Introduction

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Welcome to this collection of short papers from the eLearning Symposium 2020!

The 13th eLearning Symposium was held at the University of Southampton, on the 24th of January 2020. Our theme was ‘Education 4.0 revolution: transformative approaches to language teaching and learning, assessment, and campus design’. At the time, the ideas and topics we discussed were future-gazing, but within months, they have become a reality for many of us.

Indeed, as we write this introduction, we have seen the COVID-19 virus sweep the world and lead to dramatic changes in our lives and in how we deliver education. Schools and universities have been forced to embrace digital delivery modes virtually overnight, and students now face an online and/or blended educational experience for many months to come. We ask ourselves: how much of this digital transformation will last? How can we ensure that the lessons we are currently learning about good practice in the use of technology will be developed and maintained beyond this crisis?

Never has the work of our symposium community been more timely, and within this collection you will find help, inspiration, and thought-provoking ideas. This collection represents a small snapshot of the papers, workshops, and other contributions we heard at our 2020 event.

This volume opens with a workshop report dealing with the transformation of physical learning spaces for multilingual interaction. Authors Cecilia Goria and

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Lea Guetta are leading their own transformative project for a Self-Access Centre (SAC) at their university, and they shared their thinking and practical steps so far. Workshop participants discussed the interplay between the innovative use of physical space, the availability of increased amounts of digital content, varied approaches to accessing content, and changing student habits towards how and when to study language. Readers will find the authors’ rationale for their SAC redesign, their conclusions, and the summary of the workshop participants’ thoughts and feedback illuminating and useful.

Considerations of space, time, and effective education delivery are also evident in the innovative online work presented by Laura Capitani. She describes an interactive, blended course in Italian which has been highly effective in mixing self-paced study with focussed online personal learning sessions. Her use of a range of tools and apps has given both students and tutors flexibility over teaching and learning and resulted in a course with a broad appeal to a wide number of diverse learners. Georgie Hannam considers space in her chapter: the virtual space offered by blogs. Her case study proposes blogging as a method to encourage learner autonomy and concludes that the tutor’s approach and attitude are vital in ensuring such spaces are effective in fostering autonomy.

Every year, the symposium is full of examples of how technology can enrich the experience of students in the classroom. Karla K. de Lima Guedes gives an account of her research into the experiences of practitioners who integrate Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) into traditional UK higher education teaching. Her chapter finds that educators have a range of reasons for doing this, but often use MOOCs to add an international dimension to their classroom. She gives useful tips for anyone considering blending a MOOC into their learning programme. Serpil Meri-Yilan discusses the use of digital storytelling to enrich the task-based language learning experience of her students. She finds that students enjoy the method and it has some effect in improving speaking skills. Mária Adorján reports similarly positive results from her students, in relation to the use of corpus linguistic tools with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduates and trainee teachers. She describes her success in integrating
corpus linguistic tools into her programme to enhance linguistic awareness and encourage learner autonomy.

We close with two chapters discussing the importance of attitudes and expectations in technology use for learning. Andrew Davey and Simone Marx outline the technical changes implemented to a course of online resources in response to evolving learner needs and expectations. These included changes to ensure greater accessibility and inclusivity, structured pathways to guide learning, and an enhanced ‘look and feel’ for the user experience. Finally, in the last chapter by Xing Liu, the focus shifts to the perceptions of parents when trying to understand why learners use apps for EFL learning. She finds that parental beliefs about the importance of language learning in general have an impact on learners’ technology use.

We do hope you enjoy this volume of short papers from the eLearning Symposium and that you find inspiration and ideas for your own research and practice. We hope to see you at the symposium in the future, sharing your own work and experience. Keep safe and well.

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