

Editorial

Four Enduring Themes for e-Learning

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In the beautiful Adriatic setting of the city of Bari, the University of Bari played host to the 8th edition of the European Conference on E-Learning between the 29th and the 30th of October, 2009. With each passing year ECEL brings together veteran and first-time participants from Europe and beyond, who engage in the time-honored intellectual exercise of exchanging ideas. This most recent edition was no exception to that trend, demonstrated by the number of presenters, attendees and the quality of the papers accepted for the conference.

This special edition of EJEL is dedicated to ECEL 2009. As in previous years, the number of high-quality submissions far exceeded the space available for publication in the current issue. Regretfully, we had to restrict the papers published largely to those that received the highest praise from the session chairs and leave out other papers worthy of publication. Nevertheless, we are sure that the selections included in this issue will satisfy our readers' curiosity and interest in the subjects covered.

While several papers touch on multiple aspects related to the incorporation of technology in education, they seem to fall into four broad themes. The first distinguishable theme relates to the *strategies and policy aspects of the implementation of learning technology solutions*. Ines Casanovas's illuminating theoretical review reminds us of the continued existence of diverging interests between the institutional and individual levels when it comes to the strategic implementation of educational technology within universities. Her intellectual inquiry into this issue is followed by a similarly poignant account in Brown, Paewai and Suddaby's paper, this time in connection with a specific and practical example of learning management system in mind. Fiedler and Våljataga nicely round up this theme with a piece that advocates pushing the boundaries of distributed learning by a more sweeping incorporation of social media in learning environments.

A second group of papers is concerned with the theme of *effectiveness, quality and evaluation of learning tools*. The range of subtopics in this category attests not only to the diversity, but also to the importance of the purposeful and meaningful utilization of technology-enhanced learning tools. Whether they deal with the impact of support systems in distance learning with a global outlook (Bentley, Shengunshi and Scannell), with the effectiveness of formative feedback for student understanding via learning management systems (Hatziapostolou and Paraskakis), with student measurement of service quality in an online university (Martínez-Argüelles, Castán and Juan) or with assessing performance through essay tests (Nakayama, Yamamoto and Santiago), these contributions maintain our awareness of the need for reflection on what it means to provide outcome-based instruction.

Personalization of instruction is the third theme that emerges from the papers selected here. Individualized learning assisted by technology is a particular aspect of the educational landscape that receives regular attention in the literature. The papers under this rubric address several forms of personalization with the

help of technology. For instance, Folley argues for a shift in the culture of teaching via lectures by introducing interactivity and blended learning within the lecture format. In a similar vein, Jeffries reports how blended approaches focused on students' preferences allowed the latter to consider technologies as enablers in their learning. Grabinger's paper suggests instructional strategies for postsecondary learners with psychiatric disabilities. In a largely technical take on learning object repositories and virtual learning environments, Kurilovas and Dagiene look at optimization processes related to these applications which indirectly affect the way technologies can be personalized in the context of learning. In a timely paper, Stav, Nielsen, Jacobsen, Bergh and Thorseth investigate the use of personal response systems to make lectures interactive and relevant for students.

As a contemporary matter on emerging technologies, *collaborative or social learning* represents the last theme that stems from several papers selected. Using social network analysis, Sundararajan measured the transactions occurring among students in chat and bulletin board discussions to reveal the impact on knowledge acquisition among hierarchical groups of users. Jančařík and Jančaříková add to the growing evidence that wiki tools enhance the building and sharing of knowledge of participants in e-learning courses. Finally, Mesh presents a blended method for language learning, combining face-to-face lessons fostering conversation skills with online collaborative discussions promoting reading and writing comprehension.

I trust that the thoughts, ideas and results contained in this collection of readings will keep you engaged with the developments in this perennially exciting field of e-learning we all like to share. Let's meet again this fall for what promises to be another exciting round of collegial discussions in Porto.