Interview with Dr. Sándor Forgó
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2006 Recipient of the AECT International Division
International Contributions Award

Overview

My name is Sándor Forgó, and I am a Professor at the Department of Instruction and Communication Technology of the Institute of Media Informatics at the *Eszterházy Károly College of Eger,* Hungary.

In addition to being a trained engineer and technology instructor my professional background also includes a specialization in pedagogy and educational sociology earned at the Faculty of Natural Sciences at Eötvös Lóránd University, Budapest. My University Doctorate title was awarded in 1984 and I earned my PhD in 1997 at the Faculty of Humanities of *Eötvös Lóránd University*, Budapest. Presently I am the Director of Distance Learning Programs at the *Eszterházy Károly College.* Moreover I am a theme director at the Doctoral Schools of the *University of Technology of* Budapest*,* and of the *Eötvös Lóránd University* of Budapest.

During my career as a college instructor I taught the following subjects: instruction and communication technology, communication theory, media technology, communicational and information technologies, electronic publishing.

During the first stage of my scholarly and scientific career from 1979 until 1986 I performed research into the phenomena of career socialization. From 1988 I became involved in the scientific examination of the development of video technology-assisted communication skills, and of communication theory. As of 1993 I began the implementation of distance learning programs at the Eszterházy Károly College and from 2000 I have been working on the elaboration of the foundations of the Media Informatics discipline. Since 2002 I have been involved in the quality assurance of e-learning educational materials.

Presently I am the leader of the Distance Learning Text and Frame System Development Quality Assurance team of the MeLLearn Higher Education Network for Lifelong Learning Association.. Moreover, I am a member of the Information Society Instruction and Research Group and of the Adult Education Task-Force of the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture.

I am also a regular participant and contributor at international and domestic scientific conferences. I delivered papers and held presentations at the Agria Media 2004 Conference on Information and Instruction Technology, at the National Conference on Pedagogy, and at the Informatics in Higher Education conference. Moreover, I contributed to the e-learning forum held at the Institute of Computer Technology of the Academy of Hungarian Science and to the Networkshop IIF conference.

In addition to the above I have participated with presentations at the following international scholarly events and conferences:

Cebit, Hanover, Germany, 1995
WorldDidac, Basel CH; Basel, 1996
Agria Media. (AGRIAMEDIA-ICEM Instruction and Communication Technology Conference and Exhibition), Eszterházy Károly College, Eger, 1992-2006
ISPA XIX. International School Psychology Colloquium. 1996
Vilnius International Scientific Conference, Vilnius Pedagogical University 2001
Münster HBZ, Germany, 2002 Leonardo Project
Slov Didac Conference on Instructional Technology. Konstantin University Nitra
TTV. International Scientific and Professional Conference. Pedagogical Faculty of Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic 2003
International Conference Delta Academy for Science – Mansoura, Egypt. 2002
ICEM, Granada, Espana 2003
TTV. International Scientific and Professional Conference. 2004. Pedagogical Faculty of Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic.
DIVAI 2004. Konstantin University Nitra
ICEM, Oslo Norge, 2004
Valdosta State University, USA 2004
ICEM AECT Orlando USA: 2005 The 2006 ICEM Executive Committee

My recent achievements include the development of an on-line curriculum titled Information and communication technological foundations of the teaching profession and the elaboration of a chapter titled Evaluation and assessment of digital teaching materials, software, and learning resources. Moreover, I contributed to the development of the ANDRANORD Northern Hungarian Adult Education Network and elaborated a SAP-Coospace system-based curriculum for a subject titled Communication Theory as part of the Research Space subproject of the Innovative Education Support Systems 2004 project sponsored by the National Research and Technology Agency.

Also supported by the Apertus Foundation along with the Coedu, I participated in the development of an intelligent, interactive board and methodological instruction CD. I would also like to mention that I compiled the Informatics-Media Informatics section of the SULINET Digital Knowledge Base and functioned as the media consultant of the World of Schools web-based curriculum developed within the framework of the Human Resource Development Operative Program (HEFOP 3.3.1-P) sponsored by the National Development Agency.

The results of my scholarly work had been published in two books and four book chapters. Moreover, I am a co-author of four educational texts, in addition to writing eighty scholarly articles and thirty six electronically published scientific treatises.

The Interview

1. What factors attracted you to the discipline of Instructional Technology?

Although I earned an engineering degree, my family background includes pedagogy and education as well. First I found employment in the industrial sphere, but I expressed interest in social science and pedagogical issues too. Consequently, in order to continue my studies in education I started to work in my former high school. In the 1970's and 1980's, that is during the course of my continuing education, my pedagogical and technological interests were united in the examination of the theoretical and practical aspects of programmed instruction. I applied for a position at the Eszterházy Károly College, formerly named Ho Chi Minh Teacher Training College. Having gained the sympathy and support of the management of the institution I became a member of Miklós Thiel's research team, as an Assistant Professor .The team, which included such scholars as Zoltán Hauser and Lajos Kis-Tóth, not only facilitated my professional growth, but contributed to the development of long-lasting friendship as well. I was also given the opportunity to meet such Hungarian pioneers of instructional technology as Klára Tompa, András Benedek, and András Nádasi. As a result of their system-oriented approach the discipline of instructional technology became professionally accepted in Hungary. Thus in the formation of my professional career not only the abovementioned system-oriented approach, but my pedagogical and technological background coupled with the influence of my peers played a significant role. Furthermore, I always strove to reveal the mystery of making teacher presentations and illustrations the most effective and optimal in the given educational process.

