Editorial

Eugenia Smyrnova-Trybulska

Faculty of Ethnology and Sciences of Education in Cieszyn,
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Bielska 62, 43-400 Cieszyn, Poland
E-mail: esmyrnova@us.edu.pl

Piet Kommers*

Faculty of Behavioral Sciences,
University of Twente,
7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands
E-mail: Kommers@edte.utwente.nl
*Corresponding author

Margriet Simmerling

Helix5, Mendelssohnlaan 12,
7522 KP Enschede, The Netherlands
E-mail: simmerling@helix5.nl
E-mail: admin@helix5.nl

Biographical notes: Eugenia Smyrnova-Trybulska is an Associate Professor at the University of Silesia (Poland) and Head of Department of Humanistic Education and Auxiliary Sciences of Pedagogy, Faculty of Ethnology and Sciences of Education in Cieszyn, University of Silesia in Katowice. She is a Coordinator of the Faculty Distance Learning Platform (http://el2.us.edu.pl/weinoe) and Coordinator of the 'Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Distance Learning' Conference. She is the author of more than 100 scientific papers and monographs in the field of e-learning methodology, ICT in education, multimedia, teacher training in ICT, and others. She is a researcher and coordinator of a lot of international scientific and educational projects.

Piet Kommers is an Associate Professor at the University of Twente at the Department of Media, Communication and Organisation. He chairs the IADIS conferences and the e-society conference and web-based communities conference in particular. In his work for UNESCO, he brings forward the blend between the nature and the culture of learning. He distinguishes the 'new' media as catalytic to communication and awareness. In his view, learning gradually embeds in every aspect of life pertaining to the delicate question if learning can be orchestrated essentially. Similarly, we may question if communication can be 'arranged' as we ought to believe at the dawn of the social web.

Margriet Simmerling is Peer Consultant/Senior Manager for R&D projects in the area of e-society and web-based communities. She participated in the advisory board for the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and is active as a

reviewer for the European Commission. She designs and moderates e-learning modules and workshops' e-learning modules and workshops in the domain of education technology and psychology at the PhD level.

This special issue targets the recent trends of e-learning technologies and their societal priorities in Eastern European countries. And as such this special issue can be seen as a contemporary mirror of the earlier special issue on the contrast between North-Western versus Eastern European educational cultures; *IJCEELL* 2001, Vol. 11, Nos. 4/5/6. So, for those of you who face synergy with educational and instructional boundary spanning across East-West Europe, please take benefit from the underlying lucid characterisation. The main message we would like to convey is that the last decade learning and schooling in former Soviet states have made a huge transition from pure system-based architectures into societal- and professional-driven curricula and learning scenarios. The main factor behind this swift transformation is the socio-economical needs that drove learners, teachers and institutes into the abundant new market-driven enterprises, with even less scruples towards pragmatic arrangements compared to Western European countries in their schooling policies. We are very happy that this special issue brings you an expressive, exemplary and still representative landscape of innovative practices that rely upon educational technology and societal needs in the first place.

The authors share with you their experience and future prospects into success factors in e-learning and blended learning in humanistic (for example, foreign languages, philosophy) as well as natural, science, technical subjects (ecology, chemistry, etc.). The authors inform readers about new achievements and outcomes in the area of methodology as well as technology using and implementing e-learning: quality management of e-courses, using multi-agent systems, conception of multi-books design and their effective using in education and others.

This Special Issue includes authors from different universities that presented their best papers during the 4th Annual International Scientific Conference entitled 'Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Distance Learning', Subtitle: 'E-Learning for Societal Needs', DLCC2012, which was held on 15–16 October 2012 at the Faculty of Ethnology and Sciences of Education in Cieszyn, University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. The articles in this special issue are revised and expanded versions. The authors are from: University of Silesia in Katowice (Poland), Silesian University in Opava (Czech Republic), Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland), Częstochowa University of Technology, University College of Social Sciences in Częstochowa, Rzeszów University of Technology, State Higher Vocational School in Krosno, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Jagiellonian University in Cracow (Poland) and others.

Tomasz A. Walasek, Zygmunt Kucharczyk, Dorota Morawska-Walasek and Krzysztof Szewczyk provide the reader with useful information about quality management of e-courses, which is crucial for the successful implementation of e-learning process.

The article 'Quality management in e-courses' presents the possibility of using seven basic quality tools to improve the quality at different levels of implementation of the distance learning/teaching process. These tools are widely used in industry for control, visualisation, evaluation and improvement of production and auxiliary processes.

Roman Šperka and Dominik Vymětal describe e-learning as a method, technology for which a heterogeneous and distributed architecture is one of the most prominent features. In a learning environment, different kinds of information resources are shared. Its demands can be fulfilled by means of local intelligence using multi-agent systems. Their article 'E-learning system design with the focus on knowledge flows and learning objects' describes a layered multi-agent architecture of e-learning system including basics of its implementation. Learning objects and learning objects repositories are used for facilitating intended learning outcomes, and can be extracted and reused in other learning environments.

In the article 'A textbook without pages?', Hanna Gulińska stresses the fact that the school year 2012/2013 marks the beginning of a new reality in Polish schools. According to the new curricular basis introduced in the Poland in 2009, teaching must be focused on the media and on experiment. In the same year, a new junior high school leaving examination was introduced. These decisions have determined further educational improvements which are of great use both for teachers and their students. These improvements include electronic books, or the so called multibooks.

