
Editorial

Margriet Simmerling*

Helix5, Mendelssohnlaan 12
7522 KP Enschede, the Netherlands
E-mail: simmerling@helix5.nl
*Corresponding author

Piet Kommers

University of Twente
P.O. Box 217
7500 AE Enschede, the Netherlands
E-mail: Kommers@edte.utwente.nl

Biographical notes: Margriet Simmerling is a Peer Consultant/Senior Manager in R&D projects in the area of e-society and web-based communities. She participates in the Advisory Board for the Dutch Ministry of Economical Affairs and is active as an expert and reviewer for the European Commission. She designs and moderates e-learning modules and workshops in the domain of education technology and psychology at the PhD level.

Dr. Piet Kommers is an Associate Professor at the University of Twente and Professor at the Fontys University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. His specialties are advanced learning tools like concept mapping, virtual reality and mobile learning. His research and teaching stretches from teacher education via the European Joint Research Projects to international projects under the auspices of UNESCO. His recent publications are on learner's preconceptions and representations that express pre-intuitive ideas before the actual learning may start: *Cognitive Support for Learning* and *Imagining the Unknown*. He is the editor in several research journals and organises conferences in mobile learning, e-society and web-based communities.

This issue of the IJWBC focuses on learning communities and to understand how they can contribute to learning.

Learning is not only aimed at surviving; it is based upon the social convention that humans need to transform themselves in order to allow a continuous collective evolution in acting, thinking and awareness. Communication between students and peers is essential in this process. The essence of a community goes beyond that however: It presupposes the basic trust that its other members allow you to revise earlier opinions. Learning in general is the willingness to change oneself and the acceptance that others evolve into new attitudes without losing their identity. Web-based learning communities embody the special case when persons need additional partnerships in order to develop

earlier unknown aspects. Any type of scouting, mutual exploring, attachment, support, battle and eventually refocusing one's existential position that is common in face-to-face relationships may occur in web-based communities as well.

In the early days of web-based communication the software techniques were solutions in it self. Now it is the cognitive, emotional and social apprehension that decides upon Computer-Mediated Communication's (CMC) promised solutions and new directions. It is the user as a person and his day-to-day missions that are at stake.

- Technology providers investigate how they can support the user groups with extra features in order improve the positive learning experience in education and in the domain of Knowledge Transfer.
- All players in the field: students, their peers, the institutes and the technology providers realise the importance of the social supportive aspects.
- The new generation students, is used to the modern communication tools. There is no barrier any more. All kind of on and offline communication tool are used in their daily live.
- Also a new generation teachers/peers is in the picture: Willing to approach the students as a coach, willing to make jokes and to find together new directions as part of the learning strategy. The two way interaction between student and teacher is accepted by both sites.
- The institutes, like universities, also change their strategy and are reforming the learning goals and strategies.

And this broad movement within the 'usergroups' inspires the technology providers to focus on tools the support creative learning and community building. Vista, the successor of Windows XP promises to support the users, where ever he/she goes. Being mobile and flexible is the big issue for the coming period.

Volpentesta and Frega report about a three year project at the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Calabria. Their article 'Developing a blended learning community in university setting' describes an approach to and a case study of building an institution-wide blended learning community. They propose a bottom up approach and discuss organisational and technological issues to realise the transition of isolated learning micro-communities to an Institution-Wide Blended-Learning Community (IWBLC). The case study is backed up by practical evaluation results.

The article of Daniel and Schwier, 'A Bayesian belief network model of a virtual learning community', considers the characteristics of 'community' primarily in relation to learning. Based on the methodology of building a Bayesian Belief Network (BBN) to model a virtual learning community, Daniel and Schier reveal the strengths and interdependencies between 14 characteristics related to a community metaphor. They address the issues in a penetrating and wide-ranging way.

Oliveira *et al.* discuss a new approach to knowledge reuse in the educational environment. They integrate approach of knowledge reuse in an existing web environment (Thoth), with a Case Based Reasoning (CBR) approach, workflow systems and ontology. They describe a prototype construction motivated by the problems of a specific Laboratory where researcher of several areas work together to solve problems around Brazilian hydrological basins.

Think together is the slogan of The Oracle Education Foundation. As part of its mission, the Foundation provides ThinkQuest and Think.com as free services to the global primary and secondary school community. Hartnell-Young and Corneille report about this interesting initiative in Australian context. In the article 'Supporting learning communities for children on Think.com' they investigate how this system supports children's learning, specifically in relation to personalising learning and developing digital literacies that enable students to create identities in a social context.

How can we assist the students that are self-directed learners to prevent that they will become social isolated, without involving the teacher too much. According to authors of the Open University in the Netherlands, the *ad hoc* transient community is a solution: a smaller community within a larger whole, that fulfil a specific learning related goal and exist for a limited period of time. Kester *et al.* propose this interesting concept.

In contrast to this approach is the article of Sanders and Angel. They report about a project where cross-course and cross-programme dialogue between students is an essential part of the curriculum. Graduated students must be able to participate in a dialogue about real school problems and issues. The authors provide us with recommendations when others want to do similar implementation of this project.

The Portuguese-speaking countries and communities now a days, live in a different political, cultural and socio-economical realities. But they share the language, culture and history. Paiva and Matta present initiatives in the Portuguese-speaking countries to start a pilot project on e-learning.

Chua and Lee present a case study, grounded in both theory and learning technology. They investigate the effect of using Merlin version 3.0, an agent-assisted collaborative concept map. In Merlin 3.0 the authors enhanced on the task planning/learning goals and modelling aspects. Qualitative findings form the basis for discussion and conclusions.

In this issue we present you eight articles written by 21 experts located in Europe, Asia, Canada, Australia and North and South America. They will update you with their research, experience reports, surveys and case studies and share with you their results and future plans.