Editorial Preface

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Welcome to edition *3*(2) of the *International Journal of Virtual and Personal Learning Environments* (IJVPLE). This latest edition contains four research articles on a range of themes, including learning object design, designing teamwork strategies in online environments, task-based learning and immersive 3D virtual worlds.

In the first article, "The Usefulness of Learning Objects in Industry Oriented Learning Environments," Shantha Fernando (University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka), Henk Sol (University of Groningen, The Netherlands) and Ajantha Dahanayake (Georgia State University, USA), discuss a model (called Learning Objects Evaluation Model or LOEM) to assess the use of learning objects (LOs) for training university graduates. The e-learning system is used to enable continuous professional development (CPD) for workers in the knowledge economy. Focusing on the importance of three main characteristics (usefulness, usage and usability), the model examines a range of key concepts, including "academic level specificity, field specificity, industry specificity, operational specificity and reusability specificity." Consequently, by articulating the resulting index—Learning Objects Specificity Index (LOSI)—the aim of the research is to aid a range of stakeholders in the e-learning process, from course developers to designers, in terms of evaluating learning objects.

In the second article, "Learning-by-Doing Teamwork KSA: The Role of Strategic Management Simulation," Victor Martín-Pérez, Natalia Martín-Cruz and Pilar Pérez-Santana from the University of Valladolid, Spain, focus on the use of virtual technologies to aid strategic management. Of particular importance to their research are the skills and abilities or KSA associated with effective teamworking among undergraduate students in a School of Business. The research led to findings which suggest that teamwork KSA is a dynamic process and that individual learner characteristics are the most important factors in conditioning learning in this context.

In the third paper, "Designing Distance Learning Tasks to Help Maximize Vocabulary Development," John Paul Loucky from Seinan JoGakuin University, Japan, discusses how task-based approaches utilising digital technologies can be used to aid language learners' acquisition of vocabulary. Task-based approaches have been increasingly important in second and foreign language learning over the last thirty years, and Loucky's research is significant in bringing together technology and strategies for rapid vocabulary expansion utilising a focus on Semantic Field Keywords. Findings from the research involving Chinese English majors and Japanese engineering majors in a qualitative study of "collaborative writing exchanges," suggests that significant potential may exist

for target language vocabulary development in the context of a task-based approach emphasizing negotiation of meaning and writing for an authentic audience.

The final research article focuses on virtual worlds and the use of the 3D immersive environment of Second Life with management studies students. In "Virtual Worlds as the Next Asset of Virtual Learning Environments for Students in Business?", Jean-Eric Pelet (Nantes University, France) and Benoît Lecat (Burgundy School of Business, France) identify a framework for using VLEs in the particular context of management studies based on a study involving 168 students. Findings from the research suggest that it is important to map the specific disciplinary context and to understand the differences that exist between individual learners. This is especially true of learners with lower levels of competence in relation to digital technologies and the study reinforced the need for a significant period of content-based induction in order to transition learners into immersive virtual world contexts and virtual learning environments.

Volumes of the journal in preparation currently include a special edition edited by Dr Edward Dixon, Technology Director of the Penn Language Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr Dixon's edition includes papers arising from the NEALLT 2011 Conference entitled, "Transcultural Collaborations: Language Learning in Virtual and Physical Spaces." A further special edition is being prepared by Dr. Jonathan Richter, Research Associate at the Center for Advanced Technology in Education, University of Oregon. Dr. Richter's edition is based on best papers from the American Educational Research Association's Applied Research in Virtual Environments for Learning (ARVEL) special interest group. We look forward to seeing these special editions published in 2012.

We hope you enjoy reading volume *3*(2) and that you will consider contributing to the *International Journal of Virtual and Personal Learning Environments* (IJVPLE) in future editions.

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Michael Thomas is a professor in applied linguistics (special emphasis learning technologies) at Nagoya University of Commerce & Business (Japan). Previously, he taught second language learning at the University of Heidelberg (Germany). His research interests are in learning technologies, digital literacies, and the philosophy of language. He is author of The Reception of Derrida: Translation and Transformation (2006) and editor of the Handbook of Research on Web 2.0 and Second Language Learning (2009). He is on the editorial boards of the International Journal of Emerging Technologies & Society*, the* Asian Journal of EFL*, and the* Asian ESP Journal. *He is also a reviewer for the* British Journal of Educational Technology. *Dr. Thomas is Editor-in-Chief of the* International Journal of Virtual and Personal Learning Environments (IJVPLE). *His current research focuses on a new book titled* Interactive Whiteboards and Emerging Technologies with Euline Cutrim Schmid *and* Task-Based Language Teaching and Technology *with Hayo Reinders*.