Preface

INTRODUCTION

The book, *Technology Use and Research Approaches for Community Education and Professional Development*, investigates how technology is impacting community education and professional development in a host of academic and workplace settings. The role of information technology is also being explored and its significance in reshaping learning organizations and workplaces across the globe. As stated by Bryan and Musgrove (2003):

*Educators are faced with challenging times filled with dwindling resources, proliferation of information, complex systems of legalities and infrastructures, and an even more complex and diverse customer base. Today’s educator is part of a global learning community that fluctuates at exponential rates. No one person in this educational arena can afford to operate in a vacuum, nor can any one person be expected to have all the answers to all the learning or management-related problems or issues. To be informed and knowledgeable the educator of tomorrow must serve as a knowledge broker and operate as a part of a larger consortium of learners to cope with the amount of information that will be available. The ability to locate information at a moment’s notice that is relevant to the immediate educational climate and to work with groups separated by both time and space has become a necessity* (p. 1).

Chapters will address research regarding the advantages and disadvantages of using online learning, blended learning, and enhanced face-to-face learning through the technologies, on the learners and the learners’ environments. Questions will be asked as to the impact of varied learning styles, modes of communication, and information overload with the technologies themselves in our ever-changing environment. Authors will explore how our need to select, summarize, sort, and assess information may be evolving based on the devices or methodology applied and how the bombardment of information may require a new management system and possibly new learning systems that are not tied to the agrarian calendar or the traditional twenty-four hour clock to work, play, learn, and rest.

Select chapters will address readiness principles, ethics, accessibility, and social justice as it relates to the use of technology. Questions will be raised: Are the needs of the disenfranchised, non-exposed-to-technology individual across the continents being addressed in the learning environments or in the professional arenas? Are differences in race, gender, access, age, literacy levels, being multiplied as the technology usage increases? Does the device one uses, or does not use, to be technologically “with-it” presuppose one to a digital class stratum? Is social isolation becoming a reality as the technology usage increases or is the reverse occurring? Are the various social media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, and
YouTube, moving us all to a more level playing field where we can impact not only our own lives but those across the globe? Is technology causing a power paradigm shift from providers to users? Are the technocrats becoming our “new bosses”?

Select chapters will showcase research findings regarding best practices principles in online instruction and technology-rich environments. Research will be included that reflects what strategies to use and how those strategies differ from one setting to another (e.g., emergency preparedness vs. a non-profit organization vs. a school setting), the specific tools or devices to use, and when these should be introduced. The methodology, both qualitative and quantitative, that has been used in the varied community education and professional development settings will be shared as well.

Chapters also explore: a) what new careers may be evolving based on the technology use that have not even been imagined; b) what perils we may expect or predict from the technology usage (e.g., information overload that can bring stress and require higher and higher copying skills, proliferations of high skilled positions with accompanying job losses for individuals with minimal technical skills, changes in formal language, crimes such as identify theft that have become more and more sophisticated); and c) what promise the technology may offer to offset the perils.

The various authors in this book present how their use of the information technologies and the research related to those tools enhance community education or professional development, and even community development. Please note that authors are not limited to one continent, one viewpoint, or one field of study. The authors, in varied ways and through various lenses, support the tenets of community education. In this book, community education:

...is a philosophical concept that promotes lifelong learning and community building activities while emphasizing an expanded role for public education and other human service organizations in meeting the needs of communities and improving the quality of life for all. Community Education is a way for people to enhance their lives and communities through learning and collaboration. Community Education emphasizes increased involvement of parents, businesses, and community members with the local public (or even private) school system and lifelong learning while providing opportunities for local (and international) community members, schools, and other organizations to become partners in addressing educational and community concerns (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, p. 1).

The relationship between the concept of community education and information technologies are illustrated through the chapters.

OBJECTIVE OF THE BOOK

The book, Technology Use and Research Approaches for Community Education and Professional Development, is authored by leading experts and offers an in-depth description of empirical research and findings related to community education and professional development worldwide. Additionally, this volume discusses how technology impacts community education and professional development in a host of disciplines.

