The focus of this edited volume is on informal learning. As one of the authors in this volume states, more and more adults are pursuing informal learning, especially in recent years. Because of this increased prevalence of informal learning, Thomas and Brown (2011) suggest the way we think about education needs to shift. Learning does not only happen in classrooms, but also occurs by sharing stories and engaging in problem solving together.

When I was an instructional designer in a corporate setting, I realized that formal classrooms are not very effective environments for learning. Of course, people do learn something when they finish a course or training class, but the skills learned and knowledge obtained are not retained over a long period of time unless the new skills and knowledge are used immediately. Instead, I noticed that people learn and retain knowledge best when they work on a task *in situ*, share what they have experienced, and learn from each other. Later, I discovered that this concept has a name—it is called communities of practice.

Although having face-to-face communities of practice is useful, they tend to remain small and local. Organizations and professional associations are increasingly examining the potential of online communication networks to enable members to share knowledge and engage in continuous professional development without the limit of physical spaces. Lately, informal learning through participation in online communities of practice is enhanced with the advent of social networking sites such as Facebook, Google+, and Twitter. People are becoming more comfortable with connecting with others socially and professionally online than ever before. In this sense, this volume offers guidance to take advantage of informal learning happening everywhere.

The volume’s lead editor, Vanessa Dennen, has been a prolific author in the field of instructional technology. Her work touches on various aspects of online learning and online communities of practice. In fact, I collaborated with her on a paper in 2000 when we were both graduate students. Since then, technologies have changed, but the importance of understanding different learning prospects has not changed.

Vanessa has studied communities of practice with blog users and, more recently, with professionals using Twitter, whereas I studied the differences between online and face-to-face communities of practice (Hara, 2009). Although our approaches differ, we are both fascinated by the opportunities to examine online informal learning to support professional development. Vanessa is one of the leading authors in this area and is most qualified to edit this collection of articles. Her co-editor, Jennifer Myers, is a doctoral candidate who studies self-regulated learning among bloggers and is a promising young scholar in this area.
This volume covers a wide range of tools that support professional development and informal learning such as pervasive e-mail, mobile devices, and video conferencing technologies, and Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, wikis, and Twitter. Many of the contributors to this volume provide useful examples of understanding how these technologies facilitate informal learning that leads to professional development. I have noticed books like this are inclined to fall into a trap of being technologically utopian (Kling, 1994), meaning that they do not attempt to go deeper than simply advocating new technologies for learning. However, all of the contributions in this volume consist of empirically supported studies. I was especially impressed that topics such as privacy and confidentiality are explicitly addressed. For example, one of the chapters offers useful recommendations for both organizations and individuals to deal with issues related to privacy, confidentiality, and compliance when using Web 2.0 technologies.

The following chapters provide an insightful perspective on how social networks can support informal learning and professional development in classrooms, online communities, and corporate settings. This is the go-to book for those who are interested in better understanding how learning experiences in informal settings—whether it is teachers sharing their thoughts and emotions on blogs or professionals sharing contextual knowledge via Twitter—can be cultivated and will sometimes trump formal learning environments.

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