

Editorial

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It is a great pleasure for me to introduce this second issue of the new journal *Designs for Learning*. I would like to welcome our new reviewers and members of the advisory board, and I also would like to express my thanks to all of you who have sent in articles for publication. The editorial board has from the beginning on established the routines for sending articles to two independent reviewers and made plans for the years to come. Among these is the planning for the next conference. The theme of the first conference in March 2008 was “defining the field”. The theme for the next conference in March 2010 might be “towards a new conceptualization of learning” in terms of media, arenas, artefacts and spaces used for learning.

“Designs for learning” has become a new topic for – and a new theoretic perspective in – educational research. However, the concept entails (at least) two different, but interrelated, research interests. The first one highlights different activities in semi-formal or non-formal environments, like learning in museums or learning related to activities like playing football, playing on-line games or playing around with friends. In these cases, much focus is on aspects like the affordances of the environment, different modes and media used in communication, patterns of interactivity and the learner’s own design of his or her activities. One could say that in these cases, learning is the means for the activities carried out.

But we also have those instances where learning is the very goal of the activities, which might be defined as “didactic design”. This second research interest highlights learning in formal and structured situations, as in schools or further education. Physical and virtual space, learning resources etc. are designed to suit learning related to predefined goals. However, the focus is not only on resources for learning but also on the role of the teacher/facilitator/coach/moderator/tutor etc. in relation to the physical and virtual learning resources.

One could notice that in educational research at large, the interest for informal learning has shifted towards a renewed interest for formal teaching. However, new research in “serious games” is but one example of a design theo-

retic perspective on learning. We want to be an alternative to mainstream educational research as well as to mainstream communication research. We want to enhance the development of the understanding of learning, in all its aspects, from a design theoretic perspective. Different institutional framings of activities have in the past resulted in a great divide between learning and play theories. Whilst playing seemed to take place before school, after school – during hours of spare time – learning seemed to take place in schools, during lessons and during periods of homework. But is this all that could be said about play and learning: Do we not play when we learn new things in formal settings? Do we not learn when we play around? What can new artefacts mean in terms of learning?

The time has come to reconceptualise the rather traditional ways of looking at play and learning. In our contemporary time, after the peak of the industrial society with its rational production, conditions for learning are changing. Global migration, new global technology and new communicative patterns in society seem to erode old concepts of teaching and schooling as well as playing and learning. There is a need, we think, for constructing new theoretical perspectives and conceptualizations of play and learning, related to new demands in a changing society. It is our ambition that the journal *Designs for learning* will be the place for this rather challenging enterprise.

In this issue, three articles are addressing the questions of artefacts, communication, play and learning, albeit in rather different ways. Tollef Thorsnes discuss learning and how to rebuild boats in relation to traditional technology. Eva Svärdemo-Åberg concentrates on interpersonal relations in learning activities, whilst Monica Reichenberg & Ingela Wadbring focus on how students interact in relation to critical reading of texts. Research domains are varying, but there is a common interest for questions related to designs for learning. The issue concludes with an interview with Gunther Kress, who gives an account of some of the central interests and influences that has formed a background to his theoretical work on social semiotics and multimodality.

Stockholm in November 2008

Staffan Selander