Prof. Hanna Gulińska is one of the authors, who have prepared all of the necessary handbooks in the form of a multibook available on CDs or flash drives and she shares with readers her interesting and important experience.

Barbara Dębska and Agnieszka Kubacka try to describe in their article 'Generation of individual learning path in distant education' a conception of the implementation of a personalised distant learning system. It consists of two parts. The first one describes the methods of personalisation and data collection, and the other one explains how to use them to popularise an individual path of learning.

In their article, 'E-learning as an effective modern method of building a sustainable society', Piotr Skubała and Eugenia Smyrnova-Trybulska, on the basis of their long experience, claim that e-learning has proved to be a strong and effective tool in modelling environmental consciousness and preparing today's society to live in a sustainable world. A successful example of the e-learning course entitled 'Philosophical and ethical aspects of environmental protection' developed at the University of Silesia is discussed in this article. Ten fundamental rules, implemented in the course, necessary to build environmentally thinking people are also discussed. The concept of the distance learning course 'Information technology in teaching of ecology and environmental protection' is also presented. Teaching and learning, provided through a comprehensive, systematic use of ICT and e-learning can increase the quality of education in the field of ecology.

The courses help to prepare competent specialists, able to react and find solutions to arising environment conflicts, which is of great importance in the future sustainable society. Furthermore, the importance of a variety of modern didactic methods used in the e-learning course and the possibility of developing teacher-student relationships in distance learning are also analysed.

Ryszard Kalamarz informs the reader in 'Blending foreign language learning with key competences. Does e-learning do the trick?' about numerous benefits and advantages of different forms of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), blended learning in particular, and stresses that it offers a considerable boost for academic foreign language teaching with competences treated as essential learning outcomes measured by means of such indicators as the growth of the level of mastery of language skills (in particular listening, reading and writing), which make up the ability to communicate in a foreign language (the Council of Europe's second key competence). Research, conducted by

author, shows that e-learning considerably improves the effectiveness of competence oriented educational efforts. To this end the author devised an e-learning course English for Law and incorporated it in his English teaching practice at university. The e-course integrated with the traditional classes allowed to achieve some promising teaching results, especially as they went beyond developing only a foreign language competence.

Jarosław Krajka and Marcin Kleban consider learning teaching in cyberspace, which is becoming more and more widespread in the current teacher education framework, due to a growing need to enhance the quality of practical training and the presence of information and communication technologies in all spheres of life. Thus, e-training, defined here as supplementing teacher development with online interactions in the virtual space, are proposed as an option for enhancing practical training of foreign language teachers. The aim of the authors' article 'E-training in practical teacher development – from local to global connections' is to discuss the process of extending practical training with the use of e-learning in two models, online interactions among trainees (local connections) and intercultural teacher training tandems (global connections).

The article 'The use of blended learning and its influence on the assessment of motivating factors to learn English' prepared by Dominika Goltz-Wasiucionek, focuses on factors influencing motivation to learn English. On the basis of a questionnaire results the author describes motivating factors and specifies whether and to what extent blended learning influences the assessment of importance of these factors to learn the language.

Outlining overall trends and conclusions we may say that in the course of the last 20 years we have witnessed great economic changes, economic, social, political, and technological developments in Poland as well as in all European countries and around the world that require adequate systems, accompanied by fast and permanent measures to effectively adapt to new challenges. Among the priorities is lifelong learning (LL). In the chapter entitled 'Working in the knowledge-based economy' (eEurope, 2002), the Lisbon European Council concluded that: "..lifelong learning should be given higher priority as a basic component of the European social model". It is stressed that we should "invest in our people's skills, quality education and lifelong learning programs to give them skill portability and better prospects, to facilitate mobility and enhance employability" (*G20 Leaders' Declaration*, 6 September 2013, St Petersburg, http://www.g20.utoronto.ca /2013/2013-0906-declaration.html). In times of crisis and post-crisis, it is an especially important and convincing argument. E-learning is one of the main modern forms, methods, technologies of teaching and learning today, which could be used effectively at different stages of education and in lifelong learning, as it is well described in the articles of this special issue. Therefore, one can confirm that at present high technologies and e-learning play an important role in human life; our times are both marked by increased levels of activity in different age and accompanied by active efforts to keep knowledge up to date. Besides, social processes are taking place faster than before. That is why an e-learning educational environment [in a very broad context: using LMS, CMS systems, MOOCs, Web 2.0, 3.0, multibooks, virtual (local and global)] is one of the primary tools and ways to respond to the most important challenges, provides equal chance for everybody, offers possibilities of developing as well as updating of knowledge and skills, gives access to information and didactic sources no matter where you live, regardless of age, gender, social level, capabilities, and even facilitates change of speciality and careers, increases of quality of educational services. It provides access to educational materials for local community and all other people interested, also for the disabled, people with financial limitations, residents from small and remote towns and other users

in order to give all citizens equal chance to have access to knowledge, which is one of the main priority aims of the European Community.

I am truly grateful to all the reviewers who carefully read the articles and offered their competent comments, suggestions, recommendations to authors which allowed to improve and enhance the quality of the papers and special issue.

References

eEurope (2002) *An Information Society for All Action Plan Prepared by the Council and the European Commission for the Feira European Council*, 19–20 June 2000, Brussels.

G20 Leaders' Declaration, 6 September 2013, St. Petersburg [online] http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2013/2013-0906-declaration.html (accessed 12 September 2013).