It is with great pleasure that I introduce the inaugural issue of the International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning. My own introduction to the field of mobile learning was from a somewhat unlikely source. My interest in mobile systems had originally grown out of a commercial research and development project at an IT company I was working for in London in 2002. At that time I was interested solely in the mechanics of programming with Java Micro Edition, drawn in more by the fascinating challenges of developing software for the limited mobile devices of the early 2000s than in its potential applications in the sphere of learning. A couple of years later I was meeting with a major international mobile services provider, discussing possible research collaboration, when one of the executives passed me a white paper on mobile learning, with a view to considering the its potential for professional development within the mobile service industry itself. From that point, my own interest in mobile learning research began to grow. More recently I have become involved in the wider mobile learning research community; as conference chair of the International Conference on Mobile Learning Technologies and Applications (MoLTA) held in New Zealand in 2007, as guest editor, along with my colleagues from Massey University’s Centre for Mobile Computing, Hokyoung Ryu and Tony Norris, of a special edition of the International Journal of Mobile Learning and Organisation, and as co-editor, again with Hokyoung Ryu, of a book on Innovative Mobile Learning (IGI Global 2008). Recently I have become increasingly aware that the early phase of research into mobile learning, focusing in many cases on the mobile device, has begun to give way to a more inclusive model of blending mobile learning technologies into richer and more complex learning environments. Thus the focus of this journal is both mobile and blended learning, embracing technology-supporting learning worlds that may use various combinations of mobile, embedded, augmented, and immersive tools. With this experience and interest in mind, I was therefore delighted to be offered the opportunity to become editor in chief of the International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning.

The articles in this issue have all been invited, with a view to addressing various aspects of the current and future landscapes of mobile and blended learning. Some of the authors whose work appears in this issue will be very familiar to those who are already well read in the fields of mobile and blended learning. Others may be less familiar, but they have been invited to provide their own unique perspectives on the current and future potential of their research.

Our inaugural issue opens with John Traxler’s Learning in a Mobile Age, which addresses the definition and evolution of mobile learning in the dynamic context of socio-technical developments. Traxler addresses the key issues of research and development that now face our discipline. Having come through the pioneering phase of learning how to build and apply mobile learning tools:
the mobile learning community is now faced with broader challenges of scale, durability, equity, embedding and blending.

Traxler concludes by asserting that we must now focus not just on the inward looking development of what we build, but on the outward looking awareness of the context and importance of mobile and blended learning within the environments in which it is being used.

Innovation in Mobile Learning: A European Perspective by Agnes Kukulska-Hulme, Mike Sharples, Marcelo Milrad, Inmaculada Arnedillo-Sánchez and Giasemi Vavoula, emphasises the leadership given by European researchers and funding bodies throughout the development of mobile learning. Major European projects with significant funding such as MOBI Learn and M-Learning have already entered the lexicon of landmark projects in the evolution of mobile learning. Few could disagree that the work carried out in Europe throughout this decade has been a major driver in the maturation of our field of research. However as the authors trace the development of more recent projects they demonstrate that our concerns have now begun to address mobile learning from a more blended perspective, typically embracing multiple technology platforms and ensuring the support of teacher education and indeed educational policy making. The authors conclude that the research challenge ahead:

will require a combination of technical, pedagogical and sociological expertise to be able to make sense of, and give some direction to, emerging forms of mobile and blended learning.

Similar themes of mobile learning integrating into a wider educational philosophy are explored in A Model of Collaborative Learning Scripts Instantiated with Mobile Technologies by Pierre Dillenbourg and Zeno Crivelli. In this article the authors acknowledge that learning scripts themselves are not necessarily computer mediated, and are simply a pedagogical method. However:

The relevance of mobile technologies is to enable the execution of a computational workflow across heterogeneous spaces.

Thus we see how mobile technologies can give added value to a pedagogical model using a blended approach. Once again the authors highlight the challenge of successfully integrating mobile technologies into blended learning environments:

We do not claim that mobile learning is an easy way to enhance collaborative learning...However this should not prevent researchers from continuing to explore the richness of the convergence of social and physical interactions.

If some of the key challenges faced by mobile learning proponents are, as Traxler maintains, embedding, scalability and blending, then our fourth article is an excellent example of how we can leverage the technologies and practices that are already embedded in the lives of learners. The phenomenon of the iPod (and similar portable media devices) is one of the social revolutions of the early 21st century. Leveraging the iPod as a mobile learning device is considerably easier that doing the same with the mobile phone, because the platform is more predictable. Thus there are great opportunities to integrate such devices into blended learning environments. In Choreo:pod : Dance and the iPod - Towards Blended Learning, Dennie Wilson, Ben Andrews and Crispin Dale show how iPods have become a key tool in teaching aspects of dance for video.

The iPod screen offers a new platform for dance performance, where perhaps first and foremost, it offers the artist a different perspective from which to consider making Dance for Screen, that of the screen size and image quality, the portable nature of the viewing platform and the location of the viewing experience.

By exploiting the mobile tools that students already use on a regular basis, this project vividly demonstrates the potential for using the existing environment as an enabler. Rather than trying to impose new systems to support mobile learning,
the authors take advantage of the embedded and scalable infrastructure of the personal media player.

Our final article does not directly address mobile learning, but its role in this issue is to give us one viewpoint on what may be possible in blended learning systems in the years to come. Describing their Affective Tutoring System for Better Learning, Abdolhossein Sarrafzadeh, Samuel Alexander and Jamshid Shanbehzadeh introduce the research behind a:

* lifelike animated agent called Eve, who is able to detect student emotion through facial expression analysis, and can display emotion herself.

Whilst the current implementation is tied to a desk top environment, the authors suggest that the ever increasing power of mobile devices, integrated with personal and wide area networks, may bring affective tutoring to the mobile learner, blending the personal mobile device with the personal attention of an affective tutor. It may seem far fetched at this stage to suggest that such systems can be implemented on the mobile devices currently available. However the current generation of devices are hugely powerful and sophisticated when compared with those available at the turn of the century. Augmented location aware displays and virtual world clients on mobile devices are already a reality. In 10 years time Mobile with Eve may be equally feasible.

Some may regard this issue to be a little too Euro-centric. The choice of authors was, however, simply an accident of circumstance. During the first part of 2008 I was on university sabbatical in the United Kingdom, where I was fortunate enough to be able to meet a number of the authors whose articles I invited to this issue. Nevertheless this journal has a global agenda, as the membership of the International Advisory Board and Editorial Review Board makes clear. Engagement with the broader mobile learning community is underlined by the fact that the IJMBL is a partner with the recently formed International Association for Mobile Learning (IAmLearn). The journal is also associated with the pioneering and prestigious MLearn conference, and a future special issue will include extended versions of the best papers from the 2008 conference. It is my intention to ensure that the IJMBL engages with all aspects of mobile and blended learning from an international perspective, and, with the support of the worldwide mobile and blended learning community, becomes the leading journal in its field.

David Parsons is a senior lecturer and major coordinator for information systems within the Institute of Information and Mathematical Sciences at Massey University, Auckland. 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, and 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, 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).