

Editorial

Regular readers of the journal will know that, each year, we have one themed issue. While it's always useful to gain such a sustained, considered insight into a given topic, it forms quite a contrast to editing a 'general', regular issue of the journal. Unlike conferences or special issues, we do not solicit research on any particular theme; thus the submissions we receive act as a kind of weather vane for current research topics. Interestingly, this issue seems to be spread across a broad spectrum of pedagogic concerns, but is unusually focused (for this journal) on the practices of teaching.

Digital portfolios have been linked to a number of pedagogies and policies that are growing in importance, so it was good to receive a piece that provides a critical and analytical review of experience with these. Clegg *et al.* raise interesting research issues about the form of such writing for assessment; it will be interesting to see how the forthcoming one-day Association for Learning and Technology conference on 'Reflective learning, future thinking' builds upon such work.

In the other articles, the topic of assessment is revisited (by Conole and Warburton), building on the discussions in the previous issue. Questions of course design and practice are raised by de Boer and Collis, focusing on the issue of increasing flexibility for students. Equally concerned with student support, Smith and Oliver explore the ways in which students' information literacy are developed. Finally, Ip *et al.* explore a specific application designed to home students' decision-making and problem-solving skills.

Although this is not a special issue, this array of articles spans the lifecycle of many courses. How should we design it? What pedagogies shall we adopt (particularly if we are concerned with reflection and relevance)? How can we be sure students will make good use of the resources available to them? And how can we then assess them?

Serendipity is a marvellous thing.

On a slightly different note, keen readers will notice a slight change in the format for this issue. Instead of our normal discussion section, we have included a positional article by Helen Beetham, who has been acting as a consultant to the UK's Joint Information Systems Committee on their e-learning programme. One stand of this work—concerning pedagogies for e-learning—has recently produced a series of recommendations, some of which the Joint Information Systems Committee (who

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are not a research council) are unable to pursue. This seemed to us to be one of those moments when the outcomes of research can either be lost or else brought to the attention of the wider community, so we decided to present this because of its potential value of researchers. (We also felt that the discussion section was a little superfluous this time around, following the rich series of articles on Computer Aided Assessment in the previous issue, together with the review article on this topic here.) If you are researching one of these topics, for example, it signals that we would be interested to see the outcomes of your work in *ALT-J*. If you are not researching any of these areas, you might feel that what you *are* investigating is so important that it should be highlighted rather than allowing such positional statements to neglect it. Or you might find it useful in highlighting an area of currently neglected work to pursue. However you engage with it, we hope that it proves stimulating.

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