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Instructional Applications of the Internet
Web 2.0 Tool Overview
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There are many different learning-related systems available today that enable schools and educators to create online learning communities. When choosing a method to deliver learning, one must take into consideration the broad scope of learning-related systems available and their features in order to choose the best possible solution. Online learning-related systems are categorized based on their functionality and can fall under the categories of (CrMS) course management system, (VLE) virtual learning environment, (LMS) learning management system, or (LCMS) learning content management system. Examples of learning-related systems include Moodle, Blackboard, eFront, A Tutor, Docebo, and Dokeos, just to name a few. Some of these systems are commercial editions, in which they can be purchased at a flat rate and downloaded as software that can be installed on a private server or they can be purchased and hosted by the manufacturer for a monthly or yearly subscription fee. Other systems are open-source, meaning you can download the software for free and install it on your own personal server. Some creators of learning management systems will provide both commercial and open-source editions; however, the open-source versions usually don't have as many features as the commercial "paid for" versions. While there are many options available, this paper focuses on the eFront LMS/LCMS.

A LMS is an "enterprise level, server-based software system used to manage and deliver (through a web browser) learning of many types, particularly asynchronous e-learning." LMSs "generally also include the capability of tracking and managing many kinds of learner data, especially that of learner performance. Many training organizations rely on their LMS as a single point of access for all their e-learning content and student records. They are a key enabling technology for —anytime, anywhere access to learning content and administration. LCMSs are closely related to LMSs, providing much of the same functionality with the addition of content authoring. The focus of an LCMS is the instructional content—its creation, reuse, management, and delivery." (Berking & Gallagher, 2013)

Purpose and Basic Functions

[eFront](#) is an all-in-one learning management system (LMS/LCMS). It can be used as a tool for training, communication, evaluation, and certification, as well as file management and sharing. While eFront can be used as an autonomous tool, it can also be combined with traditional classroom education for blended learning or combined with tools for synchronous learning. The eFront environment enables educators to build lessons, create tests, and organize content and the learning process. eFront includes tools for enriching the communication between users, assessing learner improvement, advanced administration and system customization.

eFront is offered as a software or a service and is available in four editions. The "Enterprise" edition is best used for companies and organizations, while the "Educational" edition is best used for schools and colleges. These two editions can be purchased as software at a flat rate and installed on a personal

server or as a service hosted by eFront for a monthly fee. eFront Community is the open-source edition of eFront. It is a fully flexible eLearning 2.0 system capable of fulfilling a wide range of learning needs and it provides the basis of all eFront editions. eFront Community++ brings payment support and social extensions on top of the community edition. You can view the functionality matrix by visiting this link: <http://www.efrontlearning.net/functionality-matrix>

eFront supports three basic types of users: Student, Professor and Administrator. Users must have a basic role, but they can also have different roles per lesson, allowing a user to be student in one lesson and a professor in another. Except the three basic roles, eFront can create descendant roles with fewer permissions, permitting the creation of "guest" users, that cannot send messages to forum or see the lesson content. eFront has full administrative support for adding or modifying languages. Internally all content and function is unicode (UTF-8) enabled. The only thing needed to add a new language is to translate a language file. The administrator can control any aspect of the system through an easy to use interface. Modules allow administrators to extend the basic system functionality as needed. Modules are installed and activated via the administrator interface. There are a plethora of themes available that can be used to adjust color, layout and block position according to the user's preferences. eFront can be adapted according to user needs. For example, users can re-arrange the main page components via simple drag-and-drop, select the active components for lessons, or change the visual theme of installation. Users can effectively search inside lesson content, personal messages or forum messages, to obtain exactly what they are looking for. (*eFront 3.6 - Quick Overview*)

Basic functions include:

- *Learning Delivery – including content management and assessment utilities*
- *Communication tools – basic communication tools*
- *Reporting – basic reports*
- *Administration – Everything needed to cover the core functions*
- *User interface – same across all edition platforms, making it easy and simple to use.*

"eFront community and community++ are SCORM 1.2 compliant and certified platforms. You can import SCORM packages or export the content you created in SCORM format and use it in any other SCORM compliant platform. Course management is done through the administrations interface. It involves the management of lessons, the logical organization of lessons to categories, the bundling of several lessons as a course and the enrolment of users to lessons and courses. eFront includes an easy to use WYSISWYG (what-you-see-is-what-you-get) content editor, to add images, videos, sounds, java applets and mathematical types in a visual way. Experienced users can further format content using html. eFront includes an advanced file manager that allows you to upload, preview, share, zip, rename and delete files. Multiple files can be uploaded in zip format and eFront will unzip them automatically. All files uploaded to the special Digital Library folder are shared and can be downloaded by every lesson user. eFront has an advanced internal test builder that supports several types of tests and a wide range

