Due to a series of special issues with guest editors, it is more than a year since I have had the opportunity to write an IJMBL editorial. During that time I believe that the journal has made significant progress in raising its profile in the international research community. It is now included in eleven indices, including Cabell’s Directory and DBLP, and is currently in review by Thomson Reuters for possible inclusion in the Web of Knowledge. I very much hope that, by the time I write the next regular issue editorial, IJMBL will be included in that prestigious index. I have also endeavoured to make the journal known through more informal means, including creating dedicated pages on both Wikipedia and Facebook.

The journal has continued to deliver special issues from the world’s leading mobile learning conferences and workshops, most recently mLearn 2009, IADIS Mobile Learning 2010 and the Alpine Rendez-Vous workshop, and papers from mLearn 2010 are scheduled for the final quarter of this year. The journal’s relationship with the International Association for Mobile Learning is also increasingly strong. These links to mobile learning research forums are a fundamental part of the journal’s mission and are, I believe, mutually beneficial.

The content of the journal has also gained some further exposure though an edited book, *Combining E-Learning and M-Learning: New Applications of Blended Educational Resources*, which has been published this year by IGI Global and consists of updated versions of all the papers published in Volume 1 of the journal (2009). I am pleased to report that Yrjö Engeström’s chapter ‘Wildfire Activities: New Patterns of Mobility and Learning’, is available as a free sample chapter on the IGI website, as I believe it deserves a wider audience. This kind of exposure to researchers who do not currently subscribe to the journal can only help to enhance its reputation and increase the visibility and citations of the work that it promotes.

Turning our attention to the issue at hand, this regular issue of the journal contains five papers from a cosmopolitan mix of territories; New Zealand, Belgium, the United States, the West Indies and Australia. This kind of mix serves to underline the international appeal of mobile and blended learning research, and gives us the opportunity to learn from differing global perspectives. As time goes on I am increasingly seeing synergies in research themes that have previously appeared in the journal or related publications. I have taken the opportunity of indicating these to the reader in this editorial, as an encouragement to look at any of the related papers that you may not already be familiar with.

The first paper in this issue is “Reflections on 4 Years of MLearning Implementation (2007-2010)” by Thomas Cochrane. Regular readers may already be familiar with Thom’s previous contribution to the journal (with Roger Bateman) in Volume 1 Issue 4, ‘Transforming Pedagogy Using Mobile Web 2.0’. Since Thom works in an institution in the same city as my own, I have been familiar with his work
for some time, and it is good to have the opportunity see this reflective piece of work that summarises his extensive activities in practical mobile learning projects over the last few years. His paper reviews the outcomes from multiple projects, and concludes that the ‘keys to mlearning sustainability are an institutional cultural and strategy shift as well as a lecturer and student ontological shift in relation to learning and teaching.’

The second paper is ‘Listening to an Educational Podcast While Walking or Jogging: Can Students Really Multitask?’ by Joke Coens, Ellen Degryse, Marie-Paul Senecaut, Jorge Cottyn, and Geraldine Clarebout. This particular area of research is one that I have found interesting since Peter Doolittle contributed a chapter to ‘Innovative Mobile Learning’ (IGI Global 2009), which I co-edited with Hokyoung Ryu. Peter’s chapter, ‘iPods as Mobile Multimedia Learning Environments’ described some experiments on the impact of navigational distraction while listening to podcasts while mobile. The paper by Coens et al., explores some wider aspects of distraction, and concludes that there can be many different factors that can impact on a student’s capability for addressing two tasks simultaneously, including levels of fatigue, motivation and physical fitness. The authors conclude that ‘Our results so far suggest that many factors must be considered when answering the question “Can students really multitask?”’

In ‘Mobile Technology and Student Learning: What Does Current Research Reveal?’ Pamela Pollara and Kelly Kee Broussard review in detail eleven papers selected from a much broader set of candidates, in order to answer the question in their paper’s title. They selected the papers for analysis by applying a set of selection criteria including recency, device type, methodology and formal learning context. Among other things, the authors acknowledge that the United States has not in the past been a leader in mobile learning research, though of course activity in this area has increased enormously in recent years. Given the vast amount of published research, any such review must be taken within the context of its scope. The sources used were primarily the ERIC and EdLitLib (AACE) databases, with additional studies found through Google Scholar, Academia.edu and Webfeat. A single review of this kind is, therefore, not going to provide a complete overview if taken in isolation. However the role of such reviews is to complement other perspectives. For example in Volume 3 Number 1 of IJMBL, Anna Wingkvist and Morgan Ericsson published ‘A Survey of Research Methods and Purposes in Mobile Learning’, which took the mLearn series of conferences as its source. Whilst such reviews may have an individual perspective, together with others they can begin to give us an overall picture of mobile learning research, helping us to understand what we have already achieved as a research community, and where we should focus our future efforts. Pollara and Broussard conclude that ‘it is critical that education embraces this new technology and develops pedagogies to support and enhance learning with the use of these devices.’

Lisa Soon’s paper ‘E-Learning and M-Learning: Challenges and Barriers in Distance Education Group Assignment Collaboration’ approaches the blending of e-learning and m-learning, and takes as its starting point some analyses of student experiences in distance education using e-learning tools, and reflects on the opportunities for overcoming some of their difficulties by using mobile technologies. The context of the study included students who were both geographically and culturally distant, with online communication for collaborative work made more problematic by differences in time zones, as well as personal circumstances. With practical teaching issues in mind, Soon outlines a ‘Framework of Student Requirements in Online Group Work in Distance Education’. Part of this framework is a component embodying personal and portable learning. From a practical perspective, the pervasiveness of mobile technology can perhaps provide some benefits in enabling students to communicate even when not in front of a desk top computer. In addressing the
deeper concerns of intercultural communication, as Botha et al. describe in ‘Improving Cross-Cultural Awareness and Communication through Mobile Technologies’ (IJMBL Volume 1, Issue 2), the potential of mobile learning tools to address Soon’s concerns about ‘social and cultural issues associated with the use of mobile technology in learning’ has been recognised. The task now is to leverage these tools to address the practical problems of international distance learning.

The final paper in this issue is ‘An Investigation into Mobile Learning for High School Mathematics’ by Vani Kalloo and Permanand Mohan. This paper may be juxtaposed with Wajeeh Daher’s paper in IJMBL Volume 2 Number 2, ‘Mathematics Learning Community Flourishes in the Cellular Phone Environment’. Both papers address the teaching of mathematics using mobile Java applications. However whereas Daher’s paper focused on the learning community aspects of school students using these tools, Kalloo and Mohan focus more on measuring learning outcomes. In particular they look at the context of use of the mobile learning application, and consider the impact of teacher support in how students might benefit from mobile learning. They conclude that ‘more students from the teacher supported group showed an improvement in performance. This data implies that the teacher support was a complementary component but not required in mobile learning.’ A further conclusion was that the game based elements of the mobile learning application proved the most popular with students, having implications for future development of the application, with a greater focus on game based learning.

Looking ahead, we have some excellent special issues scheduled for the future; the last quarter of 2011 sees us publish a selection of the best papers from the mLearn 2010 conference, held in Valetta, Malta in October 2010. In 2012 we can look forward to a special issue on Mobile Learning in Africa, guest edited by Dick Ng’ambi and John Traxler, and more of the best papers from the top conferences. As I reflect on the first three volumes of the journal, and start to schedule the fourth, I feel that this venture is about much more than just publishing a few papers. The International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning is the embodiment of a global research community, strongly supported by its professional association, conference committees and contributors. Its increasing popularity and status is a reflection of the commitment and quality of that community.

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Editor-in-Chief
IJMBL
David Parsons is a senior lecturer and major coordinator for information systems within the Institute of Information and Mathematical Sciences at Massey University (Auckland, New Zealand). He holds an MPhil in electronics and computer science from the University of Southampton (UK) and a PhD in information technology from Nottingham Trent University (UK). His current research interests include agile software development and mobile computing systems, in particular mobile learning. He is a founding member of the Centre for Mobile Computing and Conference Chair for the Conference on Mobile Learning Technologies and Applications (MoLTA). Beginning his academic career in Southampton, UK, he worked as a lecturer for 13 years before leaving academia to broaden his experience in commercial software development. He worked for five years as a trainer, researcher, and practitioner across Europe and North America, initially for Ottawa based company, The Object People, before becoming a principal technologist for BEA Systems’ internal education in EMEA. His last role before emigrating to New Zealand in 2003 was as Director of Emerging Technologies for International Consultancy Valtech, based in the City of London. Since arriving in New Zealand and in addition to his academic post at Massey University, he has continued his professional practice as a knowledge engineer for Software Education Associates, specializing in Java technologies. He is the author of successful textbooks on Java, C++, and Web application development, and is the co-editor (with Hokyoung Ryu) of Innovative Mobile Learning (IGI Global 2008).