E-learning—in its broader sense—has become a part and parcel of our ordinary life as education professionals. I was starting to write «at least in the well developed countries», but I think this is no longer the question. Communications networks are able to reach every point on the planet, and mobile phones, for example, are now in use in places where wired connections were rarities ten or five years ago. This does not mean that technology is not an issue. We are constantly confronting ourselves with technical problems, communication availability, the cost of services, and so forth. But geography is no longer an issue, and countries political heads are more and more facing favourably the demand for opening communication channels. After computer technology and computers-connected-to-the-Internet technology, mobile technology will probably be the next wave. Let us just remember that one of the ideas that prevailed in developing the phone network was that it could bring culture—specifically the music from the Opera—into each house. Mobile phones are achieving such goals far beyond the expectations.

E-learning being here, what do we do with it? Naturally, I do not pretend to answer this question, though this could be considered the aim of this journal. First I just would like to underline the richness and variety of situations that the word «e-learning» refers to. From full on-line learning to classrooms connected on the Web during the class hours, from video streaming of full courses to forum monitoring within small groups of students, from content delivery to collaborative learning facilitation, the job of teaching is definitely something different. So probably is the «job» of learning. The number and diversity of tools—the profusion of which seems to signal that we are still in the vertical part of the learning curve—and the number of research, development, and application publications could simply be regarded as two key indicators of the complexity of the situation we—members of the teaching/training/learning community—are facing.

As educators we have always been trying to take into account the complexity of the system of goals in which we are «operating». As any kind of organization we need to face the institutions’ goals (the strategic orientations), the management and production process goals (organization, policies, processes, etc.), the employees’ goals (faculty and staff), the clients’ goals (the companies that will be our students’
future employers) and our partners’ goals, the students (which I refuse to consider either as clients or as products), not forgetting the system of constraints which is now at a global level. What I mean when speaking of students as partners is that we cannot achieve the slightest of all these goals without their cooperation, at least to some extent. We are supposed to know more or less how to do this, as professionals of pedagogy. When the relationship between all the actors of the pedagogical process becomes mediated, by computers, by networks, and by software environments, the complexity increases still a bit. We face the same amount of change as people in companies when their job becomes mediated by Information Technology (IT). It is not enough do know how to do your job well; you have to do it through a strange system that forces you to consider the fact that, maybe, you are not doing the same job any longer.

IT professionals know how to design, develop, and implement IT systems that efficiently support job activities in order to try and reconcile the complex systems of goals of a company with the complex system of constraints of the external world. The same thing happens in our institutions; we benefit from intelligent management systems to administrate the employees, the students, to cope with the course schedule, the classroom schedule, the grading records and the transcripts, the management of the library, the computers, and so on. What happens when it comes to pedagogy? When it comes to supporting the sensitive set of relationships between a learner, a teacher and knowledge through mediation devices?

Designing and developing an IT system requires to be able to model the activities, roles, processes, data, flows, indicators, interactions, etc. that will be impacted by the IT system. It seems to me that, so far, we have been rather successful in modelling the teaching processes. We, as teachers/trainers, benefit from a range of tools, generally integrated in a Learning Management System (LMS) or something alike, which help us reproduce teaching situations—including content delivery, assessments, work handover, asynchronous and synchronous interaction, information sharing—at least as efficiently as we used to be in classrooms. Some of us even think that using these environments could make teaching more efficient, because we are spending time where it is more needed, we keep trace of events that help us better understand the situation of our students, and so forth. Nevertheless, it seems to me that, though there is a lot of research available on learning processes, these processes have not been sufficiently taking into account when designing the computer-based and Web-based environments we are using. To say it short: we have good teaching environments; students might have much less good learning environments.

