Foreword

It is a pleasure to provide a foreword for this volume of collected contributions from global scholars. Blended learning is especially relevant and practical in today’s contexts. However, it poses threats and challenges in addition to opening opportunities. This book helps to explore concepts and remove uncertainties in this important area. A wide range of international recognized authors, global institutions and perspectives are represented with a heavy Asian influence, especially Hong Kong. The book brings to the fore a wide range of relevant topics that are contemporary and important in the context of blended learning.

Section 1 focuses on blended learning environments with chapters supporting key issues that are beyond control: will blended learning subvert national curricula?, perspectives on blended open distance education learning and teaching in a South African context, enhancing student learning through blending varied learning and assessment experiences, and implementing and promoting blended learning in higher education institutions: comparing different approaches.

Section 2 focuses on blended learning practices with chapters supporting key issues, such as student profile and its effects on online and hybrid courses, using action research to assess student performance in traditional versus e-learning formats, examining individual students’ perceptions of curiosity utilizing a blend of online and face-to-face discussions: a qualitative study, online discussion and e-mentoring strategies in blended continuing education courses, infusing Web 2.0 tools for blended learning: virtual presentations as an alternative means of assessment, reflective practice, professional learning and educational partnerships: effecting change in classroom settings, Allegheny Women’s Biotechnology Workforce Collaborative: investing in disadvantaged populations with technology, blending classroom activities with multi-user virtual environment for at-risk primary school students in an after-school program, and comparing face-to-face with blended learning in the context of foreign language education and cross cultural communication.

Section 3 focuses on cultural differences studies with chapters supporting key issues, such as when cultures meet in blended learning—what literature tells us?, online literacy among students and faculty: a comparative study between the United States and Eastern European countries and the efficacy of security awareness programs from a cross-cultural perspective.

Section 4 focuses on cross disciplinary studies with chapters supporting key issues, such as cross disciplinary learning in distance higher education: empowerment for sustainable research prowess among professionals in the African sub-region, as well as comparing IT and non-IT faculty and students' perceptions on blended learning.

If properly designed and implemented, blended learning is a win-win-win for students, instructors, and institutions. It can boost students’ cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies, as well as their critical thinking skills. However, the role of e-mentors is critical. Blended learning demands a committed teacher team who make important decisions on curriculum choice, learning task and assessment,
and choice of appropriate technology. In many ways, it is a sustaining innovation for students, but a disruptive innovation for faculty. More flexibility and variety are required than historically encountered and there is a definite impact on institutional strategy and national policy.

Knowing what to apply (and how) with respect to blended learning is the key to success. From a technological perspective, there is a role for learning management systems and varied forms of technology support, for example wikis, blogs, Facebook, and SecondLife. Blended learning brings to the fore the best of old and new but not without challenges as noted. Teacher education is especially important. Further, inducing research competencies with an interdisciplinary need and focus is crucial. Student population learning style and motivation is also an important consideration. Disadvantaged populations pose special challenges, as well as opportunities. Much remains to be learned and applied. This book is an important step in that direction. The future for blended learning is challenging but bright.

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