This issue of IJMBL opens with a paper about a learning community of mathematics students from a middle school in Israel. In ‘Mathematics learning community flourishes in the cellular phone environment’, Wajeeh Daher, reports on the use of mobile Java applications (Midlets) from the Math4Mobile site (http://www.math4mobile.com/) and how these applications were used within a learning community to explore the various dimensions of that community and its impact on the learning process. The primary application used in the experiment was “Fit2Go” which enables the user to draw specified points and then to fit a linear or a quadratic function to them. The application is particularly suited to work done out of the classroom, measuring the relationships between different aspects of natural phenomena, for example finding the relation between the circumference of the trunk of a tree and the circumference of one of its branches. An important feature of the study from a learning community perspective was that the tasks were not designed only by teachers, but that the students themselves developed new activities that they could perform with the mobile applications. Research data was gathered using multiple sources; videos, blogs, diaries and interviews, and the analysis used Schwier’s 10 element model to analyze the characteristics of building a community in an online learning setting. After analyzing the relations and influences among the characteristics of the cellular phone community of learning, the author concluded that it “encouraged mutuality of the community members’ relations, autonomy of the members’ decisions and learning, and their active and diverse participation in mathematics learning.” This paper provides some encouraging evidence that freely available mobile learning tools that will run on a wide range of mobile phones can be effectively used with school students to encourage mutuality, autonomy, participation and, of course, learning.

The second and third papers in this issue both address issues in blended learning. Aleksej Heinze and Chris Procter discuss ‘The significance of the reflective practitioner in blended learning’, while Carolin Fuchs discusses ‘Cross-institutional blended learning in teacher education’. Heinze and Proctor’s paper relates to an action research project in the U.K. This was a longitudinal qualitative study where “Emphasis was placed on the perceived benefits and drawbacks of blended learning and how the use of blended learning could be improved.” The key issue that emerged during the research process was that whilst the original focus had been on issues of how technology might best support a blended learning environment, it became obvious that the role of the practitioner was much more significant. In their evaluation, the authors of the paper refer to the problem of the Dr. Fox effect, whereby the nature of the delivery of something can be more influential than its actual content, and the effect that this can have on the validity of student feedback when evaluating educational interventions. Therefore data gathering was triangulated using a number of methods to gather data from both staff and students. One important finding
was that the majority of interaction took place in the face to face sessions. Interaction on line was technically available but did not take off on its own. As one of the students in the study commented, ‘I think that we expected it to happen and we have not seen it happening.’ The important learning that we can take from this as practitioners is that the technology enhanced aspects of blended learning will only work if practitioners act as facilitators to ensure that these tools are used by learners so that they will benefit from them. This does not happen without the practitioner engaging with the on-line environment. In summary, ‘the extent to which the learning advantages are achieved is dependant upon the engagement of stakeholders in the mode of delivery’.

Fuchs’ paper describes how student teachers in the U.S. and Germany used web based tools for collaborative work related to language learning, both using and creating learning material. Perhaps the main feature of interest from this study is how it raises a large number of questions about how such collaborations can be made more effective, given that a large number of issues were raised during the research. ‘During this process, student teachers were exposed to some of the frustrations such as miscommunication, technological issues, cross-cultural differences, and perceptual mismatches.’ The study highlights issues both with technology and personal interaction, and like the previous paper, makes it clear that in a blended learning situation both the technology and the human interaction have an important role to play, and we can treat neither in isolation.

The final contribution in this issue is a review of ‘Researching Mobile Learning: Frameworks, tools and research designs’ edited by Giasemi Vavoula, Norbert Pachler and Agnes Kukulska-Hulme (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009). When I was given the option to include a review of this book in the journal, I took the opportunity to take on the role of reviewer myself, because I was very interested to read the material and felt that writing a review would give me the chance to really take on board the content. I was not disappointed. This book provides a welcome set of chapters that cover a raft of mobile learning research methods, projects and concepts. I hope, after reading the review, that you will also feel motivated to acquire a copy.

I hope that you enjoy this issue of the journal, and that you continue to find its pages a valuable resource. After two regular issues, we have some great special issues in the pipeline, and we are already making plans for 2011, when we enter our third year of publication, a significant milestone in the life of any journal. I look forward to editing those issues and continuing to bring the best of mobile and blended learning research to your attention.

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David Parsons is a senior lecturer within the Institute of Information and Mathematical Sciences at Massey University (Auckland, New Zealand), where he is a founding member of the Centre for Mobile Computing. 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. His previous work on mobile learning has been published in a range of journals, including the International Journal of Mobile Learning and Organisation and IEEE Transactions on Learning Technologies, and he has presented at many major mobile learning conferences including mLearn, IADIS Mobile Learning and the IEEE International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies. He also acted as Chair for the Conference on Mobile Learning Technologies and Applications (MoLTA) in 2007. He was co-editor (with Hokyoung Ryu) of 'Innovative Mobile Learning: Techniques and technologies' (Information Science Reference, 2009) and is the author of a number of texts on software development covering Java, C++, and Web application development. He is a member of the International Association for Mobile Learning and a professional member of the British Computer Society.