Editorial

Eamon Costello[1]

Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland

Dear Reader,

Welcome to this special issue of the Irish Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning the journal of the Irish Learning Technology Association. This issue comprises a selection of papers based on submissions to the Next Generation: Digital Learning Research Symposium in November 2016. This symposium was held in partnership between the Irish Learning Technology Association, the Educational Studies Association of Ireland, and both the Institute of Education and National Institute for Digital Learning at Dublin City University.

The Symposium was framed around the notion of building capacity in research in digital learning. The Symposium's title not only alluded to generations of teaching and learning but also to learning futures and how we might ford the chasm of the great promise of the digital with evidence of its actual effects. The symposium sought to foster discussion, debate and above all a community of scholars by discussing and debating the big issues we face in digital learning research. The event gave voice to a wide range of Irish educators and researchers across all levels and sectors. The articles in this issue represent a selection of the highlights of presentations at the symposium in extended written form.

Professor Gráinne Conole's keynote served in many ways to set the scene for a broad gathering of educators and researchers from across all levels and sectors. Her article in this issue - Research through the Generations: Reflecting on the Past, Present and Future - traces a broad arc of research in educational technology framed around key technologies and methodological developments. She identifies five transformative technologies: the web/WI-FI; Learning Management Systems (LMSs); mobile devices, Open Educational Resources (OER) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs); and social media. Her piece considers the characteristics that made these developments transformative, along with the challenges to their usage. This examination is followed by an overview of the field of digital learning research and divides

digital learning research into three main types: research around the pedagogies of digital learning, research on underpinning technologies, and research at an organizational level. Using this framework the reader is afforded an insight into how digital learning has emerged as a new interdisciplinary field. It is always at the tectonic plates of previously separate disciplines that new terrain emerges and Professor Conole's piece will provide an invaluable contextual overview to readers both new to the field of digital learning research but also to those more experienced researchers who may be too close to see it. As such it is a richly rewarding read for Ed Tech visitors and residents alike.

A second position paper in the issue by Tony Murphy also invokes Educational Technology futures. It examines a key area, and one the three broad themes identified by Conole, that of organizational forms in digital learning. Behind the provocative title of [The future of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) is in the hands of the anonymous, grey nondescript mid-level professional manager](#) is an informative and insightful research-informed commentary on how technology confronts existing practices and boundaries in higher education. Key insights that this paper affords arises from how it draws on well developed concepts from literature of organizational forms outside of education and uses them to interrogate the emerging practices of work and professional roles for 21st century educators.

The theme of contemporary professional practice is central to [Exploring higher education professionals' use of Twitter for learning](#) by Muireann O'Keeffe. Using a Visitor and Resident typology this paper reports on research into how higher education professionals were involved in a range of types of participation (and nonparticipation) on Twitter. It shows how participants both use and sometimes fail to use social networking for professional learning and attempts to unpick the complexities of participation in online spaces. This paper makes an important contribution to the topical area of how we participate (or resist participation) in online spaces as a professional community.

Professional practice is also to the fore in a fascinating research piece by Michael Hallissy that looks at practices in Synchronous Computer Mediated Conferencing (SCMC) which is, relative to asynchronous environments, an under researched area. [Sharing Professional Practice – Tutors have their say](#) reports on research into teaching in synchronous environments. Using Pedagogical and Content Framework (TPACK) in parallel with the Flanders Interaction Analysis Category the practices of teachers are explored with the aim of challenging and changing them. The findings of this research enjoin us as educators to share our practice critically and reflectively. Its core message is perhaps encapsulated in that both teaching and teaching development are a form of dialogue. Appropriately then, this article is written in a style that immediately engages the reader, draws them into a story and is a richly rewarding read.

A number of current trends are captured in Barry James Ryan's research article Near Peers: Harnessing the power of the populous to enhance the learning environment. This research investigated the impact of a tool called NearPod used in third level educational settings. Using a case study methodology it shows a practical implementation of some key trends in higher education and reports on its aims to enhance the student learning experience through the integration of BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) and flipped classroom learning. Methodologically this study is interesting for its use of student and teacher reflective forms of data and provides a valuable vignette of contemporary research informed teaching.

To conclude it is hoped that the diverse array of articles in this issue offers something for every interested reader. Indeed this is reflective of the diversity of the Irish community that is engaged in practices informed, mediated or enabled by some kind of digital learning technology. Conole's article sets this out from a research perspective and the picture has been painted elsewhere of what "Ed Tech" as an emergent discipline might look like. To this end it is hoped that this issue goes some way towards helping us build our community through the critical lens of research.

On behalf of the Irish Learning Technology Association and the journal editorial team we wish you happy reading (and hope to see your work in a future issue).

Best wishes,

Eamon, Tom and Fiona