2. What made you join the AECT? (Association for Educational Communications and Technology)

I became familiar with the efforts of this huge organization via my membership in the ICEM. Last year I was fortunate enough to join the AECT and enjoy the privilege of participating at the ICEM conference enabling me to make the acquaintance of such leading scholars and professionals as Jenny Johnson, Marina McIsaac, Otto Benavides, Robert Doyle, and Richard Cornell who are not only dominant figures of their field, but dedicated advocates of ICT. Encouraged by their professional and personal support I registered at this prestigious event in which I became most impressed by the introduction of mobile communication-based learning formats.

3. In your opinion what are the major trends in instructional technology especially in Hungary and in Eastern Europe?

As our world became fully digitalized, the previous analog systems are superseded by ICT equipment. In Hungary and in Eastern Europe an interesting situation developed as, due to the lack of the respective professional impact and competitiveness of faculty and the academic sphere, informatics experts significantly influence the professional aspects of content development in addition to organizing the learning process. Consequently, the curriculum development process requires the authors of distance learning texts to deal with routine informatics and data operation tasks, thereby discouraging most of the already overburdened faculty from this effort.

While supported by various grants and tenders several new distance and e-learning programs have been developed, their accessibility and dissemination capability are not always guaranteed. Nevertheless, I would like to point out a few remarkable efforts as listed below:

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http://ip.gallup.hu/elearning/magyar/mint.htm
http://tavoktatas.lap.hu/
http://sdt.sulinet.hu
http://www.apertus.hu/
http://moodle.kfrtkf.hu/
http://balint.ektf.hu
http://tavoktatas.ektf.hu

All in all, however, constructive teaching and learning methods, project-based knowledge acquisition and practice-oriented learning formats became prominent, and comprehensive informatics development programs have been launched in the public education sphere.

4. What kind of changes can be expected in the field of ICT?

In my opinion instructional technology is not only relegated to the role of the "maid of pedagogy" in which only the application of pedagogical principles can lead to practical knowledge, but it developed into an independent professional discipline incorporating relevant technological skills and aptitudes. In the future the often unpublished theoretical research results will not be prevalent, as increasing importance will be assigned to the shared knowledge gained by educational professionals via the application of Information and Communication Technology. Consequently new, unrestricted forums and dissemination opportunities will have to be provided. One possibility would be the so-called Wiki initiative in which educational professionals would share their ICT-related experiences and respective content knowledge in an unrestricted, freely edited format. (Today a so-called Pygmalion effect can be discerned in the curriculum development arena, as authors are reluctant to share their work for fear of their programs being modified or mutilated by unauthorized users) The aforementioned initiative would significantly contribute to the professional dissemination and sharing of relevant experiences.

As a result of digitalization we can experience the convergence of media components (Internet, TV, radio, mobile phone-based television). The tools of interactive education whose applicability was limited due to the previously unidirectional nature of communication equipment are incorporated into ICT devices. Consequently, the ubiquitous computer networks will make frontal instruction obsolete thereby facilitating the development of the constructive learning process.

5. How could the International Division of the AECT be further improved?

While one is hardly in the position to give advice concerning the operation of a well-organized professional community, I would like to reiterate that the next general assembly of the ICEM will be held in Eger, Hungary. This event will be simultaneously organized with the AGRIA MÉDIA Conference on Information and Instruction Technology, a professional forum arranged since 1992. This prestigious professional event expecting 120 participants will provide a good opportunity for those members of the ICEM Board of Directors who represent the AECT as well to widen their professional and personal horizons. The motto of the conference: "Digital teaching and learning environments require new teaching

competences and increasing academic achievement." Web address and Internet accessibility:
http://www.ektf.hu/agriamedia
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6. What professional advice would you offer to your students?

In Hungary today teacher salaries lag behind the European average. While usually not the most talented students will become teachers, my previous research efforts reveal that altruism and the love of children play a dominant role behind such career choices. Although the aforementioned altruistic motivations ensure a strong dedication and the respect of the teaching profession, I offer few of my thoughts below:
- educational and instructional devices should not dominate the teaching process as future teachers can see that in their immediate families the analog technologies have been superseded by digital ones
-teachers should rely on their own knowledge and try to limit the use of ICT as there is a strong need for the instruction of abstract theoretical knowledge
-teachers should not be dependent on ICT as a balance should be achieved between technological prowess and theoretical knowledge
-prospective teachers should have an open-minded approach toward their peers and community, and the respective technology
-teachers should avoid prejudice and use pedagogical skills and tact in the solving of an educational or pedagogical conflict

Moreover, I would like to reaffirm that creative media use is not only based on instincts, but on a more profound   knowledge of media and the respective applications.

7. Would you offer any closing thoughts?

An ICT professional is in a somewhat controversial position as, according to the well-known slogan, media use is a blessing and a curse at the same time. While few of us would give up on the use of media (TV, Internet, mobile phones), we make condescending remarks about computer or Internet addiction, or feel critical about the gatekeepers of the media. It is for us instructional technology experts to recognize this duality, and with adequate skill and tactfulness, we have to promote media literacy for the masses. We have to convince teachers that media play an important role in the life of children, thereby justifying the educational application of the latest achievements of ICT. We want our children to become more than just consumers of the messages of the media, we should strive to make them conscious and creative users as well. Finally, I would like to thank to the AECT for this opportunity, as I feel it was a privilege that I could express my views at this forum. Last, but not least, I owe special gratitude to Jenny Johnson for her recommendation and support.

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