Technology has its limitations. But even thinking about current technology, systems designers could probably do much better by reversing the point of view from teaching to learning, just as specialists in pedagogy are doing. A few examples of what it could improve:

- We are thinking about teaching environments as integrated environments (ITE, Integrated Teaching Environments), a little like companies are doing with ERPs; each time a new technology is available, ITE providers struggle to integrate this technology to cover new functionalities, or simply ignore it until a further release. Let us look at what is happening on our students' computers (or mobile phones): they use a lot of plug-and-play technologies that are not integrated into a formal system, but that successfully enable them to achieve a lot of goals (communications, information retrieval and
publication, socializing, gaming, etc.). These technologies are easily available (open source), and easy for them to use. What about plug-and-play Learning Management Systems? Such systems could be opened for life-long learning, and updated as soon as new technology are available, by the learners themselves. What could be a business model for such systems? I recently met in a conference Teemu Arina, who is the head of a young Finnish company named Dicole. He was very proud to say that he had learned nothing in school, but a lot after; and he seems to have effectively learned a lot, at least in how one could use IT for learning and working together. He is using this idea of building our own customized environments with what we know or like best. Maybe if our students were able to use such "personal" systems to access course contents and university facilities they would be more "motivated" and "collaborative"?

There is a lot of research done in the knowledge management area, but there is no strong coupling between this research and the processes of teaching/learning. If this Journal was entitled "Web-based Knowledge Management", I guess I would receive a totally different kind of submitted papers. But what is learning about if not knowledge management? Here we cross another boarder, the one between Universities and Companies. Knowledge management, in companies is often dealt with in the sense of "valuable information capitalization and transfer", instead of being thought as learning processes. But when it come to life-long learning, there should be no gap between what and how we learn at school and what and how we learn during the rest of our lives.

Computer-based and on-line technologies should be great facilitators for improving the access to knowledge for people with accessibility challenges. Though a lot of devices have been developed, it seems that technology has still a long way to go before being able to provide low-cost adapted systems that would enable the integration of students with physical and/or mental limitations in the usual learning programs. And the question remains: are we taking such students into account when designing our courses? Again, should not we start thinking about learning conditions, instead of teaching conditions?

I am not pretending that we can solve all these questions easily. Some are not on our side, because technology development is, most of the time, not driven by learners concerns, though they should be taken more often into account. But I think it is up to us to rethink our jobs in this way. Some of the articles in this Issue are opening paths.

The first article, "Course Management Systems: Hope or Hype", by Teresa Lang and Dianne Hall, underlines the parallel between CMSs and ERPs, and comes to the conclusion that “students performance does not improve with the use of technology”. On one hand, this is not bad news, because they also show that it is not worse. But they also discuss a lot of interesting points that seem to go against “common sense”, like the importance of computer attitude. For me there is another aspect that is embedded in this article, the one of designing CMSs. CMS are designed to fulfil a number of Institutional goals and teaching goals but “they are not designed to provide (…) specialized information delivery (…) [nor] the process of reflection on material and interaction” that are crucial for learning.
The second article, “Utilizing Web Tools for Computer-Mediated Communication to Enhance Team-Based Learning”, by Elisabeth Avery Gomez, Dezhi Wu, Katia Passerini, and Michael Bieber, exemplifies how technology can be successfully used to support team-based learning in addition to traditional classroom courses. The stress is put upon the pedagogical design of the whole course, in order for learners to take the maximum benefit from the diversity of their learning situations. They quote that “the survey indicates a high perception of learning, motivation and enjoyment”.

The third article “Accessible E-Learning: Equal Pedagogical Opportunities for Students with Sensory Limitations”, by Rakesh Babu and Vishal Midha, introduces the interesting question of “designing for accessibility”. They, for example, question the aspect of media richness. They quote that “CMS offer a medium that presents information simultaneously in both visual and textual modes” but, simultaneously, that “the CMS under study did not offer a media rich enough for learning”.

The fourth article, “Managing Distance Education for Success”, by Wm. Benjamin Marz and Morgan Shepherd, discusses the question of how customer satisfaction concerns should be taken into account in distance education. They present the drivers and inhibitors of Distance Education adoption in a global market including Education Institutions and Corporate Learning Programs. They discuss the impact of a number of factors on the “overall satisfaction” of a population of on-line MBA students, and derive “a set of operational recommendations that can impact on-line programs success”. They also insist upon the design of the tools used, both on learning and teaching sides.

The fifth article, “The Role of Organizational, Environmental and Human Factors in E-Learning Diffusion,” by Kholekile L. Gwebu and Jing Wang, deals with concerns of corporate learners. Their “proposed conceptual model emerges at the crossroads of four areas of inquiry: e-learning, motivation, the innovation diffusion literature, and technology-related changes”, and they merely consider the e-learning adoption in the view of an innovation diffusion process. They explore the point of view of both employees and managers within four corporations.