Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to write the foreword to this book, Gender Issues in Learning and Working with Information Technology: Social Constructs and Cultural Contexts. One of the first projects I initiated as CEO of the Knowledge Foundation in Sweden was the research programme on Learning and IT, LearnIT, and one of the remits of that programme was to contribute to the work of the Foundation in terms of its research orientations and research output – to benefit the knowledge society which was taking shape in Sweden. Of the many research projects, masters and doctoral theses, books and conferences that came from the programme, which ended in 2008, one that might have spread its wings furthest is the research network on Gender, Learning and IT (GLIT) which Shirley Booth and Sara Goodman ran from 2001 until 2008. This network provided the core of the chapters which make up this book. However, it also made contact with other networks and researchers in the field to expand the final set of chapters with contributions about research from the UK, mainland Europe, Afghanistan and Malaysia.

The origins of GLIT were in the perceived shortcomings of the Foundation itself, when it came to policy and principles for adjudicating applications for research and development funding. Indeed, one of its later activities was a symposium at the headquarters of the Foundation in 2007 when some of the work that had been financed was presented to the whole staff to act as catalyst for the development of our own structures. Most of the work of the Foundation involves financing projects, research and development and dissemination, that are intended to contribute to the building of a viable infrastructure for Swedish development in terms of information technologies, and we have come to see that such issues as gender and equity awareness are essential aspects of a strong ethical and sustainable policy for our work.

The chapters presented here, from work carried out across the world, suggest that there are many common assumptions about such social issues, but it takes research and theorizing in the social sciences, closely allied to the technical sciences, to inform us at a deeper level than assumption. I recommend that policy makers globally should engage in reading such books as this one in order to embrace the values that can lie at the foundation of a just society even in the technologically rich future. The chapters of the book embrace one of the principles of the original LearnIT research programme: that research and development need to be aimed at three levels of society – to the individual, to groups or classes of individuals and to society as a whole. Thus the chapters take on issues from individual women making their way to higher education with the help of IT, to forming networks for women taking on a new role of computer scientist in the restrictive culture of Afghanistan, and to proposing a manifesto for e-learning that would embrace all higher education and place it on a footing of a feminist ethic.

I wish the book well, and the networks that have come together to write it all success in the future.

Madeleine Caesar
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Madeleine Cæsar was the Chief Executive of the Swedish Knowledge Foundation (The KK Foundation) 1999-2009. She was Head of Operations at the Foundation during 1995-1998 and was responsible for education and research programmes. The Knowledge Foundation was established in 1994 by the Swedish Parliament and promotes a broad use of IT in society, and supports research at Sweden’s university colleges and new universities. Cæsar is on the board of the Government owned company Rise Holding AB, which owns shares in Swedish industrial research institutes as well as also on the board of the Interactive Institute, Blekinge Institute of Technology and KTH Royal Institute of Technology’s Holding Company. Madeleine Cæsar has served during 1970-1995 at the Ministry of Industry and has been Head of Division Industrial Research and Development. 1992-1995 she was Director and Head of Division responsible for budget coordination and planning of the Ministry of Industry.

ENDNOTE

1 KK-stiftelsen, Stiftelsen för kunskaps- och kompetensutveckling.