Preface

Contemporary business practices, in any field or industry, are characterized by constant change and advancement. The organization that is not continuously striving to improve the speed, accuracy, and effectiveness of their processes is the organization that will be left behind. Subsequently, employees must keep up with the latest advances in technologies, pedagogies, and best practices in order to further their careers and secure the best possible employment opportunities. To accommodate this growing need, universities offer programs for adult and non-traditional students, curricula tailored to the unique situation of the adult learner. This book presents a compilation of some of the latest research in this field, with chapters covering topics ranging from e-learning to teacher education and workplace education to self-directed learning.

Chapter 1, “A Systematic Map of Evaluation Criteria Applicable for Evaluating E-Portfolio Systems” by Gary McKenna and Gavin Baxter, examines the literature on evaluation methods within e-learning with respect to their applicability to evaluate e-portfolio systems within higher education as evaluation criteria for reviewing e-portfolio provision does not currently exist in the literature. The approach taken was to initiate two extensive literature searches and reviews. The first search was undertaken in 2009 involved reviewing over 600 articles by abstract dating from 1995 to 2010 to develop evaluation criteria suitable for Blackboard LMS e-portfolio systems evaluation. The second search undertaken in 2013 involved extending the search criteria to include further terminology and databases and returned over 4107 articles which were read by title and abstract dating from 2009 to 2013, in order to systematically map evaluation methods used within e-learning to assess their quality and applicability for evaluating e-portfolio systems. The implications of the research undertaken provide a starting-point for further research into the development of robust e-portfolio evaluation models and frameworks. The lack of evidence uncovered in the 2009 and 2013 searches of the literature justify the need for further research into the design, development and testing of evaluation methods for the evaluation of e-portfolio systems.

Next, Joachim Sturberg discusses “Medical Education: The Need for an Interconnected, Person-Centred, Health-Focused Approach.” Given the needs of the people to address their subjective well-being of health, illness, and disease rather than merely an underlying less frequent disease, humanities, supported by sciences and technology, should rightly be the driver of the healthcare system. Systems require a core driver, or core value, to function, and it is the loss of the patient-centred health-focused core value underpinning the healing professions that is ultimately failing patients. Hence health professional schools must foster an appreciation of the experience of health and illness as the basis for care (and at times cure), and need to emerge their students in sharing these experiences with their patients. Only then will we educate a new generation of colleagues capable of delivering patient-centred health-focused medical care that meets the expectations of individuals and communities.
The following chapter, “Educational Paradigm Change and Fostering Sustainable Success of Healthcare Organization with the Aid of Web-Based Interactive Training” by Kristina Zgodavová and Aleš Bourek, focuses on necessary improvement of existing education process and presents comprehensive insight into the methodology of acquiring skills for managing healthcare organization for sustained success through interactive WEB based training with special attention to simulations in virtual learning environment. We describe functions and properties of the IMPROHEALTH® portal, as well as services pertaining to integrated e-Learning, e-Implementation of the specific management system with the added bonus of role play simulation, e-Improvement of provided healthcare services, and present the way how knowledge accumulated can be glossary-based learning presented in the form of a WEB-log book. Moreover, purpose of this chapter is seen in addressing the obtained experience with regards to the utilization of information and communication technologies among the knowledgeable community. It is intended for professional educators involved in improvement activities of managing healthcare organizations, in e-Health management, but also for all people keen on modern digital ways of caring about their health status and on improving their sense of well-being, further supported by the so-called e-Laboratory. Several innovative approaches augmenting the possibilities of traditional e-Learning options are presented.

“Faculty and Chair Perceptions and Ratings about System-Wide Assessments in the Higher Colleges of Technology” by Matthew A. Robby examines use of System-wide Assessments (SWAs) in the Higher Colleges of Technology of the United Arab Emirates. These end of course assessments were designed to ensure consistency of standards, to measure student learning outcomes, and to improve the quality and effectiveness of instruction, courses, and programs. The authors review literature highlighting the importance of outcome assessments, the relevant issues and trends in higher education, the challenges with implementation, and the type of support necessary for enhancing best practices. The paper primarily describes the design and use of SWAs among the 17 Federal Colleges. It summarizes 2013 survey findings from 232 randomly selected respondents about the level of satisfaction and agreement among faculty and academic chairs about the purpose, process, value, and impact of SWAs. Findings identify what is perceived to be working well including the challenges and issues to ameliorate to promote continuous improvement in SWAs. From experiences and research findings, recommendations are offered for applying best practices and enhancing the effectiveness of assessments in higher education.

