

Linux for Kids The end of the long vacation

SUMMER ROUND-UP

RICHARD SMEDLEY

Whilst work to get Free Software into British schools seems stalled, progress is being made around the world. Here we highlight some projects old and new.

Letter 11

The K Desktop Environment (KDE) is on a roll at the moment with praise for KDE 2.2 and KOffice 1.1 and a clear roadmap to KDE 3.x – a port to Qt3. As the project continues to gather momentum it is no surprise that many of the developers have turned their attentions to the needs of younger users.

The KDE edutainment project will create educational software based around KDE. Recognising that KDE is rather deficient in software for children generally (though there are notable exceptions – see this column in *Linux Magazine 10*) the project will develop KDE educational software for children aged three to 18.

Although just launched, the project has an active mailing list, a newsletter, columns on educational philosophy and diverse applications in development including, in a firm stance against the dumbing down of education, *KLatin*. Eventually the KDE Edutainment package will be released with the rest of KDE.

There is perhaps no need to rehearse the practical arguments here for stable, economical software that can run on older hardware. It is a sad reflection on the nation if we need to make the case for open source code for schools and colleges and the desirability of immersing young minds in a community built on cooperation, never mind the advantages to taxpayers of avoiding foreign proprietary software.

k12ltsp

The author is currently installing cable around his house to upgrade his poorly functioning home network. This will lead to the configuration of the childrens' computers as thin clients using packages from the Linux Terminal server Project (ltsp).

The clients (X servers) boot from floppy or a ROM on the network card. They get an IP address from a server running Bootp or DHCP. Then a TFTP request

is sent to download a kernel from the server. The kernel takes control, mounts a root filesystem and starts the init process. An X-server is loaded and a login prompt is displayed. The principal advantage is in administration – 20 or 200 machines are now managed as one. Other advantages include vastly reduced hardware requirements (and improved reliability) and consequent cost and energy savings.

This has prompted some thoughts on current efforts at X terminals for schools, particularly the progress being made in the USA by the K12ltsp project. Look out for a feature in the next couple of months.



Free schools

The Free Software Foundation Europe (FSF Europe) has been working with The Organization for Free Software in Education and Teaching (OFSET) to promote Free Software in French schools. The French government now finds itself joining Argentina and Mexico in considering Linux in its educational establishments. The other big project for FSF Europe is representation at the World Education Forum (WEF), to be held October 24-27, 2001, in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Blue penguins

Matt Jezorek of Blue Linux has boldly proposed to pack all the "Educational Software games and such for younger students" into a single new distro, as well as "put together a second version that will contain administrative software for the schools." Take a look at their site to see how they are progressing.

Meanwhile the developers of Tuxtyping have launched Tux4kids to promote "quality educational software released under Free Software or other OSI-certified licenses."

Until next month, if you would like an educational excuse to waste some time, try *simutrans on the cover CD*. A freeware Railroad Tycoon-type game covering all modes of transport and the resources needed to run them. ■

Info

KDE edutainment	http://edu.kde.org/
IRC – server	irc.openprojects.net , channel: #kde-edu
K12ltsp	http://www.riverdale.k12.or.us/linux/k12ltsp.html
FSF Europe's pages	http://www.fsfEurope.org/education/education.html
OFSET	http://www.ofset.org/information/legal/manifesto.html
FSF and WEF	http://savannah.gnu.org/projects/edu
Free in Italy	http://www.libresoftware-educ.org/en/carteltalieen.html
In France	http://www.libresoftware-educ.org/en/carteFranceen.html
Blue Linux	http://www.bluelinux.org/
Tux4kids	http://www.geekcomix.com/tux4kids/goals/