Foreword

The digital resource environment arising out of ongoing developments in information and communications technology (ICT) is diverse, complex, and in rapid evolution. Learners and teachers have at their disposal an ever-increasing array of both structured and unstructured digital content in a wide range of multimedia formats. The use of digital resources created by others—whether accessed via institutional repositories, virtual learning environments, library services, or the open Web—has, in recent years, become a fundamental part of educational practice. At the same time, learners and teachers are increasingly empowered to become active producers of digital content that can be widely shared. New systems and standards are being developed to support structured practitioner exchange and reuse of content-focused “learning objects” and process-focused “learning designs.” In the open environment of the Web, social networking tools and virtual worlds that connect people in communities of interest and resource exchange have become widely and freely accessible and are creating rich new possibilities for resource access and sharing for both formal and informal learning. However, the need for effective pedagogical mediation of learners’ engagement with resources presents a key challenge to designers of digital information and communication systems and tools, as it does to teachers and others—including librarians, learning technologists, and educational developers—who support learning.

As Professor Ford demonstrates in this timely and groundbreaking book, this context gives rise to an important agenda for research and development in a new interdisciplinary field—that of educational informatics. With roots in the research
traditions of education, ICT, and information science and situated at the intersection of these three disciplines, this emergent field has, up to now, lacked a coherent and integrated theoretical framework. Professor Ford’s considerable scholarly achievement in this book is to comprehensively survey the contours and parameters of the field and to provide such a framework—thereby offering an essential point of stimulus and orientation for new research and development initiatives. Distilling his own, extensive previous research in learning-related information behavior, systems, and retrieval, the book draws on the historical research traditions of each of the three contributing disciplines to provide a systematic exploration of those areas in which education; library and information science; and ICT interconnect. Following a discussion of foundational concepts, concrete examples of existing educational informatics systems are examined and important directions and issues for future research and development are explored, including issues of research methodology. The question of how personalised and autonomous Web-based learning may be facilitated through pedagogical mediation of information seeking and retrieval is at the heart of the book, and of the new research field that it delineates. The distinctive nature of educational informatics as a research field is clarified, and the numerous illustrations of the way in which it integrates the central concerns of librarianship and information science are particularly useful in differentiating it from the adjacent field of educational computing.

With this invaluable book, Professor Ford has made a major contribution to the development of a new interdisciplinary domain and enhanced collaboration among specialists in the three contributing disciplines of education, librarianship/information science, and ICT. In addition to its in-depth, state-of-the-art review, synthesis, and critique of relevant knowledge and development initiatives, the book provides a theoretical framework that will inspire and guide research and development in a domain that is crucial to learning and teaching in the “knowledge society.”

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