Chapter 5, “Online Interest Groups for Graduate Students: Benefit or Burden?” by Sherri Melrose and Helen Ewing extends discussion of an educational innovation project where faculty (the present authors and associates) provided virtual gathering spaces (Clinical Interest Groups) for online health professions students to congregate. Unlike gathering spaces offered in discrete courses, the non-graded Clinical Interest Groups were open to all students in the nursing faculty’s graduate programs. Getzlaf, Melrose, Moore, Ewing, Fedorchuk and Route-Wood (2012) found that students believed the virtual gathering spaces offered a valuable place where learners could discuss common interests and support one another. However, findings also revealed that participation in the groups was limited due to competing demands on students’ time from other commitments. As online learning programs become commonplace, and as online social networking spaces also increase in popularity and usage, educators must consider both the benefit and the burden of inviting professional learners to participate in supplemental activities such as online interest groups. Areas for future research are suggested.

Anne S. Koch and Joseph C. Kush then discuss “The Infusion of Technology into Teacher Education Programs.” Technology integration refers to the use of technological tools in the classroom with an understanding of its relationship to pedagogy. It is more than just how software and hardware work as ancillary components to teaching. Technology integration is part of the pedagogical process and in-
structional delivery of a set curriculum. With technology integration, a teacher will use technology as a tool to promote and extend student learning on an everyday basis. Digital technology is so prevalent in our society that we often forget that it even exists. Current education trends imply that effective learning environments are places where an array of different technology devices, software and services are available for students to learn. Seemingly, when students and teachers have instant access to a variety of technology, learning can be increased. Throughout this chapter, student achievement, the differentiation of instruction and 21st Century Skills will be examined along with their relationship to the use of technology in an educational setting. Characteristics of highly qualified teachers will also be examined from multiple standpoints within our educational system. Standards from INTASC, NCATE, NCTAF and NCLB, point to the importance of the university faculty and quality teacher education programs to support the needs of preservice teachers. In addition, the joining of business and education across our nation and the world to infuse technology into education has shown positive results. This merger between business and education exemplifies the need for the acquisition of 21st century skills needed for all students to be a literate part of the 21st century workforce.

Although Westerners have used over 200 terms to describe self-directed learning (SDL), few Western scholars realize that educators in Confucius heritage cultures (CHC) have successfully promoted and implemented SDL. In those cultures, self-directed learning is considered the most single popular theory in teaching and learning. For decades, American educators have argued that American students do not compare with students from other industrialized countries. In “The Single Most Popular Theory: Self-Directed Learning as an Effective Adult Learning Model,” Victor C. X. Wang and Patricia Cranton propose that for learners in the Western cultures, especially in the United States to catch up with learners in other industrialized nations including newly emerged China and India, SDL must be promoted and implemented at all levels of education, not only within adult education. Self-directed learning is the single most popular model that helps learners master skills for the sake of competency development. The goal in learning is to achieve the changed status on the part of learners or “perspective transformation.” Unless students are learning in a self-directed manner, it may be difficult to foster transformative learning; SDL and transformative learning are intertwined.

Chapter 8, “Creating an Authentic Space for a Private and Public Self Through E-Portfolios” by Simon Lygo-Baker and Stylianos Hatzipanagos, reports work that investigated the use of e-portfolios developed by teaching practitioners as part of an award bearing academic development programme in the UK. The project aimed to enable teaching practitioners to access and gain familiarity with pedagogically sound e-portfolio opportunities. The project was designed to foster a reflective approach, promote critical thinking focused on learning and teaching and enhance continuing professional development. The outcomes of this project are discussed in terms of an appreciation of e-assessment by the teaching practitioners involved, recommendations for an e-portfolio environment that uses technology enhanced learning resources to foster a reflective approach that can enable and enhance continuous professional development for academic staff.

