Preface

The subject area of youth and online social practices deals with research that concerns children and youth and their use of interactive media. This research consists of a broad range of different perspectives such as quantitative and descriptive studies of what goes on in the contemporary media landscape, psychological and sociological research on online social practices, pedagogical research on formal and non-formal learning strategies, to mention a few. The aim of this book is to outline this emerging research area, evolving around young people and contemporary digital arenas. The field is growing in size, shape and complexity and the need for study is urgent. The book is a valuable contribution by providing critical perspectives and a broad overview.

The book, *Interactive Media Use and Youth: Learning, Knowledge Exchange and Behavior*, cover current areas of research on young people’s use of interactive media. The chapters represent cutting edge research with a critical perspective as a common denominator. As editors we were pleased that our call for chapters had such good results. All authors were interested in the critical perspective that we emphasized in our call. So you will find chapters presenting novel ideas, different aspects of young people’s net cultures and ground-breaking research that will be of great value to the academic society as well as to policy makers. The book aims at providing relevant theoretical frameworks and the latest empirical research findings in the area.

The target audience of the book will be composed of students, professionals and researchers working in the field of young people and the internet in various disciplines (e.g., education, library and information science, psychology, sociology, computer science, linguistics, informatics, media and communication science). The book may serve as literature at an undergraduate level and provide an overview of the area for researchers, teachers, students and policy makers. It is written for professionals as well as students who want to improve their understanding of online social practices from a young people’s perspective. *Interactive Media Use and Youth: Learning, Knowledge Exchange and Behavior* focuses on young people’s use of interactive media in general and learning, knowledge exchange and behavior in particular.

During our planning process we tried to find a way to involve young people in the making of the book. The aim was to make young people not only the objects of studies but also subjects. The idea was to find students who were willing to give their side of the story. This is not as easy as it may seem; we needed to find students who were sufficiently good at English, who were interested in reading a substantial amount of academic text and who had the time to go through a writing process together with us. And since the chapters from the adult authors were to be submitted in spring 2010, we had to ask the students to do this work during the busiest period of school. Luckily enough, there is an International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme in Umeå, Sweden, quite close to the university. Their English teacher Neil Duncan presented our idea to one of his classes and some of the students wanted to participate.
The contributors are students in the IB1 class of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme at Östra Gymnasiet in Umeå. All IB students have CAS – Creativity, Action, Service as part of their diploma, and these students volunteered their contributions here as Service – helping other people who need or ask for help – in this case by giving their time and sharing their ideas, opinions and experiences in print with us when editing this book. The students were first presented with the abstracts of every adult chapter. After reading through the abstracts some of the students wanted to read entire chapters, which at this stage were in the form of drafts. Our instructions for the writing were deliberately vague, because we wanted to avoid steering these young authors into writing in a traditional academic style. Even though there may be educational winnings from training young people in academic writing, we wanted their tone to be authentic since they were to write about their own thoughts and feelings. After the first reading of the adult chapters, we presented the students with questions like “What are your thoughts about this? Did anything particular catch your attention, either in a positive or a negative way? Do you have any ideas what to write about this?” We also pointed out that the students did not have to comment on the adults’ chapters, their chapters could just as well be separate texts. Today, we are very proud to present this way of getting young people’s views on research concerning the internet and we hope that the readers will appreciate this vantage point. We also encourage other editors and publishers to follow our example, since it has been a valuable experience for us and these students and hopefully beneficial to the book.

The theme of *Interactive Media Use and Youth: Learning, Knowledge Exchange and Behavior* is the different learning aspects of the contemporary media landscape. As researchers having young people and the internet as our focus we have slowly come to understand that learning is one of the burning issues of today. The educational system was slow in discovering that there was very much learning going on in front of the computers, be it learning not being steered by curricula. This learning, often labeled informal learning, is a recurring theme in the chapters of this book. Furthermore, even though schools discovered the potential of interactive media they often had problems incorporating these new, powerful processes into the pedagogical practice. In fact, today we can no longer call them new processes. Instead, we have to admit that it is not the technology that is new but the teachers and the educational system that have become older.

To counteract this dichotomy between old and new, the first section of this book consists of the young authors’ chapters. The students from a Swedish upper secondary school have focused mainly on three different aspects of learning: media literacy, learning styles and informal learning.

