Editorial: Special Section on Social Web Technologies in E-Learning

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the last 2011 issue of the IEEE Transactions on Learning Technologies. As you can see, this issue includes a special section devoted to using social web technologies in e-learning. Unlike other special sections, which were scheduled in advance and managed by guest editors, this section was not planned. Yet, with the overall popularity of social web technologies and the increased interest of teachers and educational researchers in this area, more and more papers on this topic have been submitted to the IEEE Transactions on Learning Technologies. While planning the last two issues of 2011, we realized that we had a large selection of high quality papers on social web accepted for publication. Collecting these papers in one issue provides a better value for our readers, since together these papers present a good state-of-the-art picture of the current research on social web and e-learning.

The set of papers included in this special section is exactly as diverse as we would like an introduction to this research direction to be. Most important is the fact that the most popular social technologies currently explored in the area of e-learning, such as blogs, wikis, and social tagging, are addressed by one or more papers in this special section.

The paper “Microblogging in a Classroom: Classifying Students’ Relevant and Irrelevant Questions in a Microblogging-Supported Classroom,” by a group of researchers from Purdue University, deals with the educational usage of microblogging, a technology that Twitter has made popular over the last two years.

The paper “An Approach to Folksonomy-Based Ontology Maintenance for Learning Environments,” by Dragan Gašević, Amal Zouaq, Carlo Torniai, Jelena Jovanović, and Marek Hatala, explores social tagging technology. It also bridges the gap between social web and Semantic Web research since it explores an approach based on using social tags contributed by learners while using learning environments for ontology maintenance.

Christoph Hermann and Thomas Ottmann, in their paper “Electures-Wiki—Toward Engaging Students to Actively Work with Lecture Recordings,” explore an innovative use of the popular wiki technology to engage students to work with lecture recordings.

Another paper, “Wikibooks and Wikibookians: Loosely Coupled Community or a Choice for Future Textbooks?” by Meng-Fen Grace Lin, Suthiporn Sajjapanroj, and Curtis J. Bonk, offers a deeper exploration of wikis as a technology and a community of users and discusses the prospects of wikis becoming textbooks of the future.

Finally, Brian Thoms, in his paper “A Dynamic Social Feedback System to Support Learning and Social Interaction in Higher Education,” explores the use of blogging in an educational context. The focus of the paper, however, is not the blogs, but a dynamic social feedback technology that could be applicable to a range of social systems.

In addition to the five “social” papers, this issue features two regular papers that deal with other aspects of technology-enhanced learning. The paper “Supporting Accessible Technology-Enhanced Training: The eAccess2Learn Framework,” by Demetrios G. Sampson and Panagiotis Zervas, focuses on accessibility and the needs of learners with disabilities. The paper “Evaluation of Telerobotic Interface Components for Teaching Robot Operation,” by Ofir H. Goldstain, Irad Ben-Gal, and Yossi Bukchin, focuses on engineering education and remote access to educational laboratories.

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