

## E-Learn 2009 Preface

### A dedication

activities analysis application approach based case classroom computer concept content  
courses create design developed development e-learning education  
educational environment evaluation examples experience group  
implementation include individual information instructional instructional design interaction  
issue knowledge learning learner learning environment level material method model  
number part practice present problem process program project provide question  
research resource result school skill social student study support  
system teacher teaching technology time tools work

(Tag cloud of most commonly used words based upon all accepted presentations from E-Learn 2009, generated by TagCrowd (<http://tagcrowd.com>))

Along with the usual suspects or *learning, learners, education, technology* and *students*, the words '*et*' and '*al*' were revealed prior to filtering this tag cloud. This preface is dedicated to *et* and *al*, by far the most popular authors in the E-Learn Proceedings every year since it began. Those little words bear testament to our joy in working together, our commitment to each other, our commitment to our community, working together for a better world.

### And a welcome

E-Learn 2009 welcomes you to the beautiful city of Vancouver and the surrounding cities and landscapes of the Metro Vancouver area. Vancouver is a vibrant melting pot of culture, natural wonders and architectural delights that has something special for everyone. Whether buzzing across the water on a False Creek Ferry to the characterful market, art galleries, theatres, studios, stores and cafes of Granville Island, drinking in the big-city rumble of Downtown, meeting raccoons, turtles, bald eagles and Canada geese in the wilds of Stanley Park, browsing the aboriginal crafts in stores lining the cobbled streets of Gastown, getting lost in the melee of sights, scents and sounds in the second largest Chinatown in North America, tittering at the sleazy charm and neon signs of Granville's red-light district, eating on the sophisticated urban sidewalks of Yaletown, having your breath taken away by the sweeping vistas of islands and cities from the top of Grouse Mountain, hiking in the wide open spaces, creeks and waterfalls of Lynn Canyon or Bowen Island, or watching whales and seals, it is hard to be bored and impossible not to be amazed by this richly diverse city. And the E-Learn program this year, like Vancouver, is rich and diverse, full of vitality and depth.

And, like Vancouver, e-learning is young, but growing up fast, reaching a stable but ever-evolving state of construction and consolidation. From being a frontier discipline dominated by technophile pedagogues and inventors of crude but

interesting machines for learning, the breadth and range of papers presented here portray and represent a maturing subject area that is able to reflect on its history, its triumphs and its defeats, and to learn from them.

The keynotes and invited presentations mirror that growing diversity and depth, exploring the cultural, ethical, social and philosophical dimensions that have emerged as much as the shiny technological horizons, as we come to understand the ramifications of what we, in our enthusiastic and profligate disciplinary youth, have wrought. E-learning is now well and truly a part of the mainstream and, while many of the papers presented here show that great innovations continue to abound and challenge us with new possibilities and new dangers, we are increasingly entering a phase of reflecting on and refining systems that have become ubiquitous and embedded across the globe.

Our jury-rigged shanty towns and temporary outposts are becoming gleaming cities and, with that progress, we are reaping great rewards but, at the same time, discovering the by-now entrenched problems that recur – the disenfranchised and lonely learners who wander the e-learning streets seeking hand-outs and scraps of knowledge, the soaring costs of embedded infrastructures that are hard to change, the cultural imperialism of inappropriately applied models, the systematisation of what should not be systematised, the construction of edifices that fall at the first signs of an earth tremor, and the development of learning wastelands and pedagogic slums.

The process is far from over: while theoretical inroads continue to be made, and are reported on here, we remain in a space guided primarily by models, not theory. Whether or not that remains the case, the wealth of examples and richness of research from which we are now able to draw offers hope that those models will become more and more useful and precise and, perhaps, lead us tentatively into a world where we know not only *that* we are doing good, but *why* and *how* we are doing it.

Among the changes that affect us all are the technologies, standards and philosophies of openness – open content, open source, open APIs, open connections, freedom of time, location, connections and content. Increasingly, we are punching holes in the walls of our walled gardens, reaching outside the restrictions of the ubiquitous LMS and letting the world in to see what we have to offer. There is hardly a learner with an Internet connection who is not now an e-learner, engaging with open content in open communities, whether as a result of a Google Search, a Wikipedia look-up, as a member of a social networking group or any one of millions of other learning resources. Openness now defines the platforms and devices we use, as mobile, immersive, ambient and web worlds slowly coalesce and interoperate. Openness defines our affiliations, who we associate with, connect with, form groups with, join networks with. This conference shows how deeply such changes are affecting us: no longer does it exist in splendid geographical and temporal isolation but, through its Ning social networking site (<http://www.aaceconnect.org/group/elearn>), its blogs, the twittering of its delegates and a host of more or less formal social and technological structures its tendrils reach into the past and the future, out of this

beautiful city to reach every corner of the world beyond and, as importantly, the world reaches back. With these changes come problems that we have to address: issues of trust, changing roles, filtering and sorting, legal complexities, moral ambiguity, financial challenges, technical standards, the struggle between aggregation and integration, cultural clashes, proprietary lock-in, security and reliability, mob-stupidity, privacy and personal safety concerns. The open world is full of wondrous opportunities and sinister threats that we are only dimly beginning to perceive. Openness challenges our institutions to define themselves as more than simple purveyors of content and repositories of knowledge, to redefine their roles and take their stands in this brave new world.

So we warmly invite you to join us on this exciting leg of the e-learning journey, to explore new horizons but, equally, to look back from the mountain tops onto the landscapes we have created and what they mean to us as learners and educators but, above all, how they affect us as human beings.

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