In the second section of this book the chapters focus on the context of interactive media; what does the setting for learning, knowledge exchange and behavior look like? What approaches can we take on to manage learning today? The opening chapter in this section is the editors’ own, *Youth and Contemporary Learning*. The chapter problematizes the concept of learning and asks if and in what ways contemporary media have influenced the processes and outcomes of learning. We also pose the question of how the educational system may exploit and benefit from this. In the next chapter Regina Kaplan-Rakowski and David Rakowski give us an overview on how modern technology has been influencing the learning styles of the young of today. Their chapter *Educational Technologies for the Neomillennial Generation* gives a description of the neomillenial learner and outline why technological changes are likely to influence educational practices for them, as well as how these changes fit in the broader context of educational theory. This particular chapter has deeply inspired our student authors as the reader will see in the first section. To conclude this opening section, *School in the Knowledge Society – a Local Global School* by Birgitte Holm Sørensen and Karin Levinsen report findings from a study of schools that proactively
meet the challenges for teaching and learning. The findings are then extrapolated into a vision of the future local global school in the knowledge society.

The third section in this volume zooms in on the perspective of learning in the individual’s perspective. This does not in any way mean that the individual learners are on their own, which the reader will become very aware of. In fact, the opening chapter of this section focuses on collaborative learning among young people. In his chapter *Collective Problem-Solving and Informal Learning in Networked Publics. Reading Vlogging Networks on YouTube as Knowledge Communities*, Simon Lindgren focuses on community aspects of video blogging on YouTube. Lindgren stresses the learning aspects of this activity, an aspect that may be hidden to many outside observers. Along the same lines, collaborative processes, Christina Olin-Scheller and Patrik Wikström write about informal learning settings such as fan fiction sites, and their relations to teaching and learning within formal learning settings. In their chapter *Literacies on the Web. Co-production of Literary Texts on Fan Fiction Sites* the authors discuss learning processes connected to the development of literacies. Following this, Natalie Wakefield’s chapter discusses the related issue of *Media Literacy Education*. The author points out that although curricula predominantly focus on reading and writing, educators need to reach beyond basic learning skills and include the development of the complete individual. Serving as a bridge to the next section, the last chapter on this theme is Kathy Sanford’s and Liz Merkel’s chapter *Emergent/See: Viewing Adolescents’ Video Game Creation Through an Emergent Framework*. The authors studied a class where students created their own video games as a way to learn programming. To understand the processes, an emergence theory is introduced. The theory outlines how students’ understandings and skills can be used to provide more meaningful learning experiences in a school setting.

Zooming in further on the learning and teaching practice, the fourth section focuses on what once was called the classroom. This is perhaps not always a suitable a term today when learning environments in most cases reach far beyond the walls of the school building. Opening this section, Maria Luisa Zorrilla Abascal writes about media convergence of educational content. Her chapter *BBC Schools Beyond the TV Set: Educational Media Convergence in the Classroom* presents an enquiry into how educational television and related websites converge in an era in which the boundaries between different media are disappearing. In their chapter on how blogs may be used in language studies, Neriko Doerr and Shinji Sato stress the importance of recognizing the existence of relations of dominance in online settings. Their chapter *The Modes of Governmentality in Language Education: Blog Activities in a Japanese-as-a-Foreign-Language Classroom* examines language studies. This examination is carried out with a power relations’ perspective and the authors discuss the validity of incorporating blog activities in language education classes as an equalizing practice. Closing this section, Wu Liwei, Fan Yihong and Yang Sujuan investigate learning styles and learning strategies in their chapter *Designing Web-Facilitated Learning Strategy Guidance System: Based on Young Learners’ Learning Styles*. The authors’ research aims at improving young learners’ learning competence and effectiveness. In this process, the authors developed a Web-Facilitated Learning Strategy Guidance System (WFLSGS).

The final section focuses on society in a very general sense; what challenges do we face because of the fact that interactive media use is changing the conditions for learning, knowledge exchange and behavior? Opening this section, Henry Milner discusses obstacles that remain to be dealt with before the internet could become a source of political information for everyone. In his chapter *Political Dropouts and the Internet Generation* Milner stresses that even though citizens are expected to exercise independent, informed judgments in order to make use of the internet as a source of political information, the skills needed to do this are very unequally distributed. Touching on the same subject, Sheila Zimic points out
that the ability to participate in, and thus feel like a part of, the information society is related to digital skills, self-efficacy and relations to technology. In her chapter *Predicting the Participation in Information Society*, Zimic gives a report of a study on Swedish young people’s perceived feeling of participation. In the next chapter, *African Art Students and Digital Learning*, Paula Uimonen investigates the development of digital media skills. Focusing on social and cultural aspects of digital learning, the concept hybrid media engagements is introduced to capture the creative ways in which African art students overcome limitations in infrastructure, while exploring new forms of cultural production. The closing chapter of this section and in fact the entire book is Yang Sujuan’s and Fan Yihong’s *Learning Competence for Youth in Digital Lifelong Learning Society*. This chapter aims at identifying challenges and opportunities of learning in a rapidly changing media landscape, and at proposing a theoretical framework of classifying potentially useful learning competences for young people in a contemporary learning setting.

Altogether, the different chapters represent many of the joys and troubles that are part and parcel of contemporary learning and we hope that you will have much use of, and much pleasure from reading them.

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