The world of online or cyber education is approaching a cross-roads. In one direction is the openness and flexibility of a networked, connected, and user-empowered ecology and in the other, an institutionally-based set of programs that harness the power of technology and control its use and distribution. In this book, co-authored by Bobbe Baggio and Yoany Beldarrain, three critical factors associated with this approaching threshold are addressed: anonymity, identity, and authenticity.

In the first section, anonymity is approached from four different perspectives. The first chapter specifically focuses on the perennial question “who are we when we go online?” and addresses issues of collaboration, satisfaction, and learning as emergent outcomes from the level of trust of both the technology and people. The second factor considered is that of ethical behaviour in terms of our privacy, our integrity, and our right to free speech. Arguing for the responsibility of each and every stakeholder in ethical behaviour, the authors highlight the importance of understanding the environment within which we interact. The third chapter continues the focus on ethics through an analysis of intellectual property, and whether the laws are good enough (or perhaps current enough) to deal with the interchange of information that arises through social networking, connectivity, and information access. Is it a case of more stringent controls on content ownership, or recognising the added-value that networked communities can add to existing content. The fourth chapter in this initial section examines e-governance and the effectiveness of governance and management of online institutions in connected, networked environments.

The second section examines identity, highlighting another four factors that impact on the way we teach and learning within digitally-mediated educational environments. The initial examination addresses the risks inherent with data-security and profiling, which appear to align with recent political moves to monitor as much personal data as possible. For the teacher and student, the question arises as to how much information is needed, how much should be stored, and who should have access. Is this information a threat to security, or a doorway to better understanding teaching and learning? Having focused on anonymity in Section 1, the second chapter addresses community and self – what personal and social attributes might positively influence the online communities that emerge from online encounters? Whether we can have both ano-
nymity and community is a question that remains open to debate! The third chapter addresses a very contentious issue, academic integrity. Why do students supposedly cheat and plagiarise so much? Is it the responsibility of the educator to monitor and punish, or might the educational design look to strategies and assessment where cheating becomes almost impossible. The identity section rounds out the second section, with the introduction of the pyjama effect, a valuable analysis of the blurring between work and play, and the options to study anytime, anywhere.

Section 3 of the text examines the applications of digitally-mediated teaching and learning, and the directions needed if we are to fully realise the potential of the technology. Underlying each of the four chapters is the importance of a learner-centred ethos, where the design of educational environments and resources do not focus primarily on the content, but rather on the activities the student will need to do to make sense of that content. Not only does this approach shift the power-base form teacher to learner, but also the nature of courses – from information transmission to outcome-based. The first chapter addresses this paradigm shift through an analysis of the importance of active learning, which is extended in the second chapter by a detailed exposition of what makes learning authentic and the importance of creating learning environments where students are actively engaged with problems or issues situated within the context in which they are likely to apply their learning. The final two chapters address two emerging environments in which the potential of cyber education is likely to be realised – virtual worlds and games. Rather than classrooms where the students are asked to analyse a set piece of content, the alternative is to allow students to participate and engage in interactions with a range of peers and teachers to achieve their personal learning goals.

When we reach the crossroads, we will have encountered each of the factors addressed in this diverse, yet focused text. What directional choices we make is yet to be seen. While taking account of anonymity, security, and identity, the value of cyber education is that the learning tasks can be structured to meet the individual and contextual needs of the learner, and through that, structuring the learners and teachers can engage in trustworthy, productive partnerships.

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