

Preface

Every second year, the International AI in Education Society holds a conference - this year, it is to be held in Amsterdam during July where the theme is "Supporting Learning through Intelligent and Socially Informed Technology". This theme is consistent with some of the recent research on working with children and other informants, a theme that is at the core of an upcoming special issue of the Journal on "Learner Centred Methods for Intelligent System Design" which is expected to appear next year.

Learner Centred Design has had a new lease of life with the spread of participant design and informant design methods. However, there are some well recognised problems in developing intelligent systems with the help of informants - for example, the informants often have a relatively immature understanding of what might be done even when they have an excellent grasp of the value of what might be possible. The AIED community has special difficulties in facing this problem compared with many other communities who are interested in novel uses of technology. However, there have been serious efforts to address these problems - especially amongst those working with children. Rose Luckin and Judy Robertson are Guest Editors for this future special issue, and are seeking papers which help to broaden our understanding of the extent to which learners can contribute to the process of designing systems that provide an individualised experience for learners, and the stages of the process where their input is most valuable. They are especially interested in work on designing systems that are adaptive to the learner by virtue of user modelling techniques. Anyone wishing to submit a paper to this issue, especially if the time constraints are difficult, are advised to contact them via editor@ijaied.org.

Turning to this first issue of the Journal for 2005, the two papers presented here share at least one major aspect in common: the authors seek to address very well motivated questions in relation to the learning process within a Higher Education context.

The paper by Aurora Vizcaino is a thorough exploration of the value of a simulated student that seeks to promote active involvement in learning. More specifically, the simulated student seeks to keep students on task and help them participate. The evaluation is detailed and informative. The work can be seen as a continuation of an interest in simulated students that has been very strong in the IAIED Society.

The work of Kalina Yacef is perhaps more focused on helping the tutor monitor and support potentially large classes of students. However the work is constructively constrained by requiring that the main activities of the teachers and students are disturbed as little as possible by the system. The aim is that the system is as smart as it needs to be. The evaluation certainly suggests that this approach paid off.

This issue thus stresses two important issues for the AI in Education community, ones that have been present for a long time. In essence these issues are - how we can tease out the impact that our systems have on the various users, and how we can utilise AI in a more targeted, socially aware manner. These are both issues that hopefully will be more fully explored in the AI-ED 2005 conference in the summer.

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