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CONFERENCE REVIEW

ICEM & SIIE 2011 Joint Conference "Old meets new - media in education" – A review

The ICEM & SIIE 2011 conference was held at the Department of Education of the University of Aveiro and was organized by the University of Aveiro (Portugal) – a member of the European Consortium of Innovative Universities. In addition to international experts in the field of ICT in education, the event brought together 164 participants who represented some 30 different countries. The final evaluation by the organization committee and the external evaluation team determined that the conference was highly successful both academically and professionally. The pre-conference sessions during the preceding Media Day, were especially successful, with nearly as many participants as the conference itself.

ICEM & SIIE 2011 aimed at gathering researchers, teachers and other professionals, at national and international levels, around a focal topic that was designed to trigger and center the discussion on the old/new duality of media in education. Participants were invited to discuss:

- how old and new media in education can be described and compared;
- how old and new media in education can be combined, adopted and adapted;
- what old and new media in education imply in terms of technological, professional and social barriers;
- what cost-benefit relationships old and new media in education entail;
- how to compare old and new media in education given their particular educational contexts and the students' learning profiles.

The conference registered 164 participants from countries around the world, from Australia, to South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Cape Verde, Singapore, Taiwan, Canada, USA, Brazil, Peru, Venezuela, and Europe (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Ukraine, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Ireland, Finland and Norway). The highest representation of participants was from Portugal, Brazil and Spain due to language and geographical proximity.

After a careful double blind peer reviewing of papers, 76 were selected to be included in the conference, as well as in the pen drives of the proceedings (with ISBN number). The best papers will be invited to write a version of the paper for publication in the following journals: *Educational Media International* (*EMI*); *Indagatio Didactica*; Springer and Information Age Publishing.

The conference took place between the 28 and 30 September 2011 and included Media Day, the day prior to the conference. Media Day was dedicated exclusively to workshops and showcased diverse technological and non-technological solutions for education, in a variety of formats. It also featured two plenary sessions. Media

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activities ran throughout the conference, allowing participants and the public in general to attend these presentations/demonstrations at their own leisure. Media Day was offered as a free event, so the number of registrations was very high (up to 80 registrations in the plenary sessions, from 13 to 52 registrations in the showcases and up to 108 registrations from the 8 simultaneous workshops).

The conference program was organized in 5 plenary sessions, 1 round-table, 10 workshops, 2 posters sessions (8 digital posters and 6 printed posters) and 20 parallel sessions which included 57 full papers and 21 short papers. The conference was characterized by the international variety of the contributions. There were 38 papers in Portuguese, 32 in English and 6 in Spanish.

The conference topics included: students' perspectives on media in the classroom; students and media (as content and as tools for learning); Educational Media design; institutional impact of the integration of Educational Media; old vs new media: what really matters?; research and evaluation; personal and/or social learning environments/networks; Media and inclusion; Media and informal learning; immersive learning environments; virtual mobility in Education; mobile learning; and Media and literacies.

The conference was internally and externally evaluated using various instruments and following a mixed methodology (quantitative and qualitative methodology). The internal evaluation used a 13 questions anonymous questionnaire to be filled in by the participants that could be submitted online, using the conference web site or delivered by hand at the secretariat. The questionnaire consisted of closed questions, two open-ended questions, and selection of the best three presentations. The questionnaire also had a place for concluding suggestions or comments. In addition to a short demographic part, the instrument was divided into three main sections: the scientific, the organization and the social components. The main results were presented at the end of the conference and they are also available at the conference web site at http://cms.ua.pt/ICEM-SIIE2011/evaluation.

The returned questionnaires indicated that those participants who responded preferred to fill the evaluation out on paper (38 respondents) rather than submit it online (23 respondents), so in line with the conference theme of old and new, the old was stronger. The overall conference evaluation indicated that participants were completely satisfied with the whole conference.

