Guest Editorial Preface

Norbert Pachler, University of London, UK

This two-part Special Issue of the *International Journal for Mobile and Blended Learning* reports the results of a workshop entitled 'Technology-enhanced learning in the context of technological, societal and cultural transformation' which I convened under the auspices of the London Mobile Learning Group (LMLG) (www.londonmobilelearning.net).

It was part of the so-called Alpine Rendez-Vous, a non-standard conference organised by the pan-European Stellar network (www.stellarnet.eu/), in December 2009 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. The main aims of the Alpine Rendez-Vous were to identify and advance emerging topics in the field of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) and community building beyond the Stellar network.

The LMLG workshop brought together an international, interdisciplinary group of researchers with a particular interest in mobile learning from the fields of educational, media and cultural studies, (social) semiotics, (new) literacy, work-based learning, educational technology and learning design. Its aim was to augment the work of the LMLG, in particular around its socio-cultural ecology of mobile learning (Pachler, Bachmair, & Cook, 2010), and to extend the interdisciplinary nature of its approach. The contributions to this Special Issue are drawn from work presented at the workshop.

The starting point of discussions was the triangular relationship between structures, cultural practices and the agency within which the LMLG conceptualises the use of mobile devices (Figure 1).

The interrelationship of these three components: agency, the user's capacity to act on the world, cultural practices, the routines users engage in their everyday lives, and the socio-cultural and technological structures that govern their being in the world, manifests itself

Figure 1. Socio-cultural ecology of mobile learning
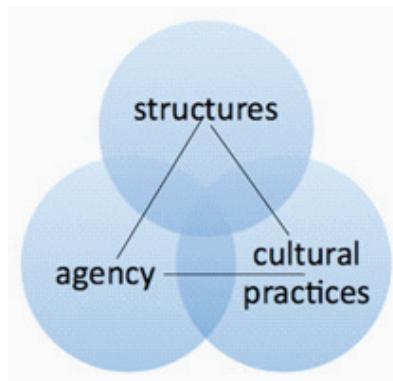
as a transformation of society, culture, media, education and technology. The significant changes currently taking place in the world around fluidity, provisionality, instability and fragmentation, which the LMLG has termed 'the mobile complex' and which the contributions to this Special Issue problematise in some way, require pedagogical responses.

In this approach learning is understood as the process of 'coming to know' and 'being able to operate successfully in and across' new and ever changing contexts and learning spaces as well as understanding and knowing how to utilise our everyday life worlds as learning spaces. It is viewed as a process of meaning-making through communication/conversation across multiple contexts among people within a triangle of social structures, cultural practices and agency as well as an augmentation of inner, conceptual and outer, semiotic resources — increasingly with and through mobile devices. That is, the actions of learners through which they seek to augment their conceptual resources are not directly on the world, but mediated by socio-semiotic tools such as language, as well as by material artefacts incl. technology.

Responsibility for meaning-making is increasingly transferred from the state and its institutions to the individual, who has become a consumer of services provided by a global market which is why the current changes in the authority in and over education, changes to consumption and production as well as current characteristics of the media landscape, such as participation, distribution, local and global content, ubiquity and multimodality, are central to the work of the LMLG.

Another significant contextual factor for the work of the LMLG is the significant shift away from traditional forms of mass communication and editorial push towards user-generated content and individualised communication contexts. These structural changes to mass communication affect the agency of users and their relationship with traditional and new media. Learners as media users are actively engaged in shaping their own forms of generation of contexts for learning through individualised communication contexts and personal criteria of relevance. And, new relationships between context and production are emerging in that mobile devices not only enable the production of content but also of contexts. They position the user in new relationships with space, i.e., the outer world, and place, i.e., social space. Citizens become content producers who are part of an explosion of activity in the area of user-generated content. Mobile devices also enable and foster the broadening and breaking up of genres and they promote a view of texts as dynamic, fluid, contingent, multiply authored and 'shared', and consequently provisional.

From the above questions arise implications inter alia for education, for teaching and learning, for communication and for language. The contributions to this Special Issue seek to problematise and explore some of these issues.

Workshop participants were asked to submit position papers, which were made available in Cloudworks (cloudworks.ac.uk/cloudscape/view/1926/) in advance of the workshop. The position papers could be commented on and they were subsequently augmented with the actual presentations given by participants. Following the workshop participants were invited to submit full papers that took into account points raised in discussion during the workshop which were subsequently subject to peer-review and revisions.

On the basis of the position papers received, the following sub-themes were identified for the workshop:

- the socio-cultural ecology and the mobile complex;
- didactic parameters for and practical examples of mobile learning;
- work-based mobile learning;
- design challenges in mobile learning;
- mixed and augmented reality;
- mobile learning and literacy and sustainability.

These are also the themes reflected in the contributions to this two-part Special Issue.

Part 1 includes four papers engaged with aspects of theory as well as practice of mobile learning followed by another 5 papers in Part 2.

In the opening paper of this issue, John Cook (UK), one of the founder-members of the LMLG, discusses mobile phones as mediating tools within augmented contexts for development. He draws on the work of the LMLG around a re-conceptualisation of Vygotsky's notion of a 'zone for proximal development' as 'responsive situations for development' in recognition of the socio-cultural, economic and technological conditions of the early 21st century. He argues for the need to re-examine approaches to the design of and research into learning experiences that incorporate mobile phones in learning context and considers the implications of the use of mobile devices for learning in formal and informal contexts.

Brenda Bannan, Erin Peters and Patricia Martinez (USA) present an interesting exploratory study, which examines the use of mobile devices together with classroom-based computer technology in the context of geological observation and reasoning and with reference to the socio-cultural frame of the LMLG.

Margit Böck (Austria) examines the complex interrelationship of mobile technologies with the digital literacies and 'information habitus' of at-risk social groups. The paper explores the dispositions of social groups at the margins of society and discusses aspects of a pedagogy of social inclusion.

In her paper, Elisabetta Adami (Italy), also a member of the LMLG, explores the emerging semiotic practices around the increasing availability of mobile devices and their implications for everyday communication, representation and teaching with a particular focus on text production.

Norbert Pachler,
Guest Editor
IJMBL

REFERENCES

Pachler, N., Bachmair, B., & Cook, J. (2010). *Mobile learning: structures, agency, practices.* New York: Springer.