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## Editorial

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**Biographical notes:** 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.

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In this special issue, 15 authors from respectively Australia, Malaysia, Israel, Portugal and South Africa share with you their experience and future prospects into success factors in lifelong learning: overcoming a weak usability and social anxiety, encouraging soft-computing and m-learning, and finally the exploitation of heterogeneity in students' background and the gaming metaphor. The presented perspectives become gradually more and more decisive for the question "to what extent can web-based learning be sufficiently vicarious for a the continuous lifelong learning of citizens, professionals or those who could not graduate their initial formal education?" Formulated more strongly, we can ask ourselves if and how the wide availability of web-based open learning resources can serve autonomous learners in their further study, without being dependent from institutional fees and accreditation regimes?

The announcement that Harvard and MIT will add certificates to students who finish an online course. Currently, a large number of web courses appear under the phenomenon

of massive open online courses (MOOCs). What will be the impact of free course material on the internet? How will it affect life-long learning finally? How will existing learning institutes transform themselves and adapt new styles to give support to students? And finally the question to what extent MOOCs will be disruptive for ongoing institutionalised higher education? Its more generic underlying question has recently been addressed as ‘inverse infrastructures’ by Egyedi et al. (2012). The current trend study on disruptive innovations can be followed via Scoop-it (<http://www.scoop.it/t/disruptive-innovation-and-moocs>) curated by Ronald Voorn and Piet Kommers. The more dominant entries to find open courseware are:

- *MOOC: MIT Massive Open Online Courses revolution and Harvard and MIT*
- *The Future of Online Education*
- *Tuition-Free Online University*
- *College Confidential*
- *Coursera*
- *Access++*
- *Udacity.*

Also the public discourse on MOOC scan be found in *George Siemens in Dialogue with Howard Rheingold*. The recent understanding is that students already start a life-long learning attitude during the phase of their formal education; it manifests as screening the top institutes all over the world open their courses in order to complement their local f2f curricula.

A second question is if and to what extent universities in Australia, New Zealand and the USA will face smaller number of international students coming to their campuses or at least stay there for a shorter period than before, as MOOCs allow them to digest parts of their programme from their home country via the web. Especially now Harvard University has announced its certification model it is likely that the lower-ranked universities are doomed to accept parts of this external certification. There is even a dispute whether the western countries (Europe and the USA) fear a decline in ideological dissemination if their share in student exchange falls back.

Finally, there is the aspect of quality awareness: via ultimate quality lectures in Youtube, iTunes-U and Coursera, university lecture around the world may gain a higher ambition to par this new standard. Similar has been seen via the lectures on TED.com where for instance the lecture by Ted Robinson has created momentum in critical thinking on Education at large.

Can websites encourage life-long learning? Are they effective for specific cultural groups? Linda Lim describes an experiment addressing these issues. ‘An experimental study of web usability to encourage life-long learning’ contains an overview and main conclusions of the experiment.

Students with a fear for mathematics, it is a well-recognised situation. Tutut Herawan, Prima Vitasari and Zailani Abdullah provide the reader with useful information to adapt teaching strategies. In the article ‘Mining critical least association rules of student suffering language and social anxieties’, the authors inform us about the results of educational data mining techniques.

Writing an essay is a very common assignment. The student is free to express him-/herself and show that they have a deep understanding of the topic. For the teacher the grading of many essays at the same time could be very time consuming. Labib Arafah describes a technique that makes auto essay grading possible.

Already the title of the article 'Soft computing auto essay grading' indicates that the author concentrates on auto essay grading and describes experiments with this technique.

Mobile learning is indeed a promising direction that is of value to the attitude of life-long learning. Elaheh Yadegaridehkordi, Noorminshah A. Iahad and Hasnain Zafar Baloch inform the reader about the 'Success factors influencing the adoption of M-learning'. A list of recommendations is included.

In the article 'Learning transitions of three doctoral students in a Portuguese higher education institution facilitated by the use of ICT' the authors Betina da Silva Lopes, Maria João Macário, Mariana Pinto, Maria Helena Ançã and Maria João Loureiro report the learning experience of three doctoral students at a Portuguese university. They believe that monitoring the individual learning path will contribute to successful adult learning strategies. A model is proposed and future investigations are shared with the reader.

Lynette Nagel and A. Seugnet Blignaut report on a master level course delivered via WebCT at the University of Pretoria. They used the soccer metaphor. It is interesting to see how cultural differences play a role. The study further shows the advantages using metaphors in an online learning environment.

## References

- Egyedi, T.M., Mehos, D.C. and Vree, W.G. (2012) 'Introducing inverse infrastructures', in Egyedi, T.M. and Mehos, D.C. (Eds.): *Inverse Infrastructures: Disrupting Networks from Below*, pp.1–14, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK.