EDITORIAL PREFACE

David Parsons, Editor-in-Chief, IJMBL

Welcome to the first 2010 issue of the International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning (IJMBL). It is very pleasing to celebrate the journal moving into its second year of publication, and to be able to reflect on the excellent quality of the papers we published in the 2009 issues, including many by leading researchers in the field. Already we are seeing regular citations for papers published in IJMBL, and I am sure that this year will see a further consolidation of the journal’s reputation and popularity.

This issue has something of a technical focus, with three of the four papers specifically about mobile and blended learning systems. These papers underline the continuing opportunities that technological advances offer the mobile learner, including location awareness, sensor networks and intelligent agents. The other paper, however, provides a contrasting approach, addressing the issue of appropriation in mobile learning from a rather more theoretical perspective. I hope you will find this issue informative both in terms of the imaginative uses of learning technology discussed, and the considerations of how these technologies impact on the learner.

We begin this issue with the most theoretical of the four papers, Appropriation of Mobile Cultural Resources for Learning by Norbert Pachler, John Cook and Ben Bachmair. In essence this paper provides us with a distillation of the key concept of appropriation from the authors’ current research. Perhaps central to the authors’ argument is that “ownership allows for qualitatively and emotionally very different kinds of relationships with technologies and devices.” Therefore the concept of appropriation is very important if devices are to be used for learning. Perhaps the significance of this debate can be appreciated all the more when we consider the fact that many mobile learning systems are predicated on the imposition of particular types of device on the learner, which raises certain issues about appropriation. On the other hand, expecting learners to use their personal devices for learning raises other, very different, but equally important, aspects of appropriation. The context of this appropriation is of course also very fluid as society, technology and media continue to evolve. The authors conclude their article with the proposal that such changes in “will lead to there no longer being a meaningful differentiation between media for learning inside and outside educational settings.” Certainly a challenge for pedagogy, as educators seek to share that media landscape with many competing demands for the learner’s attention.

Our second paper is Unlocking Lifelong Learning Through E-Heritage: Using Mobile Technologies in Genoa by Krassimira Paskaleva and Maurizio Megliola. Although much of this paper concerns itself with the technology platform used for the Integrated e-Services for Advanced Access to Heritage in Cultural Tourist Destinations (ISAAC) international research project, it also addresses the underlying intention of this system, which is to support lifelong learning in the context of e-heritage. Using mobile devices to support the learner in a built environment is of course not a new concept, but this work is providing new perspectives and experiences, pushing the boundaries of such systems both in terms of scale and educational ambition. “By intertwining cultural heritage assets in a rich and lasting personal and shared experience, the
ISAAC system allows us to directly address issues related to lifelong learning through heritage, not just its relationship to history and culture but also its social and economic context in contemporary urban environments.” The authors provide a compelling vision of the interrelated services that can be experienced by the technologically wired visitor to Genoa, enabling them to more effectively weave this heritage experience into their lifelong learning.

Our third paper is JAMIOLAS 3.0: Supporting Japanese Mimicry and Onomatopoeia Learning Using Sensor Data by Bin Hou, Hiroaki Ogata, Masayuki Miyata, Mengmeng Li, Yuqin Liu and Yoneo Yano. This paper describes the latest generation of JAMIOLAS (JApanese MImicry and Onomatopoeia Learning Assistant System), which attempts to go beyond the limitations of its predecessors to demonstrate a web based learning system based on wide area sensor networks and context aware learning content. The authors go back to first principles in the introduction to their paper, laying out the relationship between our five biological senses and the various ways that technology can feed into these senses to create context aware learning experiences. For this implementation, the wide area sensor network chosen for the system was the globally available network of weather stations, giving students distributed anywhere in the world the opportunity of context aware language learning, based on their local weather conditions. In this case, the sense of feeling temperature is a key part of the context. The system also addresses other issues of context related to the senses; video files for sight and audio files for hearing. The authors conclude their paper with the results of some initial experiments that suggest that this type of system can be very beneficial for language learning where the subtle nuances of mimicry and onomatopoeia need to be understood. This is very much work that is looking to the future. “With developing mobile technology, sensors will increasingly be integrated into each mobile device, so that while the learner is moving with such a device, a mobile system could dynamically support learning by communicating with embedded computers and sensors in the environment.” The ongoing research at the University of Tokushima reported here is certainly making a contribution towards meeting that future.

The final paper in this issue is A Platform for Actively Supporting E-Learning in Mobile Networks by Basit Khan and Mihhail Matskin. This comprehensive paper begins with a review of the various architectures suggested by current frameworks designed to support mobile learning, and proposes a new framework, FABULA, that draws from this wide ranging previous work. FABULA makes extensive use of software agents, since “the system should not only act as a passive medium of pre-defined communication patterns, instead it should perform an active role to increase the learning outcome. It can do this by … personalizing the learning experience for each individual learner.” It is the job of the software agents to support this personalized learning experience. Like our second paper, this work considers the role of a mobile learning system in a city wide context. However the example scenario that is explored falls very much under the heading of game based learning. In this scenario, the roles of the various agents and their contribution to the learning experience are laid out in detail. Again, like our second paper, this work is clear in its intentions to focus on both the pedagogical and the technological, rather than just the technological. Again, the learners’ needs are paramount, but increasingly sophisticated software platforms can more effectively meet those needs.

As editor-in-chief I am sure that you will find this issue sustains the consistently high quality that was established during the first year of the journal’s publication. As we look forward to the rest of 2010, we will no doubt see new technological and pedagogical advances in mobile and blended learning. Work like that reported in this issue underlines the importance of both of these aspects of research, and the need for balanced consideration not only of how we build learning systems, but why we build them.

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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).