Welcome to the special edition of the *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning* devoted to papers exclusively selected from the 2010 IADIS Mobile Learning conference which was held in March 2010 in Porto, Portugal. This conference series was inaugurated in Malta in 2005 and it is the longest standing annual international mobile learning conference after MLearn. The Porto event was the 6th edition and received 128 submissions from authors from 38 countries representing most European nations and every other continent.

The conference theme was Mobile Learning, a Retrospective Outlook. Its aim was to provide a framework to debate, examine, and analyse the most relevant research topics in the area of mobile learning over the past five years with a view to providing an outlook for the research agenda and challenges for the future. In particular, among other topics, the scientific committee sought contributions which expounded and contributed to the current understanding of mobile learning in relation to: the relevance of context, location and learner mobility; the tensions between personal informal learning and traditional classroom education; the design of mobile learning activities and the integration of mobile devices in the broader educational scene; and the phenomenon of user generated content versus content delivery and its implications for learning.

This special edition contains five contributions. The first article, “Mobile Devices as Support Rather than Distraction for Mobile Learners: Evaluating Guidelines for Design”, by Johan Eliasson, Teresa Pargman, Jalal Nouri, Daniel Spikol, and Robert Ramberg, addresses the design of mobile learning activities. In particular, the authors question designs which lead learners to focus on the devices at the expense of interacting with their peers or with the outdoor environment and which may be counterproductive when a situated learning approach is desired. The paper presents two design iterations of a geometry learning activity and their results in terms of: 1. students’ visual focus on devices, and 2. heuristics for designing
mobile learning activities which balance the learners focus between mobile devices and the learning tasks. The retrospective examination of mobile learning in this article illustrates the achievement in enhancing learning by leveraging the advantages of the context, peer-interaction and situated learning. The outlook is provided by the five design heuristics that can help students balance their focus between the device and the learning task.

The second contribution to this issue, “Identifying the Potential of Mobile Phone Cameras in Science Teaching and Learning: A Case Study Undertaken in Sri Lanka”, by Saku Ekanayake and Jocelyn Wishart, presents a study designed to use camera phones in the three stages of a lesson: planning, implementation and evaluation; to support students’ learning as well as teachers’ teaching. The qualitative study examines a science lesson designed by a group of 18 teachers and implemented in a school with the direct participation of four of the 18 teacher-designers. This article builds on the extensive work conducted in the field on contextual, collaborative science learning which uses mobile devices to capture and transfer data. Its contribution lies in the use of camera phones throughout all the stages in science learning outlined by Shulman’s paper on ‘Knowledge and Teaching’ (Harvard Educational Review 57, 1987) and by focusing on how mobile technologies also have an important role to play in supporting teaching. Thus this study enriches our understanding of how (returning to Traxler’s keynote themes) mobile learning both enhances learning and reaches out, and also addresses the challenge of embedding mobility in learning activities.

Andrew Middleton provides the third article in this issue, “Audio Active: Discovering Mobile Learner-Gatherers from Across the Formal-Informal Continuum.” His work contests the perception that podcasting is primarily a medium for knowledge transmission. His argument echoes the words of McLuhan and Fiore, in their classic 1967 text “The Medium is the Massage (sic)” that the use of this tool as an amplifier of the lecturer’s voice is a way of looking “at the present through the rear-view mirror”. In his article Middleton presents six mobile audio learning scenarios: audio Personal Development Planning; Audio notes; Previsit; Field trip commentary; User voices; and Pocketables; which were elaborated during a workshop involving 70 participants at a Podcasting for Pedagogic Purposes Special Interest Group applying a scenario-based design method. The retrospective analysis of this article is critical of the use of podcasting to date, contesting that teaching using recorded lectures is not an appropriate way to facilitate mobile learning. Its outlook proposes scenarios in which mobile audio should be used to involve the learners’ voices to usefully disrupt didactic pedagogy.

The fourth contribution to this special issue, “Involving the End-Users in the Development of Language Learning Material” is by Anu Seisto, Maija Federley, Timo Kuula, Janne Paavilainen, and Sami Vihavainen. In their contribution the authors present the ‘Hybrid book’ which combines the traditional schoolbook and the mobile phone and provides access to digital material through images on the printed page. The article describes the design of the hybrid book through a user-centric approach involving students, their teachers, and parents. Seisto and colleagues design with the users, bearing both context and medium in mind. For example they differentiate between activities to be completed at school from those at home, and make use of audio delivered through the mobile phone. This study also presents the evaluation of English as a Foreign Language hybrid book conducted with 25 pupils over three weeks. This article closes the issue, reflecting on the need for further research into alternative formats of books, which have so far been scarcely researched in the field of mobile learning.
The thought piece by John Traxler based on his keynote address is titled “Mobile Learning: Starting in the Right Place, Going in the Right Direction?” It looks back over the past ten years of research in the field and questions whether we started in the right place, have gone the right direction, and gone as far as we can. The retrospective journey Traxler proposes is landmarked by five achievements in mobile learning: 1. Enhancing Learning; 2. Reaching Out; 3. Theory Building; 4. Motivation; and 5. Community. His outlook is guided by four challenges: 1. Scale and Generality: Transferability and Relevance; 2. Sustainability; 3. Embedding; and 4. Evidence and Evaluation.

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