Preface

Whatever the reason, possibly to gain an edge in a challenging job market, students today are choosing to make the extra effort required to earn the top grade. Instead of the usual “read and reply” Web-course fare, students are choosing assignments with more difficult tasks of conducting an original experiment, running an original survey, or conducting a structured interview. Invariably their choice of platform for conducting their original studies is the Web. And invariably these students ask me, “Which method is best for my study? I have an idea of what to investigate, but which approach should I use? I could run an experiment on learning through the Web, but how should I use the Web to conduct my experiment? Is it still possible to control the variables in a true experiment on learning through the Web?” Other students tell me, “I just want to run a little case study. I’ve read a lot of case studies. Please just tell me how to run my case study on the Web.” And there are still other students say, “Everyone talks about constructivism and naturalistic approaches to conducting a study on constructivist uses of the Web. What about a more naturalistic method on Web-based learning? How would a naturalistic approach actually work on the Web? Could you suggest how would I plan a naturalistic study on Web-based learning?”

The answers to these and other related questions, is the central focus of the book “Selected Styles in Web-Based Educational Research.” The term “style” in the title is taken to mean a particular perspective in educational research methodology, and not a particular preference of one method over another, as suggested in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000). Some styles in the book will be familiar to you as “research methods.” These are: qualitative research, case study research, action research, correlational research, experimental research, and formative evaluation. Other “styles” in the book may be more familiar as policy initiatives, and organizational settings that more than ever are driving the research question.

This book compliments others in Web-based teaching and learning, and other books on research design in education. Unlike most others however, it does not discuss Web site design. Rather this book is intended for students, teachers and trainers interested in conducting Web-based educational research. It may either be read from start to finish, or consulted at the start of a research program and during the research itself for its information and examples on the most popular styles in Web-based educational
research. The writing style is conversational. Some of the chapters are general in approach whilst others are case studies and research reports. Illustrations are used throughout the text to increase interest and enhance student understanding. It is anticipated that once a research styles is tried and practiced, the student will take direction from the studies presented in the chapter, and find associated references from which to continue their reading within that style.

I introduce each section with a chapter to introduce the broad questions under study in that particular style. Each chapter contains contributions from active writers in Web-based teaching and learning, offering stimulating appraisals of the strategies and processes for managing change in education. The book incorporates illustrations and screen captures that depict relations among elements, explain how systems work, or portray important features on single Web pages. Demand for the book should be highest among new researchers of learning and teaching on the Web, given the growing popularity of Web-based education in most education and training sectors around the world.

References