of question types that include empty spaces, development, multiple choice with single or multiple answers, matching, and true or false. All questions are stored to a central pull and can be used in different tests. You can create projects with deadlines and assign them to users. Users must upload their answer to the project, and the tutor can access it and provide a grade. You can control which lessons each user has access to and the order of lesson completion. This way you can channel users through specific learning paths. eFront informs and guides users regarding their progress inside a lesson and what remains in order to complete it. Each lesson has its own glossary section. When a definition is entered into the glossary, the referred word will be highlighted in its original context within the particular lesson, indicating the definition entered.” (*eFront 3.6 - Quick Overview*) eFront produces extensive reports on system access, generic system characteristics, users progress and lesson information.

Comparison

The 2011 Campus Computing survey documents “an increasingly competitive campus market for Learning Management Systems (LMS). The proportion of survey participants reporting that their institution uses versions of [Blackboard](#) (including Angel and WebCT) as the campus-standard LMS fell to 50.6 percent in 2011, compared to 57.1 percent” the year before and “down from 71.0 percent in fall 2006. Concurrently, Blackboard’s major LMS competitors – [Desire2Learn](#), [Moodle](#), [Sakai](#) – have all gained share during this period. Additionally, several new LMS providers, including [Epsilon](#), [Instructure](#), and [LoudCloud](#), among others, are generating significant interest and beginning to sign some interesting campus clients.” (Green, 2011)

eFront Vs. Moodle

Since Moodle is probably the most widely used, open-source LMS, I thought it best to point out some features of eFront’s open-source community edition compared to Moodle.

According to Ben Jen, “The primary difference between eFront and Moodle is that eFront has been built from scratch to attract and retain the users. Its interface is well structured, with vivid icons and colors and with a minimum amount of popups. In all aspects eFront is more web 2.0 than Moodle and more suited for a new wave of learners. eFront is certified for its compliance with SCORM standard. Moodle is SCORM compatible but not certified from the ADL (Advanced Distributed Learning). eFront comes with an enterprise dedicated edition that offers supports for job descriptions, skills management, branches, detailed employees log, reports for the best candidates for certain jobs, career management, etc. On the other side, Moodle is primarily educational oriented. eFront has been built from a dedicated team of professional programmers. Its code is object oriented, well structured and well commented. Unlike eFront, Moodle has a big range of contributors. eFront views the quality as a two part equation—the improvement of the core system should be done through a small, coherent, dedicated team of programmers. On the other side, modules and testing should be done from as many users as possible. Like Moodle, eFront comes with a complete set of features to create content, tests, assessments, track progress, issue certifications, and dozens of add-ons to support wikis, blogs, youtube videos, picture lists, FAQ’s external links, etc. It has also been tested and improved from a wide community of users

successfully throughout the world.” (Ben Jen Online) – Ben Jen Online is partnered with Epignosis, Ltd., the Athens, Greece, based firm that makes eFront. Ben Jen Online is responsible for sales and support in North America and can provide custom content and solutions for customers of the eFront product.

According to Wyver Solutions, while Moodle is extremely robust and has been well tested by millions of users worldwide, it has grown to become a little bit of a monster. “Each iteration has added further complexity, to meet the needs of different groups, yet without the polish on the user interface that would help to hide that complexity from people that don’t need it. By comparison, eFront’s user interface is a delight. It uses a clear, icon driven design, which, somehow doesn’t fall into the trap of many such designs where the icons need interpretation. A lot of thought seems to have gone into keeping the interface consistent across the application. Moodle’s courses are built from a series of ‘activities’ (ie. where the student leaves a record of doing something – usually through some sort of contribution) interspersed with ‘resources’ (items that the student uses to complete the activities). eFront’s lessons, however, are built along more traditional lines (cf. Blackboard), whereby a the lesson is built from content-based units, perhaps interspersed with tests. Any other tools, like projects (cd. Moodle assignments) or forums sit outside of the lesson structure. “

Flexibility is “the key area where Moodle wins out. But this comes with maturity, and also with a price – complexity. For example, the roles and permissions structures within Moodle are perhaps the most complete of any application. With them you can allow a user to do something in one context, but not in another. But this richness also means that it can become a nightmare trying to work out what has caused a particular behavior for a particular user. It’s a little like having an overcomplicated set of Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), when building a website. By comparison, eFront has a simple set of permissions, which are based on the three apparently unchangeable base user types of administrator, professor and student. (Wyver Solutions) - Wyver Solutions is a learning solutions architecture practice – specializing in providing support, advice and training at the interface between learning, business and technology.

