

Welcome to EAMIL Workshop Day 2006 (Foreword)

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Media education and eLearning are timely and welcome elements of teaching and research activities at the University of Innsbruck's Institute of Educational Sciences. The Institute is therefore delighted to be associated with this interesting and well-prepared event, which focuses especially on micro-learning.

Informal learning – that is, learning that takes place in everyday life as an integrated and often unnoticed part of ongoing activities in family, work and leisure contexts – has drawn increasing research and policy interest in the past five years or so. This interest is linked with the need to re-think education and training for a knowledge society. The current rediscovery of the learning continuum (formal – non-formal – informal learning) contrasts with the strong emphasis placed on formal learning in the first modern era, which led to a relative under-recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The idea of the learning continuum not only re-introduces greater balance in this respect – it also encourages renewed reflection on the ways in which different mixes of learning features are conceptualised and classified. When we look closely at real-life learning exemplars, it rapidly becomes clear that they cannot necessarily be defined as unambiguously formal, non-formal or informal. Rather, they represent a cluster of features that, taken together, fall somewhere along the learning continuum and not into a discrete typological category.

The bulk of educational research in this area relates to workplace learning and in particular the kind of informal learning at the workplace that is the main source of continuing (vocational) education and training (C[V]ET) for low-qualified employees, many of whom are distanced and disengaged from formal learning environments. Micro-learning in everyday contexts, including working contexts, is an interesting addition to this

field of applied research. The Seibersdorf eLearning Research Studio here in Innsbruck has focused in particular on micro-learning applications for use with mobile telephones. This is not only a practical application that could prove attractive to employers and commercial training providers, but it is also an exemplar for understanding more about the pedagogy of learning in everyday life.

The rapid development of mobile devices means that mobile telephones themselves are probably best described as an interim technology, rather like fax machines in the early 1990s. One might then ask whether it makes sense to develop micro-learning applications for devices that, in their current form, do not have a long-term future. However, this very fact reminds us that for everyday citizens, the driving-edge of technological innovation is not within their experience or reach. Focusing on mobile telephones is therefore grounded in everyday realities: this is an approach to learning provision that brings learning to learners in a practical and realistic way.

One might add that mobile telephone based micro-learning users could be viewed as a kind of 'pedagogic kindergarten' for eLearning via other channels. In focusing on the learning potential of everyday gadgets, micro-learning applications also have the potential for designing low-threshold learning opportunities. These may succeed in attracting citizens who need to improve their skills and competences in key areas for living and working in today's Europe – for example, language learning – but who do not, wish to or cannot take advantage of conventional adult education and CVET provision. For most of Europe, we are here talking about many people: a majority of adult Europeans do not participate in recognised, visible and recorded kinds of learning.

Developing the conceptual and empirical links between micro-learning, the learning continuum and lifelong learning for all also fits well with the Institute's Research Group Education – Generation – Life-course, which focuses on intercultural and comparative research on learning for active citizenship, non-formal/informal learning, and new forms of learning for a knowledge society. The Institute of Educational Sciences looks forward to continuing positive cooperation and wishes the European Academy for Micro-learning well for the future.