We are very excited about this Special Issue of the NAKPEHE Chronicle of Kinesiology and Physical Education in Higher Education and its first-ever electronic publication and distribution to our members plus over 15,000 KPE professionals around the world. We are grateful for the support and assistance of Bill Sunderland, Greg Reed, and Christine Horger in the Journals Division of Human Kinetics (HK) for making this possible, and we thank HK for their support in this endeavor. The redesigned e-Chronicle now offers sections on the following areas of kinesiology and physical education: leadership and administrative issues, editor’s invited column on current issues, best practices in teaching and learning, research that matters, and a section for new professionals in our field. Many thanks go to Mike Metzler, Chronicle editor, and the NAKPEHE publications committee for all of their work in the redesign process and this great new look.

NAKPEHE has a long history as a national organization for professionals in higher education. NAKPEHE evolved from two national associations: the National College Physical Education Association for Men (1897–1977) and the National Association for Physical Education of College Women (1924–1977). In 1978, these two organizations merged to form the National Association for Physical Education in Higher Education (1978–2006). In keeping with the national trends and the multidisciplinary nature of our profession, the NAPEHE membership voted in 2006 to rename our organization the National Association for Kinesiology and Physical Education in Higher Education (NAKPEHE). However, we keep evolving as a professional organization and have continued to review our vision and mission to better meet the needs of our membership and our profession. In fact, NAKPEHE recently developed new vision and mission statements that more fully reflect our current goals and aspirations. Both were approved by the NAKPEHE membership in our business meeting in Albuquerque on January 6, 2008. I am personally very pleased with both the mission and vision statements and feel that they more accurately reflect where we are and where we want to go as an association. The updated statements are as follows:

**Vision Statement:**
NAKPEHE aspires to be the premier association for higher education leaders, scholars, and teachers in kinesiology and physical education.
Introduction
What would be your response if you were offered software at no cost? Many would quickly think of the adage “If it sounds too good to be true, it is.” They might also suggest you get what you pay for. However, this is not necessarily true in the case of Open Source Software (OSS), which is defined as software programs distributed with accessible source code(s) (Coppola, Neelley, & The R-Smart Group, 2004). OSS is becoming a viable alternative to purchasing proprietary software products. In fact, a Google search for the term Open Source showed an increase in OSS from 28.8 million in 2005 to 376 million in 2006 (Pan & Bonk, 2007), and the authors’ searches yielded similar results in 2008. OSS is becoming more readily available and is commonly used by students, public schools (eSchool News, 2008; Stansbury, 2008), institutions of higher learning (Coppola et al., 2004; Olsen, 2003), and even national and international government entities (Nastu, 2008). With this unprecedented use, this column’s purpose is to examine the value of OSS, specifically OpenOffice, as a teaching and learning tool.

OSS Products
Some of the most common OSS products include computer operating systems, servers, database software, online learning systems, and a host of desktop tools. Literally hundreds of OSS tools are available to individual users, and most, but not all, of this software is free (Crowston, Annabi, & Howison, 2003). The most common examples are Linux (an operating system), Moodle (course management system), OpenOffice (an open version similar to Microsoft Office), GIMP (an image manipulation program), NVu (a Web design assistant), Thunderbird (e-mail client), Firefox (Web browser), programming languages (e.g., Java, Python, Perl), and games.

Software Licensing and Source Code
Usually when an individual acquires a software product, that person makes the purchase from a vendor (e.g., Microsoft), which extends permission, not (continued)
ownership, to use the product. This category of software is commonly called commercial or proprietary software, only allowing certain use of the software and restricting access to the source code. Some OSS software is categorized as commercial software (like proprietary software) because it is sold; however, these programs allow anyone to report bugs, request new features, or enhance the software. This accessibility allows a community of developers to generate discussions, make modifications, and experiment with the program, potentially resulting in improvements and generation of new and novel ideas (Pan & Bonk, 2007). This fosters innovation by allowing an enormous talent pool to access and manipulate the source code (Nastu, 2005).

OpenOffice Review and Evaluation

Potentially the most influential OSS product to date is an alternative to Microsoft Office called OpenOffice, which has been under development for 20 years. There are 750 individuals who have contributed directly to the development of OpenOffice and over 4,000 individuals who contribute to extension development, advertising, distribution, and linguistic support. The product started with one application, but has grown to a suite of six application tools that include (1) database, (2) spreadsheet, (3) a drawing program, (4) a presentation program, (5) a math equation writer, and (6) a word processor.

The product version of OpenOffice selected for this review is currently available in the beta 3 version and was slated for release in October of 2008. Reviews of OpenOffice suggested it has many of the functions of Microsoft Office (Gralla, 2008) but lacks some of the higher-end features. For example, OpenOffice does not have the extensive selections of themes and templates found in Microsoft Office; however, their collection of themes, templates, and plug-ins is literally growing by the day on their Web site (www.OpenOffice.org). In addition, the OpenOffice user interface does not compare with the aesthetically slick Microsoft Office user interface, and Gralla (2008) suggested that some users might feel as if they are back in the 1990s when using OpenOffice.

OpenOffice starts up with a menu shell that is a splash screen including icons for each of the applications in the suite. In addition, there are two icons: one that operates like the My Computer function found in MS Windows and another that links to existing templates. Also, the splash screen includes links for new templates, add-ons, registration, and the OpenOffice Web site. The user interface is standard across all OpenOffice applications with a common menu bar (e.g., file, view, edit, etc.) very similar to that found in Corel Office (a proprietary product). The user will find that the menu choices under each item on the menu bar might be arranged differently and might use different labels, but the functions are essentially the same. For example, if the teacher is reviewing a document in which changes have been made by others, the accept or reject change tracking tools are found under edit. The feature of inserting notes is located under the insert link on the menu bar. Also, one can click on the e-mail icon and launch the e-mail client to send the document (continued)
as an attachment. Other useful features are the ability to convert a document to PDF format and the navigator toolbar, which nicely links to objects (e.g., titles, sheets, tables, text frames, and graphics) that are imbedded in a document. The toolbar includes an icon with dropdown links to open other OpenOffice applications. The formatting bar located under the toolbar contains standard formatting tools (e.g., font type, size, alignments, and bulleting) that are common features to the other OpenOffice programs.

Much like Microsoft Office, support links include free and commercial support, books, tutorials and picture-based step-by-step processes, frequently asked questions, a discussion forum, and support links for Mac users. OpenOffice applications are compatible with other OSS office suites and Microsoft Office documents prior to Office 2007. The authors were able to successfully open MS Office 2007 Word, Excel, and PowerPoint files with the equivalent OpenOffice applications. However, it would be advisable for individuals considering a migration to OpenOffice to conduct additional testing of compatibility with existing files.

Unless there are substantial justifications, the decision to use an OpenOffice Suite is pragmatic, fiscally responsible, and a logical choice.

References