The external evaluation was made by national and international experts and data was obtained through informal interviews and participant observation, including photographs. Photo-evaluation was used in order to capture the social interactions amongst the participants - an extensive collection taken by the evaluators show the conference mood as a very participatory one with several moments of apparently highly meaningful interactions, thus suggesting that these aims of the conference were achieved. Doctoral students who volunteered as staff were instructed to act as "antennas" for the evaluators. These students attended the parallel sessions and used a common grid for evaluating the interest level as well as the originality both in format and content of each presentation. They also observed the communications skills of the presenter and the quality of the interactions. These observations complemented the evaluations and were in general agreement: the sessions were all above average (from 2,2 to 2,6 on a three point scale).

The evaluators interviewed participants and presenters regarding both the content and context of the conference. Both received very favorable evaluations. The external evaluation methodologies included interviews, observations and reflections

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on both the content of the academic presentations and the contextual environment within which the conference was held.

Content

The Presentations were found to be very good, and were appropriate to the participants' interests. They were professionally developed and delivered. In keeping with the theme of the conference, there was a good balance between old and new in both theory and practice. Because ICEM is an organization of both researchers and practitioners, the media producers appreciated the sessions relating to project applications, and they would have liked to see even more projects presented.

Some technical problems appeared in some sessions, but they were quickly overcome by competent technical staff members. Presentations were given on various devices; laptops, tablets, and smartphones making the interfaces challenging. As usual in a conference that relies on multimedia support, there were some hardware and some network connection problems, but overall the available support was rated as excellent. This set a high standard in terms of content and organization for future international ICEM conferences.

Context

Conference participants were 70% academics, 30% designers, and/or producers. The contexts in which the presentations were made included Media Day presentations, parallel sessions, plenary sessions, round tables and keynote sessions. Many participants said that the most valuable things they took away from the conference were the contacts they made and the personal interactions with presenters. These personal interactions also occurred in the contexts of social and networking activities. Academics valued networking activities to extend their own collaborations. Producers and practitioners valued social networking and collaborations to expand their own business applications. Old met new in terms of age, experience, and practice. Networking and collaboration were of especially high quality

Below are some representative concluding comments from International attendees:

> Sometimes the titles were in English, and the presentations were in Portuguese, sometimes the other way around so I missed some things I would have been able to understand, and other times I was sitting in ones I couldn't leave without being rude.

> As a media producer I come to ICEM congresses for the social and business contacts I make and to learn more about what is going on in the field. This was a great congress, and I hope that we can have more producers as members.

> The scientific and organization committee were wonderful. There was a great variety in what they offered us in program and activities. It was a good blend of old and new friends, colleagues, projects and collaborations.

> This was my first time at an ICEM conference. It was the most personal international conference I've ever attended. The presentations and social events combined to give me good information and make me feel like a member of an international family.

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The social events of the conference were also very successful. Between the parallel sessions periodical coffee breaks occurred to provide moments of informal conversations between participants as well as lunches at the Restaurant of the University. At the end of the first day of the conference, a representative from the Mayor of Aveiro received the participants in the Grand Salon of the City Hall with a welcome speech, which was followed by a celebratory Port wine accompanied by a short concert of classical music by a string quartet in the cloisters of the Church of Misericórdia.

The second evening was the conference dinner at "Olá Ria" restaurant in a restored old ceramics factory. The trip to the restaurant was by a traditional boat used for harvesting of seaweed (Moliceiro). The trip from the city center through the Portuguese "Venice" canals was charming.

The final event, a cultural tour, took place in the Douro region, Régua, Pinhão and Porto. The first day was a boat trip through a series of locks that raised the boat, from Porto to the Régua, then continued from Régua to Pinhão by train along the bank of the Douro river. On the second day the participants had the opportunity to visit one of Port wine cellars and make the tour of six bridges by Rabelo boat.

The ICEM 2011 Conference in Aveiro, Portugal offered educators, academic professionals, and media producers, a high quality conference experience. ICEM is the organization that produces *EMI*, and we encourage readers to join us next September at ICEM 2012 to be held in Nicosia, Cyprus. For further information, contact the ICEM Secretariat at: "ICEM Secretariat" secretariat@icem-cime.org.

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