Continuous education is one of the big challenges for all countries around the globe. Due to our leading role in the development of national learning backbones for Germany and South Africa, and of campus wide solutions for both cooperate and classical universities, we were approached by many people who asked us to provide contributions to the ongoing discussion on how learning architectures should be built to support the (adult) learning process.

In its second year, the Next Generation of Learning Platforms minitrack focuses on general requirements of and current approaches to learning architectures that allow flexible delivery of learning content over traditional networks and upcoming wireless networks, in an attempt to reach potentially every person. The need for integrated systems exploiting a highly distributed web-based environment involves problem areas such as

- collaborative computer aided authoring support,
- work benches for international coverage of learning topics,
- enabling the reuse of learning fragments,
- specialized search engines,
- personalization of the learning environment,
- remote tutoring support,
- retrieving learning material on-demand and
- ensuring a proper certification of the learners’ achievements and quality control.

The accepted papers for this year’s minitrack provide a good coverage of the problem areas and sample insight into related projects. The topics include two aspects treated in the German lighthouse project L3, one on collaboration for learning environments designing specific instructional transactions for distance learning, and one on a design methodology, tool and run-time environment for massive support of personalized learning styles. An evaluation on learner-learner cooperation offers initial findings using a new simulation environment. A new approach regarding authoring for electronic books (slices) again emphasizes collaboration to demonstrate its potential. A digital lecture hall paper takes care of the massive need to integrate traditional lecturing situations with enriched multimedia capabilities to support the learner. Finally a method on criteria based marking as an instructional method is discussed.

At least 3 reviewers from different organizations refereed each of the submitted papers. The accepted papers are summarized below.

A contribution by FhG-IPSI sketches two current implementations of collaborative learning environments and embraces the evaluation of various collaboration modes for continuous learning environments. This paper describes the relevant set of directions regarding user and collaboration management as well as the transition between self-paced and multi-party learning situations. The CS department of Rensselaer Polytechnic in NY state contributed a study evaluating effective task division in peer-to-peer collaboration. The paper describes the initial findings of the simulation “CollaBillboard” used at the institute. Next, an approach for authoring personalized textbooks is described using Slicing Technologies; the basic concepts and architecture, the related process and usage scenarios in the domain of collaborative learning are discussed.

The description of the L3 project at SAP Corporate Research emphasizes a generic approach for the authoring of instructional units as an extension to the existing SCORM model. The paper describes an architecture for lifelong learning. The theoretical model, a set of tools and a run-time environment supporting flexible and personalized combination of knowledge items are described. At Darmstadt University of Technology, the Digital Lecture Hall spots the important aspect of eLearning by a novel combination of traditional classroom teaching with distributed multimedia environments. The status report goes clearly beyond current ways of electronic classrooms and emphasizes large audiences.