This book is the third in the co-editors’ series of books under the Idea Group imprint, aiming “to provide the state of the art in Knowledge and Learning Management”. Such a review of the state of the art is timely, and the production of three edited volumes in a single year, together with relevant Special Issues of several high-impact journals, is testimony to the editors’ legendary energy and initiative. Although the volume currently under review is a little uneven in quality in terms of both editing and copy-editing, there are some very valuable resources provided.

In places, the volume reads like a textbook, and most chapters are followed by exercises in a form that would suit student use. But unlike a textbook, the order of exposition is not carefully controlled, and there is little consistency in the assumptions that are made about prior knowledge either of substance or of terminology. There is an index, but it is somewhat uneven in coverage and not always helpful if one is trying to check on the use of an acronym. The authors differ in the interpretations they attribute to terms such as “Pervasive”, “Mobile”. Despite the title’s reference to “Knowledge and Learning Management” and the subtitle’s reference to “Semantics” and to “Social Networking”, the emphasis of most chapters is on the use of mobile devices in e-Learning applications, with little attention to Knowledge Management or to Social Networking, the treatment of Semantic Web or related concepts being fairly perfunctory.

An important exception to this is the very substantial chapter on “Semantic Knowledge Mining Techniques for Ubiquitous Access Media Usage Analysis” by John Garofalakis and co-authors at the University of Patras. This addresses a significant problem in providing...
access to web information via mobile devices. On the one hand, it is known that small-display devices such as PDAs and WAP-enabled mobile phones are not so suitable for browsing as a conventional PC or laptop, and that users adapt to this by attempting to go directly to the required information source; on the other hand, users of mobile services often experience uncertainty as to how to navigate to their goals and are disappointed with the quality of search results. The authors advocate the growth of business intelligence with respect to mobile and other web users, through the acquisition and management of knowledge concerning web usage patterns, and present a prototype of such an application. The presentation of this case study is exemplary in terms of clear statement of motivation, description of system architecture, description of stages of website preprocessing, manipulation of web service descriptions, semantic characterization with OWL ontology and metadata assignment, processing of server log files, and user interface for knowledge acquisition. As such, the chapter is not only of great interest in terms of its substantive content, but as a methodological paradigm.

Other chapters of a high standard include a discussion of the application of knowledge management techniques to assist help-desk operations, by Nelson Leung and Sim Kim Lau of the University of Wollongong, and a review “Mobile Education: Lessons Learned” by Holger Noesekabel of the University of Passau. Unlike Garofalakis et al, Leung and Lau do not report a prototype to support their theoretical analysis, nevertheless they give a clear exposition of the desirable relationship between Knowledge Management and the pragmatic knowledge that needs to be deployed at the helpdesk. Further chapters that repay reading come from the Digital Enterprise Research Institutes at Innsbruck and Galway, viz “A Choreographed Approach to Ubiquitous and Pervasive Learning” by Arroyo and Krummenacher and “Discursive Context-Aware Knowledge and Learning Management Systems” by O’Nuallain et al.

In his review of Mobile Education projects, Noesekabel comments that “it becomes apparent that most of them are technology driven and only a few were formally evaluated at the end”. Indeed a failure to evaluate appears to be a major shortcoming of most of the chapters dealing with Learning within the current volume. If we take one of the better chapters in this group, that by McArdle et al of University College Dublin, on “Using Multimedia and Virtual Reality for Web-based Collaborative Learning”, the evaluation of their “CLEV-R” system is limited to a usability study, and this was carried out with only nine subjects, seven of whom were postgraduate students. Several other chapters fell far short even of this standard, and consisted of lists of aspirations or assertions about the potential of mobile technologies in educational settings, with little or no critical analysis of underlying assumptions. Some chapters, even though written by European authors, assumed a familiarity with the terminology of the American educational system (e.g. “K-12”, “seventh grade” etc). It should surely not be difficult to ensure that a book with international authorship and aimed at an international readership could use more generic or abstract terminology, for example giving the actual age-group that corresponds to “seventh grade”. Authors should also have been required to define all acronyms on first using them, as is standard good practice. It would have been helpful to include a glossary, to improve the quality of the index, and to have employed an editorial service to weed out examples of incorrect English.

Julian Newman is professor of computing at Glasgow Caledonian University. He has worked in the computer industry, as a technical writer, as a training officer, and as an academic. His current research interests include Semantic Web applications and computer support for virtual organisations and virtual research communities.