Editorial: a new direction for ALT-J

The Association for Learning Technology celebrated its tenth anniversary this year and it can now be said that learning technology is a recognized research field, with a growing body of researchers and associated conferences and journals. Over the past two years as an editorial team we have undertaken a review of the position of *ALT-J* in relation to other journals in the area and considered the nature and scope of the papers we publish. We continue to expand our list of referees and have provided them with more detailed review forms to help guide them when considering recommendations on submissions and to encourage detailed, critical (and hopefully!) helpful feedback to authors. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the referees for their involvement and commitment to the journal and for their continued work on refereeing papers. As part of the review process we will be moving to a new publisher, Taylor and Francis, commencing with Volume 12; this is, in part, driven by a desire to increase our international profile and readership, as well as seeking to have a better online presence including electronic access to all papers. We are, after all, a research journal on learning technologies! We are looking forward to taking the journal forward with Taylor and Francis but would also like to take this opportunity to thank our current publisher, University of Wales Press, for all their support and professional work over the years; it has been very good working with them.

This issue contains eight articles which reflect the breadth of research activities in learning technology. It begins with a useful literature review of learning theories and their relationship to e-learning. Ravenscroft provides a review of pedagogical underpinnings to e-learning from the past fifty years, particularly focusing on the shift from an emphasis on behaviourist conditioning to more collaborative learning communities.

The next four papers report on specific research and evaluations into innovations in the use of learning technology. Joiner *et al.* report on the evaluation of a Web-based video lecture using the Boxmind system. Whitelock *et al.* consider mechanisms for improving student feedback to tutors using technology and in particular on the use of an electronic monitoring system for this purpose. Boyle and Nicol also look at communication but focus on

using classroom communication systems to support interaction and discussions in large-class settings. A specific subject focus is provided by the paper by Stuart and Brown, who report on an evaluation of learning resources in the teaching of formal philosophical methods. A direct comparison of distance learning and face-to-face teaching has been carried out by de Freitas. She reports on a quantitative study comparing the experience of students on face-to-face and distance courses, focusing on a series of courses in Geography over the past five years.

Littlejohn reports on the experiences of e-learning support staff and forewarns of the growing gap between institutional practice and research in the development of approaches to sustaining e-learning. Finally Dempster *et al.* consider the issues, challenges and experiences of creating virtual communities of practice for learning technology through their work on the development of the RESULTs portal.

We continue our theme of responses to papers and in this edition, Draper has provided a critique of Nicol and Coen's article on cost-benefit analysis published in Issue 11.2. Draper agrees that this is an important area of learning technology research and considers the associated methodological issues with developing an appropriate model for reliable and authentic cost-benefit analysis. The authors respond to this, agreeing that this is a difficult area of research, which is precisely why models such as theirs are valuable in terms of opening the debate within institutions and providing senior managers with an analytical framework within which to work.

Gráinne Conole
Editor