The mLearn 2009 conference was a bellwether event. It marked the first time that the international mobile learning community rallied in the United States and began development of partnering opportunities that leverage the longer history of research initiatives in Europe and other geographies with the late-breaking technologies that the U.S. has been introducing at a rapid pace. We hope that the subset of expanded papers on topics of high interest and quality presented here will continue to spur new ideas and new relationships that can help us advance the state of the art in mobile learning and pervasive computing. To that end several papers stood out as extremely credible and relevant, reflecting some of the key concerns of the mobile learning researchers who attended mLearn 2009. These include the focus of our past and future research efforts, how students across the world are using mobile devices for learning in practice, how m-learning can empower disenfranchised learners, how we can increase our levels of collaboration in mobile learning, and how experience with mobile learning may impact on learners’ perceptions about its value. A common theme among these papers is that we can, and should, learn from the past, both our failures and our successes, in order to fully achieve the potentials of mobile learning.

In our first paper “A Survey of Research Methods and Purposes in Mobile Learning,” Anna Wingkvist and Morgan Ericsson provide a comprehensive survey of papers from past mLearn conferences. They conclude that we may be failing to engage enough in basic research, and also in evaluation. Such insights may help us to address this particular imbalance in the future. (It should be noted that the original version of this paper won the Best Paper Award at the conference).

In “Mature Students Using Mobile Devices in Life and Learning” Agnes Ku-kulska-Hulme et al. analyze the traditional boundaries between work and life as well as formal and informal learning environments and contexts. In order to assess the extent to which mobile technology has aided the goal of ‘anytime, anyplace’ learning, thus rendering those traditional barriers less distinct, the authors polled an international sample of adult learners to determine the context and scope of actual use of personal mobile technologies as well as the social, psychological, and cultural factors that influence actual use.

In “Empowered Learner Identity Through M-Learning: Representations of Disenfranchised Students’ Perspectives” Ruth Wallace presents a case study on the use of mobile technologies to empower disenfranchised learners from Indigenous populations in Northern Australia. Learners responded well to the use of technology as a medium for authentic, situated digital storytelling that reflected their personal and cultural knowledge and experience. Beyond the original case study, this research has broader implications for engaging and empowering learners who exist outside the reach of mainstream formal education due to economic or cultural factors.
The two short papers that conclude this issue have more specific agendas. In “Advancing Collaboration Between M-Learning Researchers and Practitioners Through an Online Portal and Web 2.0 Technologies” Laurel Evelyn Dyson and Andrew Litchfield advocate for the creation of an online knowledgebase (or ‘mPortal’) for researchers and educators to develop and share m-learning best practices, strategies, and case studies.

Finally, in their paper “Empirical Research on Learners’ Thoughts About the Impact of Mobile Technology on Learning” Gábor Kismihók and Réka Vas sound a warning based on international survey data that suggests that current positive attitudes towards m-learning may be disappointed by actual experience, if the past results of e-learning experiences are repeated (incidentally Gábor received an Honorable Mention for the Best Student Paper Award at the conference.) As mobile learning researchers and practitioners, we should take heed of this warning and ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

These papers represent the best thinking and research from the 2009 conference. They are building blocks for the next generation of solutions and learning outcomes enabled by mobile technology.

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