EJEL Special issue editorial

ECEL 2012: Beyond the gadget

On the 26 and 27th October 2012 the ECEL conference was held at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. We felt it was important for the conference to focus on practical applications of e-learning. Attending lecturers and educational advisors or policy makers should be enabled to implement the innovations after the conference. Therefore the title to the conference was Beyond the gadget. We wanted to go beyond the gadgets and establish what really matters in e-learning. How to find the real value of e-learning, and the role of tools therein? More and more we see that e-learning takes its logical place in the design of materials for learning. E-learning gets integrated in the design process of learning. A design cycle is followed of setting goals, working out how these are assessed, and then filling out the methods of learning. In this way, e-learning is chosen as one of the methods of learning, and is selected for its true value.

We were honoured to host keynotes from Professors Eric Mazur (Harvard University, USA), Fred Mulder (Open University, Netherlands), and Johannes Cronje (Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa). Video registrations of our keynotes, photos, conference abstracts and a backlog of tweets are still available online at http://academic-conferences.org/ecel/ecel2012/ecel12-home.htm. We were only able to invite our international keynotes with the support of our gold sponsor. Thank you Blackboard! Their senior manager solution engineering Dan Peters shared his ideas on e-learning and opening up education.

At ECEL 2012 we saw examples of great course designs. Good practices, showing the real value of e-learning innovations. The eight best examples are presented in this special issue. Arnesen et. al. follow up on our keynote of Eric Mazur by describing their experiences on using student response systems, categorizing them in several pedagogical uses. Two papers are about Open Education Resources. With the enormous amounts of resources now available, finding resources is a problem. Mahoudi et. al describe a frame based approach to help find materials. Gruszczynska et. al. describe ways to build an open source curriculum in the area of teacher development. Developing digital literacy skills is the focus of the paper by Hall et. al.

The use of social media cannot be missed by a conference on e-learning. Grosch provides an overview of student use and ranks 53 media services. Rockwell et. al. describe social backgrounds for minority groups to improve their chance in the job market by making use of social media. Making social connections is stressed in Garcia et. al. Via the use of blogs students focused more on peer-critique and feedback. Providing feedback can be helped by using a diagnostic table, which is described in the paper of Wang and Chen.

The organizing committee of the ECEL2012 conference hopes you will enjoy reading this special issue. Via this issue we hope you will be able to take a small first step to implement ideas as presented here.

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