Topics in this book address: a) the role of information communication technologies and community education, professional development, learning organizations, and workplaces across the globe; b) the nu-
ances of online learning, blended learning, and face-to-face learning via technologies; c) various modes of communication and their impact on information and cognitive overload; d) how new management and learning systems are needed to support the new technologies; e) discussions about race, gender, access, age, literacy levels in relation to the use of technology; f) how social media tools and social isolation can impact research needed in varied disciplines (Martin, 2012); g) views of the new power paradigm shift through the technologies in a host of career areas and how these shifts can impact workplace ethics, social capital, and social justice; and h) the new career paths that have not even been imagined in emergency preparedness, medical advances, gaming, artificial intelligence, and lifelong learning.

The various authors in this book present how their use of the information technologies and the research related to those tools enhance community education, professional development, and community development. The authors are not limited to one continent in sharing these views or limited to one discipline. The authors are from a host of disciplines including health care, online mathematics, organizational learning, public schools, community and civic organizations, emergency management settings, medical schools, internet banking, literacy and workforce readiness programs, and higher education. The authors are also not confined to geographic boundaries and do represent movement to a global perspective for community education:

We live in a global community, where events that shape our lives are as likely to occur in the Mideast as they are next door. Continued dependence on an obsolete model does not give us the resources to meet the challenges of living in a global community. The need for community educators to raise issues, promote partnerships, and meet challenges is greater now than ever, but we must have new and creative ways to deal with the complexity of our world.

The goal is to redefine “community” so that it can address the multitude of needs people confront daily. This redefinition must include a willingness to form communities based on interest, need, and commonality that is not bounded by location, distance, or time. This goal is achievable through technology.

Technology continues to transform every aspect of our lives, so it is not surprising that it can change the meaning of “community” . . . . Community becomes the choices we make in connecting with other human beings, no longer limited by geographic or temporal boundaries (Turner, 1991, p. 60).

THE INTEGRATION OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION

In 1991, Larry Horyna and Larry Decker, a Charles Stewart Mott Eminent Scholar, envisioned a set of community education principles for the National Coalition for Community Education. The principles, cited at http://dpi.wi.gov/fscp/ceprin.html, were: a) self-determination; b) self-help; c) leadership development; d) localization; e) integrated delivery of services; f) maximum use of resources; g) inclusiveness; h) responsiveness; and i) lifelong learning (Horyna & Decker, 1991). The principles apply to the needs of programs and processes in today’s world and suggest we all need to partner to address community concerns. Each of the principles presented can be directly supported using the various technologies that are present today.

Even though the principles are still significant in today’s world, the way in which the principles may have to be employed have morphed considerably. Our “connected” world now evolves at exponential
speeds. Not only is the information exploding, but how the information is being exchanged has drastically changed and will continue to do so. Today’s population is simultaneously using their phones while surfing the Internet, answering emails, visiting websites while also watching television and playing games on various digital devices (Smith & Boyles, 2012). You only have to sit for a few minutes in any crowded space and see a proliferation of tools and techniques that are being used to be “connected.”

With our Twitter accounts and Hoot Suite, we can each tell thousands of individuals in the click of 140 characters where we are, what we are doing, and why they should be interested. The “community” that can exist through these exchanges has not been refined or researched and offers rich opportunities for a new form of education directed at a new kind of learner.

Imagine how Charles Stewart Mott, Frank Manley, and other early community educators could have used the technology tools to marshal the communities around educational and community development. Can you see them using their Facebook accounts or LinkedIn as global tools for communication, as means to solve problems, to market services and create sense of community, to alter employment trends or alter lives?

ROLE OF THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

Information technologies provide service and program functions, including communication, and information retrieval useful in the administration of organizations worldwide and increasingly in the management of our everyday lives. Through information technologies, individuals stay connected to their families, communities, and cultures. Corporations remain connected to their constituencies to stay ahead of their competitors. Governments are able to function in a global economy.