Further Reading: [Why eFront Instead of Moodle?](#)

[Click here to view eFront’s free, open-source community edition main features.](#)

Potential for Instruction and Training

eFront is designed to assist with the creation of online learning communities while offering various opportunities for collaboration and interaction through an icon-based user interface. The platform offers tools for content creation, tests building, assignments management, reporting, internal messaging, forum, chat, surveys, calendar and others. It is a SCORM 1.2 certified and SCORM 2004 / 4th edition compliant (commercial). As you would see they have an interesting list of modules but not all of them are available in the open source model. The commercial editions also include the ability to integrate with Facebook. “eFront allows users to connect to the platform via their Facebook account. By using the Facebook connection some info from Facebook is transferred to efront (specifically the user status and avatar). If the eFront user changes his/her status this change is also reflected on his/her Facebook profile.” (Gogos, 2013)

Awards and Recognition

In April 2010 eFront won a bronze award for "Best Advance in Learning Management Technology for Small- and Medium-Sized Businesses" category from Brandon Hall Research. - http://web.archive.org/web/20100505161036/http://www.brandonhall.com/awards/award_winners/Ita2009_winners.shtml.

In September 2012 eFront won an Award of Excellence for "Best Learning Management System" and a "Best Open Source Solutions" award from Elearning! Magazine - <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2012/9/prweb9948974.htm>

eFront was listed in The Top 100 Tools for Learning 2013 list released 30 September 2013. This list was compiled from the votes of over 500 learning professionals (from education and workplace learning) from 48 countries - See more at: <http://c4lpt.co.uk/top100tools/analysis-2013/>

Websites that Use eFront

Want to be inspired? The following is a list of company websites that use eFront.

[eFront Online Demo](#) – Log in as administrator, professor, or student to see how eFront works.

[Hissom School of Computer Technology](#) - This first link will take you to a project I created for a class in the ITEC program here at Kent State University. You are more than welcome to create a free account to check out my course.

[World Mentoring Academy](#) - FREE Interactive Learning OpenCourseware from MIT, UC Berkeley, Harvard, Yale, Stanford, U Houston, USC, UCLA, Khan Academy, NPTEL.

[My Music Expert](#) - Highly affordable Voice (Singing), Piano, Music Theory, and Songwriting online classes from Berklee College of Music.

[Avia Training](#) – For professional pilots by professional pilots.

[Fair Housing Solutions E'Train](#) - Your Online Solution to Fair Housing and 3560 Training!

Find more by searching Google for the following search term:

[index.php?ctg=lesson_info](#)

Challenges and Issues Related to Implementation

Individuals wanting to set up eFront's free community edition must have a hosting service and domain of their own with the following software installed:

- PHP version 5.1+ (PHP 5.2+ recommended)
- Mysql Server 4+ (Mysql 5 is strongly recommended, and mandatory for eFront Enterprise installations)

- Web server (Apache 2+ recommended, although eFront can work with Apache 1.x, IIS, nginx or lighttpd)
- Write access from the web server to some folders inside the efront installation.

Individuals wanting to install eFront on a school's server will most likely need permission to do so. Depending on how many will be utilizing the system, bandwidth could be an issue. There are no limits on the type of hardware used to host an eFront installation. However, as your needs grow, so will the need for additional resources. A simple eFront installation requires about 50M of free disk space and 32M of free system memory. However, a minimum of 128M free memory available to PHP is recommended. Disk space should be allocated according to usage.

While eFront Community may not be as complex as Moodle, there is a lot to learn in terms of using it. See the next section for links to tutorials that will be very helpful.

Training/Tutorials

A demo of eFront is available via the eFront website at <http://www.efrontlearning.net/demo>.

The eFront Website offers a plethora of training videos for the basic, intermediate, and advanced features. Visit this link to see all the tutorials. - <http://www.efrontlearning.net/tutorials>

Documentation for eFront can be found here - <http://docs.efrontlearning.net/>

Installation instructions can be found here - http://docs.efrontlearning.net/Installation_instructions

eFront User Voice - User Community forum - <https://efront.uservoice.com/forums/31924-efront-community>

How to Integrate with Facebook (Commercial Editions) - http://wiki.efrontlearning.net/index.php?title=Social_extensions&revision=2

Efront Alternative Solution

Think eFront's open-source Community edition sounds interesting? If you are looking for an even easier solution that is not as complex as the Community edition, eFront offers a 100% cloud-based solution in its [TalentLMS](#). With TalentLMS, there is no need to install, upgrade or backup anything. Everything runs from the CLOUD. TalentLMS offers different plans; one which is free and allows five users and a total of 10 courses. [Click here to view the plan comparison chart.](#)

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