

Media & Learning Brussels 2011:

Exploring the power of media to support learning now and in the future

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The Media & Learning Brussels 2011 Conference was organised by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training and media company ATiT with the support of the European Commission, DG Education and Culture. It took place on 24-25 November 2011 in the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training headquarters in Brussels and involved 298 participants from 39 countries who came together to discuss the advantages and implications of using media in teaching and learning.

The conference evolved around three main themes:

- *Future trends and developments in media-supported learning*
- *Digital and media production skills and competences including media literacy*
- *The use and re-use of existing media resources in education and training at all levels including early and special needs education*



The audience during one of the plenary sessions

Based on the shared goal of harnessing the power of media to support learning, the conference organisers set up the event to provide participants with an opportunity to *consider digital media and media literacy in new and hopefully radically different ways*. The idea behind this conference is to support a real and on-going community of practice of those interested in how best to harness the promise of traditional and new media in the service of learning coming from different educational sectors.

By combining the conference with the annual MEDEA Awards which rewards excellence in the application of media in learning, the conference programme *combined excellent examples of media usage in an educational setting alongside discussions about policy, developments and best practice*.

Media & Learning was sponsored in part by Adobe, Liberty Global, Telenet and Young Digital Planet.

The programme

The 2011 conference programme included screenings of educational media productions, discussion opportunities that began online before the conference and presentation sessions. A series of practical workshops were scheduled on topics like how to set up projects whereby students teach their teachers how to use media tools and another on using YouTube video clips in the classroom.

Media & Learning 2011 - Flemish Ministry of Education and Training Headquarters, Brussels – 24 & 25 November 2011

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A total of 99 people from 17 countries contributed to the programme in 23 different sessions. *Networking* was supported by the Pigeon service which practically all participants signed up for. *Sessions in the main auditorium were streamed* and many people followed parts of the conference online.

All 9 finalists in this year's MEDEA Awards showcased their entries in screening sessions and most participants took part in the MEDEA Awards Ceremony where this year's winners were announced with **Monkey Tales Games** from Belgium winning the MEDEA Award for Professionally Produced Educational Media 2011 and **The Merchant of Venice** from Austria winning the MEDEA Award for User-Generated Educational Media 2011.

The conference featured an *exhibition by agencies active in the media and learning sector*, including INgeBEELD Media Wisdom Platform, European Schoolnet, Lifelong Learning Programme Projects supported by the European Commission, IBBT, the eLearning Europa Portal, EUscreen and the Agence Wallonne des Télécommunications.

A new feature this year was the conference *Play Area* where participants could try out products and services including Microsoft Kinect, Adobe software on different tablets and smartphones and a 4K screen from SURFnet.



Participants testing out devices in the Play Area

Discussion themes

The main issues were highlighted in keynote presentations on the first day. **Constantijn van Oranje** from the European Commission talked about the current situation: although much has been invested in the introduction of ICT solutions in education, we are not reaping the full benefit of these investments. Additionally, he mentioned that best practices often involve a holistic approach, where ICT fits into a further and broader strategy of educational change, involving students, teachers, parents and the community. **Peter Adriaenssens** talked about media for learning, against the backdrop of the role of education in the physiological and psychological growth of a child.



Peter Adriaenssens

One of the main themes of the conference concerned the integration of media creation into the classroom. The idea of giving kids the opportunity to produce their own films or short clips was a central theme of the conference. The underlying principle was that video production includes a whole process of skills which, once acquired, can be transferred to solve other complex tasks.

Nikos Theodosakis showed successful examples from his *The Director in the Classroom* project and the *InStill Life* project. Similar approaches were recognised in the winner of the special Award for European Collaboration in the creation of Educational Media 2011 at the MEDEA Awards, The European Chain Reaction, as well as several MEDEA Awards finalists.

There were plenty of examples of professional media creators and providers reaching out to and engaging with schools and the wider public. They included:

- open access to professionally created material, for integration in own learning contexts such as the classroom or digital learning spaces, e.g. *Twig* from the UK presented examples from the field of science, with the noteworthy statement of a teacher who started to use Twig clips: 'Have you ever heard a kid ask "Can we have a look at the next chapter?" at the end of a lesson?'
- professional support in the creation of media, e.g. the *BBC News School Report* as a collaborative project between schools and professional journalists provided the audience with more inspiring student-created examples.
- open access to creative design platforms where learners and the general public can create their own material starting from professionally designed resources e.g. keynote speaker **Pere Arcas** presented the Catalan project *Draw Me A Story*, an example of ultimate interactivity in which anyone in the world with internet access can contribute to the creation of a non-linear clip in a creative way, using the very flexible tools provided on the site.
- use of professionally created video to support community building e.g. *TV Klasse* of the Flemish Ministry of Education produces videos for students, parents and teachers to raise awareness on different educational issues; *INgeBEELD Media Wisdom Platform* connects user-generated and professionally made content with their mission to convey media awareness to young people.

There were also examples of games for learning. Mostly, games functioned as a self-study tool additional to the classroom activities (e.g. MEDEA Awards 2011 winner *Monkey Tales Games*) or as tools to support training in soft skills and understanding of complex situations.



