Foreword

Reviewing this first volume reminded me of my initial contact with educational technology in the late 1970s. It was the time of mainframes (including international, synchronous communications), and subscription dial-up services at 30cps, the telephone handset fitting snugly into rubber modules. It was also a time without mobile phones, without the Internet, and without personal computers, and it was a time when distance education meant receiving and transmitting quantities of paper through the postal system.

How much has changed in those 30-plus years! Yet the more things change, the more they remain the same. This volume focuses on the global issues facing distance education, and my first experience with being global was in 1979, sitting in a motel in the outskirts of Melbourne, a PLATO terminal plugged into a phone line, and conversing in real-time with colleagues in Minneapolis—even sharing screens on the touch-sensitive terminal.

Despite my personal adventures with global education beginning over 30 years ago, education (whether it be online, distance, blended, or face-to-face) continues to shift so much that addressing global issues in our field is incredibly timely. In essence, the technology many of us now take for granted has broken down many (but not all) of the barriers of distance, creating new communities founded on intellectual commonality rather than geographic co-location. While this shift is by no means new, the critical issue is that it is changing the face of education.

Professionally, and because of global digital communications, I have clients and students in both Australasia and the United States. While I have the good fortune to live in a beautiful part of Australia, my workday is a constant exchange of communications and Skype discussions with people from all parts of the globe. As I noted, this form of interaction was what introduced me to the field many years ago, and so it is not “new”; however, it is real enough that we no longer need to be tied to one place to practice distance education.

Interestingly, the word distance is somewhat confusing because there are people who I interact with who are geographically distant but educationally close, and those who are co-located whom I rarely see or talk to! The choices of where, when, and how we teach and learn are numerous and evolving daily. It is, therefore, incumbent upon us as practitioners in the field of distance education to understand the new pedagogical dynamics that are emerging as more and more people, institutions, and communities link to the global networks of social, formal, and informal knowledge.

Encapsulated in this volume are chapters that engage with the issues faced by our community—borderless education, equity, cross-cultural communication, partnerships, and part-time work. Together these narratives weave a pattern of 21st century distance education, where we must continually ask, distant from what or where or who?
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