of learning objects; and
- 5) free educational courses. A more thorough conceptual analysis will take place in the course of the study. Open source software is comparable with LINUX with its free (of charge) obtainable source code.

Since a few years some universities have started to offer lecture notes, learning objects, or full online courses for free on the Internet. The project is studying this new movement with four main questions in focus:

- * A mapping exercise: which initiatives exist and how are they financed? How can they be sustained when the funding is gone?
- * How to deal with intellectual property rights?
- * What are the main incentives and barriers for both individuals and organizations to produce and share OER?
- * What measures could improve access and usability of OER?

According to a recently published study from CERI (E-Learning in Tertiary Education – where do we stand?) e-learning was over hyped during the dot.com-boom. Many became disappointed when e-learning failed to live up to the promises. But now the use of e-learning seems to be slowly growing again in universities. What is slowing down the deployment at the moment is lack of investments in content, and the skills of the instructors.

On the question in what way his study will meet the philosophy of academe, which is based upon a collegial sharing of information and new discoveries through the peer-reviewed academic publication process to share knowledge, he replies that research is all about openness. Universities should be open with research and with results as well, but instead they foster their intellectual property.

Open initiatives in higher education have crystallized around three major areas of activity:

- * the creation of open source software and development tools

- * the creation and provision of open course content
- * the development of standards and licensing tools.

The outputs of all three may be grouped together under the term Open Educational Resources (OER).

In his opinion Jan Hylén states that the first major area of activity is leading because of open source software movement is older and the open content ideas being more recent. Open content licences such as the Creative Commons, which is a kind of copyright, is an important element to foster this new movement. The license states clearly how you are allowed to use the content and if you are allowed to adapt in to your own needs. It can, among other things, also allow the content producer to prevent others from using the content for commercial purposes.

One of the biggest problems of the e-learning industry is that it lacks an efficient mechanism for the exchange of educational resources. Expensive, high-quality educational resources often are underused because only few people know they exist, and rather than searching in the hopes of stumbling across useful resources, many educators choose to create their own. This practice can be costly, but a growing movement calling for open educational resources (OER) may alleviate this problem. Jan Hylén recognises this issue.

What is needed is an open mind from all players in the work finding new roles for everyone and a road map ahead:

- * intellectual property rights
- * incentives and barriers for both individuals and organizations
- * Measures to improve access and stability.

When asked if he likes to be helped by Dutch higher education institutes Jan Hylén indicates that some universities will be directly invited to participate in a survey and he hopes they all will respond.

Others may take the survey by visiting the project website at: www.oecd.org/edu/oer .

One of the most difficult issues is quality control of content. Some repositories uses centrally controlled quality systems and others are peer-reviewed based and the universities themselves are showcasing different examples together with the experiences from involved parties.

When the study will be published, which follow up possibilities do you foresee (conferences, international databases, regulations etc.)? Jan Hylén: Dissemination of the results and surely some new issues for another project or projects.