Panellists discussing "What is the best business model for a learning game?"

Collaboration between technology designers and technology users

Ongoing interaction and collaboration between technology designers and technology users was also the theme of two keynote speeches: **Richard Harper** gave some insight into the design process in big technology corporations, and spoke of how technology often turns out to serve a different purpose than what it was originally designed for. **Lizbeth Goodman** showed how more intensive dialogue between technology users and technology designers can lead to unique and inventive solutions for various complex problems. She also showed how technology - when applied well - has the ability to empower people and communities, allowing them to grow and contribute significantly to society.

A notable discussion was on how increased interaction through social media was breaking down certain socially upheld values around media and media creation. What do authorship, originality, quality and the monetary value of creativity mean in an environment where group creativity becomes the norm?

Another central theme of the conference was around the question *what the effect of the move from a literacy culture to a media culture* has on learning. This was highlighted given the ease with which the



Donald Clark during his keynote presentation

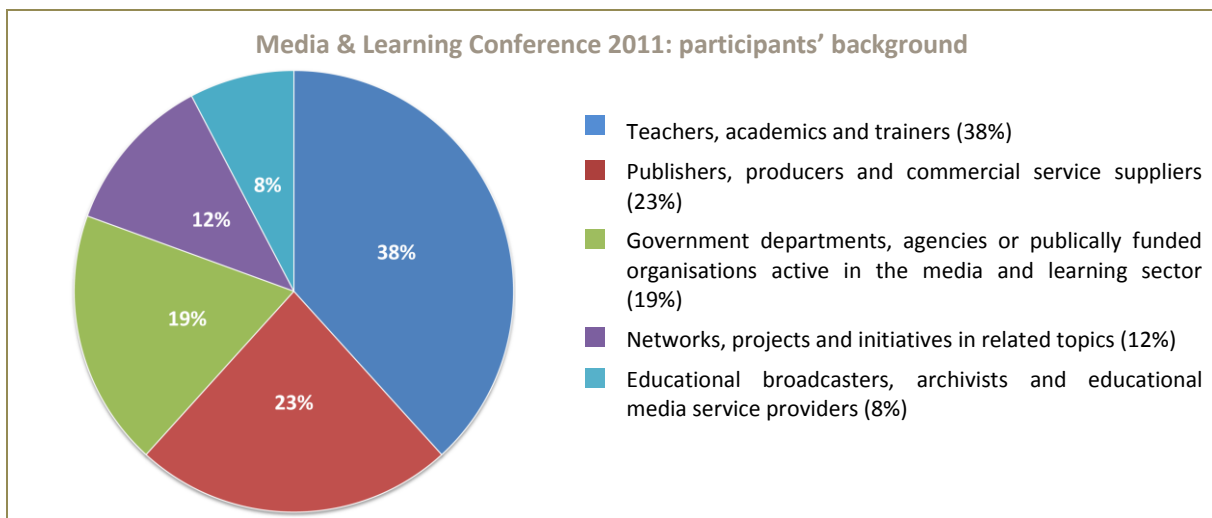
younger generation seems to engage with new media. Keynote speaker **Connor Galvin** spoke of using spaces to bridge the gap between the classroom and the learner's world outside the classroom. However, keynote speaker **Donald Clark** pointed out that the younger generation has never used language and text more than now. 21st century kids, he argued, were actually very unashful when it comes to using text: producing text is their main activity when connected through new media.

The discussion heated up when it came to employability and these new media skills. In the experience of **Joe Cullen** of Arcola Research for example, creativity-oriented training with new media helped youngsters of difficult backgrounds overcome their problems but it did not help them out of their unemployment in the end and thus led to a new frustration. **Andy Jones** of Thomson Reuters supported this by claiming that media skills were not usually the reason applicants got employed. **Allen Partridge** noted that the employers' perspective was underrepresented in the conference and added that the value of entrepreneurship was not emphasised enough.

There was general agreement that discussions on media skills needs to be more nuanced between media skills for entertainment and media skills for learning purposes. Also, the discussion increasingly developed into a discussion on educational change in society, broader than the role of media in this change. A topic that came up at several points throughout the conference was what the purpose of education is in today's society: what kind of learners are we teaching and how do we enable these learners to function in a more participatory society? This needs a more in-depth discussion on the changes in society itself.

