

Editorial for proceedings papers

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EDITORIAL

Editorial for proceedings papers

Here are the Proceedings Papers of the 2012 ALT Conference “A confrontation with reality”, held in Manchester, England. Each paper reports on a piece of research, possibly in its early stages, states a point of view or summarises an area of work, perhaps giving new insights. This supplement contains 18 papers, an increase over previous years.

The conference has five themes which are:

- **Problem solving** – finding effective solutions to technical problems and using learning technology to solve institutional problems.
- **Openness and sharing** – methods and frameworks for collaboration and sharing of knowledge and resources between practitioners and between providers, and the evidence to justify this.
- **Entrepreneurialism** – moving resources from where they have low yield for learning and for learners to where their yield is higher.
- **Mainstreaming** – applying learning technology on a large scale in pioneering ways that enthuse learners and are welcomed by teachers and administrators.
- **Sustainability** – of technologies, models and approaches.

Problem solving is the bread and butter of learning technology practitioners. Two papers look at new solutions to familiar pedagogic problems. Essa and Ayad (2012) discuss how to use predictive and statistical techniques to identify those students most at risk of not completing a learning programme – in a way that also helps to identify an appropriate intervention to address the learners’ difficulties. Taylor (2012) looks at the problem of using video effectively in a physiotherapy context to support learners on placements, rather than relying on occasional face to face visits.

The other three papers on problem solving are more focussed on the actual techniques being used. Mor and Craft (2012) report on a workshop looking at all aspects of the evolving use of learning design – from tools through methods and frameworks. Alsubait, Parsia and Sattler (2012) propose an ontological approach to automatic generation of analogy questions in multiple choice format. Flavin (2012) discusses, in part through survey results, the increasing role of disruptive technologies – those that were not designed for education but have become widely adopted by learners.

The largest number of proceedings papers is in the area of *openness and sharing*. This area often coincides with the need to confront reality in terms of the limited resources available. McGuigan and Golden (2012) report on the introduction of a standardised online tutoring system for learners gaining a Teaching Qualification in Further Education: the system provides generic email, blog and micro-blog facilities and allows support to be roster-based. Cochrane (2012) reflects on three

failed m-learning projects, identifying critical failure factors by comparing them with a larger number of successful ones. A significant cause of failure is not updating pedagogy to match the introduced technology.

Two further papers on openness and sharing have a discipline base. Reinhardt and Rosen (2012) report on forming a national and international peer support group through a website for medical exchange students. Naamani and Taylor (2012) reflect on the use of podcasting in a vocational area, specifically Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy.

When the openness and sharing is of ideas and policies the results can be of wide applicability. In the policy area, McNeill (2012) analyses published social media policies from 14 universities with special reference to the need to respond to demand, whilst guarding against possible threats. Mor, Warburton and Winters (2012) look at the use of workshops that share experiences in order to produce design narratives and resulting design patterns, with a view to wider adoption. Finally, Heap and Minocha (2012) analyse the results of a survey of scholarly bloggers which looks at their motives for blogging and especially at the use of blogs as an effective way of sharing scholarly knowledge.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, because in UK education the word is still widely viewed with suspicion, *entrepreneurialism* attracted very few proposals for the conference as a whole and only one proceedings paper. Narayan, Davis and Gee (2012) discuss the entrepreneurial use of mobile Web 2.0 tools to reinvigorate two courses in New Zealand.

For the conference as a whole, *mainstreaming* was the most popular area but for proceedings papers this was not the case. Perhaps proceedings papers are more ahead of the curve and hence potentially not on it at all. Two institutional experiences in London are reported. Jordan (2012) discusses the introduction of video for peer feedback and reflection at the University of the Arts, including the important areas of training and dealing with student anxieties. Glover *et al.* (2012) cover the simultaneous introduction of a new open VLE at City University with its integration with other key institutional systems, such as those for external information and for video streaming.

The other two mainstreaming papers look more to the future. Munnerley *et al.* (2012) debate the social, cultural and technical issues surrounding the wider use of augmented reality systems by both learner and teacher. Griffiths, Ogden and Aspin (2012) discuss the near-future impact of HTML 5 and especially its support for semantic content, giving scenarios for its use in transforming the learner experience.

Also unsurprising in a UK context when reporting on a period when impact is yet to become too intrusive a concept, *sustainability* was overall not popular and attracted only one proceedings paper. Clayton (2012) reports on developments in New Zealand towards mass customisation and self-reflective frameworks following a government-enforced greatly increased participation rate in tertiary education.

In covering such a wide variety of topics, the authors have identified tensions between technology, practice, learner, financial, institutional and policy realities. Their approaches have been innovative, but have been grounded in the need to achieve results for learners. Together, these papers form a significant contribution to confronting reality. Enjoy reading them.

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