The primary purpose of the next chapter, “Newly Created Heterogeneous Groups: The Time to Adjust to Significant Race and/or Gender Differences” by Theodore E. Davis, Jr., is to investigate the influence of racial and gender diversity on group process and problem solving in an academic setting. The importance of this dynamic is its value in preparing students for the workplace. The supposition is if heterogeneous groups had enough time to resolve group process conflicts, they could significantly increase their performance on group tasks (Davis 2012). Moreover, their later performance on tasks should exceed the performance of the homogeneous groups (Davis 2012). However, how much time, as well as
tasks, does it take heterogeneous groups to start to exceed the performance of the homogenous groups? Data for the study was collected from upper-level undergraduate male and female students, registered in a sixteen-week business course taught by one instructor, at a large university in a metropolitan city in the northeastern United States. There were five racially mixed groups of seven members in the four sections of the course. During this period, group members met frequently for a series of case analyses. Only balanced heterogeneous groups significantly enhanced their groups’ performance on complicated problem-solving tasks over time. They exceeded the performance of all homogeneous groups, except that of the black American female homogeneous groups. Ultimately, the academic grades of the balanced heterogeneous groups as well as their individual members were in the upper half of all grades issued.

In chapter 10, Revathi Viswanathan explores “Mobile Devices as Effective Language Training Tools of Digital Era.” Students of this digital era are proficient users of various gadgets and it is the responsibility of language teachers to tap that expertise for facilitating learning beyond the classroom. Teachers can offer training to enhance students’ language skills with the help of mobile devices through which modules could be shared. It helps students to get adequate practice in using the language skills. A short study was conducted recently by the author with a few engineering students who received training in business English through mobile devices and in this article she throws more light on the current study. It must be stated that this study was a continuation of the pilot study conducted, in which students were encouraged to record and share their presentations through mobile devices.

The following chapter by Ying-Chen Lee and Nobuyoshi Terashima defines “An Extenics-Based Learning Performance Evaluation Scheme in Distance Learning.” In recent years, web-based learning has become one of the major applications of the internet. For web-based learning, it is important to design an intelligent curriculum website for students and to make teachers understand the learning situation of each student in order to provide adequate auxiliary learning materials to individual students. Seven factors, including learning behaviors, were assumed to affect the learning performance of students. These assumptions have been analyzed to determine their effectiveness, and five factors, the degree of interest in the course, the degree of familiarity with the computer, the number of web pages browsed, the length of the course content, and the degree of difficulty of the course content are selected for evaluating the learning performance of students. In our research, a Moodle-based curriculum website was established as the experimental platform to record students’ learning behaviors for analysis. By applying the exenics engineering method, a learning performance evaluation scheme has been proposed to generate an evaluated learning performance of individual students for instructors’ reference. Thus, according to the evaluated learning performance, instructors can provide students with more adequate learning materials in accordance with individual students’ learning performance.

With support from the research literature, chapter 12, “Virtual Prowess: The Keys to Effective Virtual Leadership” by Shelly R. Roy, argues that in order to lead effectively in virtual environments, the leaders of virtual teams (VTs) need (A) relationship building skills, which include (1) trust, (2) embracing diversity, (3) fostering a team spirit, and the ability to (4) motivate team members. The leaders of VTs must also possess (B) technical skills, which include the ability to use (1) video conferencing software, (2) instant messaging (IM) and chatroom software, (3) e-mail, (4) virtual worlds and avatars, and (5) be able to communicate effectively. In addition, leaders of VTs must use their (C) leadership skills and lead with (1) trait emotional intelligence, (2) be able to create an open and supportive environment, (3) lead by example, and (4) resolve conflicts. These skills, as well as their practical applications, merit further discussion in the subsequent paragraphs.
Finally, Tung-Cheng Lin concludes this book with the chapter “Combining the TAM and IS Success Models to Validate E-Learning System Satisfaction and Continuance Intention.” Many e-learning studies have evaluated learning attitudes and behaviors, based on TAM. However, a successful e-learning system (ELS) should take both system and information quality into account by applying ISM developed by Delone and McLean. In addition, the acceptance for information system depends on the perceived usefulness and ease of use according to TAM. This research combines TAM with ISM by introducing system quality, quality of platform information, and course information as an antecedent of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. These factors are crucial for understanding users’ intention to continue their use of ELS. The research model was examined with data collected from 164 practicing 412 students with ELS experiences. The results indicated that system quality, platform information, and course information had significantly positive effect on user satisfaction and their intention to use ELS continuously.

In all, the chapters in this book will be useful for students, academics, and professionals alike in their efforts to further their own education and the education and training of their employees.

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