The participants

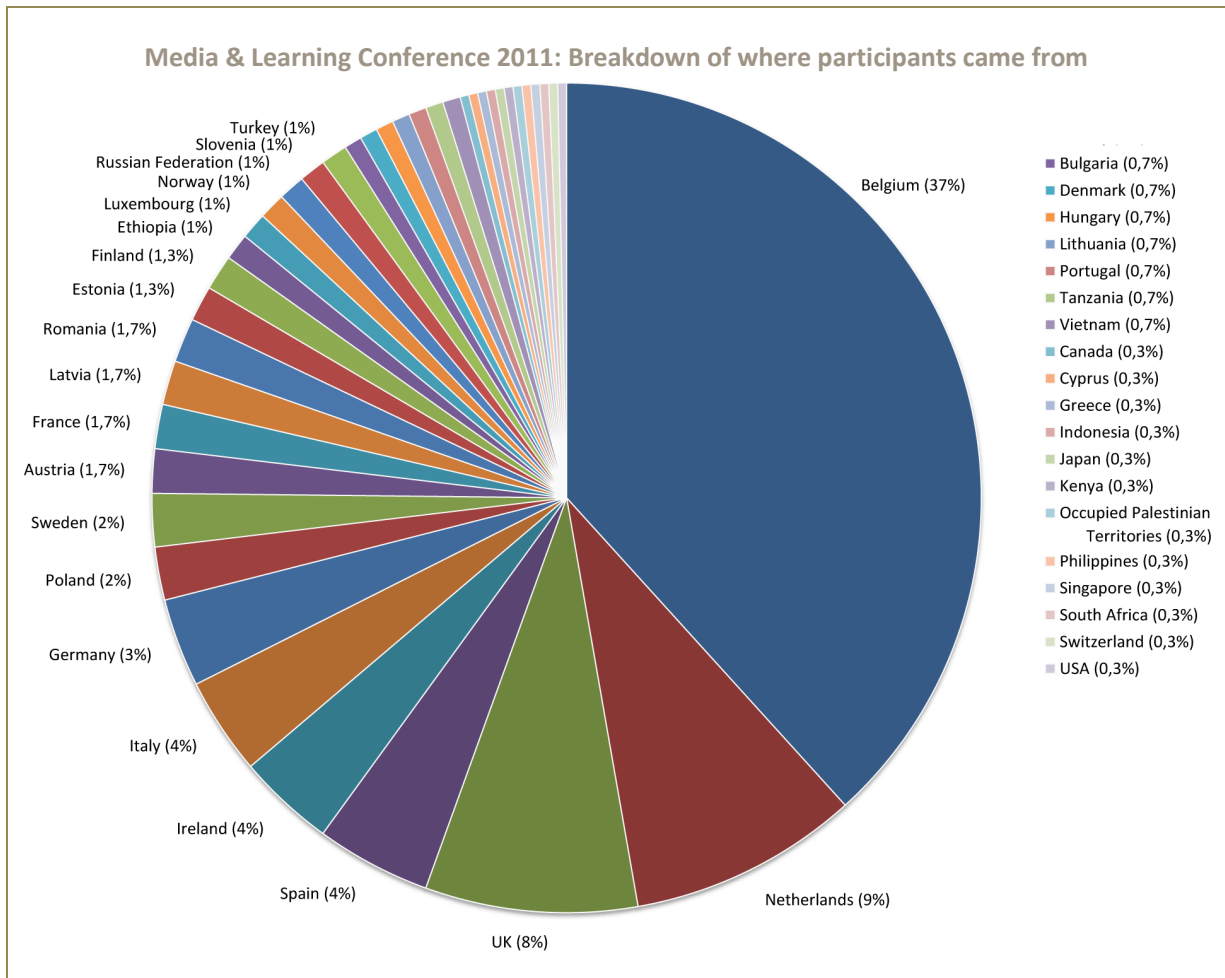
The Media & Learning Conference 2011 attracted people from different backgrounds, with experience across all levels of acquaintance with digital media, ranging from novices to media-literate educators and broadcasters.



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Participants were asked for their feedback after the conference and the responses have been very positive. When asked about the quality of the programme, 78% responded that it was excellent or very good and when invited to assess the quality of the organisation of the conference, 94% rated it as either excellent or very good. The organisers were also keen to find out whether participants were pleased about the opportunities for networking that were provided and a resounding 87% thought that the opportunity for networking was either excellent or very good.



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Participants with various backgrounds could share experiences and interact in different types of session, meet up during breaks thanks to the Pigeon Networking service, and visit stands hosted by different organisations, networks and initiatives in the field of media and learning.

Participants were also asked for their general comments about the conference and here are some of the comments they made:

"I learnt about the amazing array of media available for the teacher and the learner", Jared Kimanga Kericho, Teachers Training College, Kenya

"A very enjoyable and interesting event", Carol Priestley, MDR Partners, UK

"A lot of good practices, very good insights/moments of consideration/ideas", Sandra Wormgoor, Taaltutor, The Netherlands

"I got new ideas for my work with media from the best practices from other countries", Susanne Friz, FWU Institut für Film und Bild, Germany

"Enjoyable and fruitful", Sachiko I. Kodaira, NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, Japan

"Really enjoyed it, organisation, very good, technical very good, food excellent, well done!", Pete Fraser, The Centre for Excellence in Media Practice, Bournemouth University, UK

"I've got many ideas thanks to the inspiring workshops and seminars", Lut De Jaegher, Artevelde University College Ghent, Belgium

"Thanks to the organisers for bringing together bright minds!", Sintija Buhanovska, Zvaigzne ABC Publishers, Latvia

"Very enjoyable", Karl Donert, EUROGEO (European Association of Geographers), Belgium

"I thought it was a well-balanced programme with relevant themes, a lot of variation in the sessions (hands-on workshops, presentations, discussions", Anneleen Cosemans, Media and Learning Unit, K.U.Leuven, Belgium