Editorial for proceedings papers

Here are the proceedings of the 2011 ALT Conference "Thriving in a colder and more challenging climate". Proceedings papers report on a piece of research, possibly in its early stages, or they can be "thoughtpieces" which state a point of view or summarise an area of work, perhaps giving new insights.

The conference has six themes:

- **Research and rigour**: creating, marshalling and making effective use of evidence
- **Making things happen**: systematic design, planning and implementation
- **Broad tents and strange bedfellows**: collaborating, scavenging and sharing to increase value
- **At the sharp end**: enabling organisations and their managers to solve business, pedagogic and technical challenges
- **Teachers of the future**: understanding and influencing the future role and practices of teachers
- **Preparing for a thaw**: looking ahead to a time beyond the disruptive discontinuities of the next few years.

Interestingly, there were very few proposals for the conference as a whole against the sixth theme: and no proceedings papers. Perhaps the thaw is still perceived as being too far away to warrant any preparation yet!

Unsurprisingly, *research and rigour* is well represented in the proceedings but there is a problem-solving practical flavour relevant to the title of the conference. Garnett and Ecclesfield (2011) look at Boyer's often cited model of scholarship and update it for the current more open and networked environment. Jones and Kennedy (2011) argue for a more problem-driven approach to social science and specifically educational research using a pluralist approach combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies and tools. Bain (2011) revisits the role of online discussion in learning for all learners and produces a framework. Kerrigan et al. (2011) report on the successful use of a tool to support and indeed require student reflection on the feedback they have been given. It is now in use in several universities and colleges.

These four general papers are balanced by two that are specifically subject-based. Abadi and Alsop (2011) use a formal combination of activity theory and grounded theory in a practical way to improve learning of initial Java programming,

a high-volume area with considerable payoff. Bacon, Windall, and MacKinnon (2011) discuss using emotional effects in the multimedia training of executives responsible for safety critical services such as fire or police, a lower volume area but again with high payoff in the light of the important role for which training is being given, and the expense of traditional methods.

Making things happen through problem solving with significant actual or potential payoff is also important, especially in the current environment. Collins et al. (2011) report on the successful use of short "photomarathons" in engaging primary school children in learning on a visit to an historical site. Kohl (2011) discusses the deployment of a voluntary plagiarism checking system which addresses this serious problem through prevention rather than post hoc detection. Smith (2011) reports on the use of a "virtual internet" to solve some of the security problems of group work in learning computer networking concepts and techniques. Gorjian (2011) describes and discusses a very carefully designed experiment that suggests that hypertext annotations in second language teaching, while improving vocabulary learning, so do primarily in the short term only. This result is sufficiently disturbing to generate an interesting discussion of the context of the experiment and why the result might not generalise.

Several papers involve collaborations but only Tan and Pearce (2011) major in *scavenging* in their use of YouTube videos in teaching sociology. Their discussion of the barriers to and advantages of such use has wide applicability.

At the sharp end, Strachan et al. (2011) discuss the results of a questionnaire that looked at Workplace-Based Learning from the points of view of not just learners and teachers but also from those of the workplace and external stakeholders. The results are of wide relevance in the current environment. Stewart, McKee, and Porteous (2011) discuss an integrated system for lecture capture that does not require heavy hardware or software and can be accessed from simple hand held devices.

Finally, what of the *teachers of the future*? Two papers offer very different approaches to teacher professional development. Cochrane and Naryan (2011) describe a new approach at a single site, for lecturers through a "social learning technologies" course which aims to produce a community of practice in the use of mobile Web2.0 technologies. In contrast, Arati, Todorova, and Merrett (2011) are looking to bring together the strange if not completely incompatible, bedfellows of government in Germany, France and the UK, in public/private partnerships with Intel. The project supports the professional development of teachers to help them use technology more in their teaching and to enable them to facilitate the acquisition of twenty-first century skills by their students.

We thus see the effects of the cold. To thrive in the current climate, research needs to be more focused than in the past on solving problems, preferably in a scalable way: that is where the payoff lies. Nevertheless, the papers remain solidly grounded in

theory, properly constructed and well argued. ALT's field overall has an important role to play in "bringing on the thaw".

David Hawkridge
Kia Ng
Steven Verjans

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