

Guest Editorial Preface

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Welcome to our first issue of 2016, the eighth year of publication for the International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning. The four articles in this issue address the teaching and learning needs of deaf/hard of hearing children, online tutors, members of a community club and university students from different disciplines. In all cases, innovative tools and techniques are used to understand the changing landscape of mobile technology use for both teachers and learners.

This issue begins with an article by Brett Shelton and Mary Ann Parlin of Boise State University, Idaho, USA; ‘Using a Mobile-Application Based Game to Teach Math to Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) Children: Student Outcomes with Student and Teacher Perspectives.’ This paper outlines the perspectives of Deaf Education teachers and deaf/hard-of-hearing (DHH) children who participated in the GeePerS*Math project, using a prototype mathematics game for mobile devices equipped with GPS technology. The game was intended to try to address the problem that an overwhelming majority of DHH students are performing below their grade level in mathematics. An iterative design science research approach was taken in developing the game, with most of the gathered feedback data being qualitative. Although the work report in this paper is an ongoing process, results from this initial study suggest some positive outcomes from the game, in some aspects of mathematics and for some DHH students. Further work, however, is required to continue to develop the game to its full potential as a learning tool.

The second article is ‘What are Tutors’ Experiences with Online Teaching? A Phenomenographic Study,’ by Cvetanka Walter, from the University of Lancaster, UK. In this article, the author analyses the experiences of tutors introducing blended learning in a German university. Three on-campus tutors and seven online tutors were involved in the study. As a phenomenographic study, it was based on semi-structured interviews with these tutors. The outcome space revealed three categories that build upon one another; the online course as a one-way street of communication, the online course as an add-on to on-campus classes, the online course as a distant relationship between students and online tutors, and the online course as an opportunity for tutors’ professional development and team communication. The study concludes that further work is needed on tutors’ understanding of their skills and roles in support of large blended learning courses.

Article number three is ‘Fostering Collaborative Learning with Mobile Web 2.0 in Semi-Formal Settings’ by Daisy Mwanza-Simwami of The Open University, UK. This study of 18 participants from a local community club looked at their collaborative learning, and mobile Web 2.0 usage practices in real-life problem solving activities. Research data was gathered from multiple sources, and data was interpreted through the lens of activity theory. How the participants used mobile Web 2.0 was based on the ways in which technological functions effectively supported and enhanced their established social relations and practices. It also emphasized that collaboration can be a natural part of learning.

Our fourth and final article in this issue is ‘Seamless Learning Environments in Higher Education with Mobile Devices and Examples,’ written by Victoria Irene Marín Juarros, of the University of the Balearic Islands, Spain, and Päivikki Jääskelä, Päivi Häkkinen, Merja Juntunen, Helena Rasku-Puttonen and Mikko Vesisenaho of the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. This article reports on the

concept of seamless learning environments and lifelong learning. The study reported looks at how educational university programs support seamless learning with mobile devices. Three cases from Finland are explored with qualitative data, addressing sports coaches, school teachers and music workers. The authors seek to identify common aspects for designing mobile, seamless learning environments. For example, collaboration and sharing were shown to be important in all three cases. They also propose a research agenda on challenges related to designing such environments, with the integrated use of mobile devices in the curricula.

I'm pleased to be able to present this first issue of the year, and I'm looking forward to some of the great upcoming special issues that are scheduled for 2016.

David Parsons

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