Information technologies are being used by people of all walks of life to formulate solutions to problem scenarios. Virtual learning teams across the globe operate on intranets in all types of hierarchical and matrix organizations. These learning communities are made possible through Virtual Learning Teams (VLTs) using a metamorphosis of group calendars, listservs, group discussion boards, and a host of social media tools—Twitter, blogs, Facebook, and the lists goes on and on.

Information technologies are also being used by individuals of all ages to seek education, often in virtual settings. Ultimately, the same skills used in seeking one’s education at any level may translate into skills needed to: a) conduct research and/or find employment; b) to pursue avocations, maximize everyday living, and function as a productive citizen; or c) to assist others in their life as parents, friends, or caregivers. As individuals gain the skills to secure the latest information through public documents, electronic libraries and journals, and the Internet, they become empowered as citizens in their world.

Information technology can also serve as an aid for us to become more human and more humane. We can create careers, find our soul mates, pursue leisure pursuits, and become humanitarians on a grand scale. Through the various tools, we can market ourselves, our talents, our organizations, and our platform of beliefs. However, with all the potential that information technologies bring there are caution throughout the publication as to how we must remain vigilant in the use of the technologies and the role access can play.

As learners, educators, business owners, and governmental entities, the information technologies are invaluable as we unearth the various layers of data found in public documents and electronic libraries and journals. With electronic surveys, we can capture data, analyze and report using more and more engaging tools that combine databases, spreadsheets, and statistical modeling tools with voice, animation, Second Life formats, and avatars.
We can extend our education to a 24/7 format through listservs, email, group discussion boards, online newsletters, blogs, vlogs, wikis, and the list goes on and on—and most of the information is readily accessible on our phones. Lifelong learning has become a survival skill for not only traditional school-aged youth but for pre-school, young adults, and seniors (Thornburg, 1991, p. 106). Our day-to-day lives require access to the Internet to get permission to drive, to hunt or fish, to vote, to secure governmental services, or to obtain legal information.

However, this education, enhanced through information technologies, can also have a greater impact on the vibrancy of communities. We know from our research:

1. Communities are better served by a literate citizenry (Talking Page Literacy Organization, 2007).
2. Education is a direct predictor of individuals electing to pursue more or continued education (Kasworm, Rose, & Ross-Gordon, 2010).
3. The less schooling one has generally impacts the income the person will earn in a lifetime (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009; Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 2002).
4. Individuals with lower levels of education reportedly experience more negative consequences of a life, victims of crime, more health-related problems, higher levels of homelessness, or poor standards of housing (Brown, 2012).
5. Wife and child abuse issues, health maladies due to lack of nutrition or other related problems, poorer diets are generally more evident in homes with high levels of illiteracy (Brown, 2012).

Worldwide there has been a shift to a knowledge-based economy where earnings are associated with one’s ability to search and retrieve information. People in our communities are being asked to think, find information, and use that information rather than produce goods and services. The proliferation of information will continue to drive the need for knowledge brokers in all our communities worldwide. As we move more and more into Second Life domains, augmented lives, and virtual worlds, the communities we serve will require more advanced education to meet the needs of the citizenry we serve (Mancuso, Chlup, & McWhorter, 2010).

The educators that serve the various communities must be users of the technology to guide the citizens of tomorrow. Community educators must assume the role of knowledge brokers. They must become avid researchers to identify what works and does not work for a myriad of learners. For this to occur, learning communities need to be created where the focus is on the relationships, the shared ideals, and the strong culture (Senge, 1990; Dufour & Eaker, 1998). We need to turn our communities into professional learning communities. As stated by Eaker (2002), we need to:

1. Acknowledge collaboration,
2. Know the professional learning community concepts,
3. Create a shared mission, vision, and values,
4. Focus and communicate a mission of student learning,
5. Visualize the school as a school of excellence,
6. Implement the vision statement,
7. Value the vision statement,
8. Develop the short-term and long-term processes,
9. Use research-based and data-driven plans, and
10. Remember that a professional learning community is a cyclical process.
As you visit the chapters of this book, you will see that each of the authors in his or her own way has addressed many of the elements needed for a professional learning community and comprehends the need to use all the resources available, including the information technologies, to accomplish that end.

REFERENCES


