Foreword

Information technology has not only transformed society, but also this transformation has become an integral part of the evolution of the 21st century classroom. Technology used by students has become more portable and its usefulness as a teaching tool has increased. There is an increased focus on active strategies to effectively serve the needs of the digital learners in modern technology-rich classrooms. Educational institutions are also continually pressed to find new and creative ways to enhance student learning and technology is a tool that holds such promise.

It is against this backdrop that the current institution I work in, Winona State University (WSU) launched its e-Warrior: Digital Life and Learning program in 1997. This program integrates communication and information technology into students’ social and learning experience at Winona State University and provides all students with a laptop computer to enhance their studies. Because of this program instead of building specialized computer specific facilities, students and faculty can transform any room on campus into a computer lab. The predictable environment afforded by the program has allowed instructors to explore innovative pedagogies and action research in such areas as e-books, flipped classrooms, blended instruction, and enhanced communication with students.

Yet, technology continues to evolve. The exponential growth of tablet computing opens up many interesting academic opportunities for teaching and learning. Tablets could be considered a disruptive technology (Christensen, 2003) that threatens the position of laptops as the leading device for supporting mobile computing. WSU has been preparing for such disruption by adding the content consumption tablet to the list of technology provided to all students. This is just one of the many issues that surround the integration of technology into the educational enterprise.

In addition, providing students with the technology is not enough! Integrating technology into the fabric of the classroom requires the institution to address issues around student and faculty technical support, infrastructure needs (i.e. wireless), the physical learning spaces (i.e. classrooms), professional development of the faculty and staff, training of the students, course and program integration, and a robust virtual learning platform (i.e. course management system) need to be in place to effectively leverage the technology.

Even after all of these issues and services have been addressed, how do we know they are effective? Does this access to the technology actually enhance student learning? Or are those even the right questions? In addition, what are the challenges and opportunities to integrating these devices into the classroom? Assessing the impact of any educational tool or practice on a variable as complex as student achievement is always a challenging. These are hard questions and this volume provides 15 chapters of strategies and frameworks to look at mobile computing’s impact on today’s classroom.
Many educators across the nation have made a serious commitment to student success by leveraging mobile technologies. This commitment is guided by the understanding that instructional technology provides a vehicle to support innovative pedagogy and active learning strategies in the classroom. To that end, this timely volume provides a wide range of literature review, strategies, and frameworks to help educators and other educational researchers examine the benefits, challenges, and opportunities of mobile computing in education.

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REFERENCE