Foreword

Education can be said to be one of the cornerstones of society as we pass information and new discoveries of human kind, from generation to generation. While the methods, mediums and technologies used for education have certainly changed over time, the concept and importance remains unchanged. With an increased emphasis and interest from the educational community over the past several years, I believe that technologies such as virtual environments will have a strong impact on our future as a learning environment. We no longer are bound to the physical classroom, or even by the text-based nature of the flat Internet. We have the computational resources to create multi-user spaces, experiences and representations, where we can participate in realistic settings and with realistic digital objects. The quality of education can be enhanced by improvements in technology overall.

This book, *Teaching through Multi-User Virtual Environments: Applying Dynamic Elements to the Modern Classroom*, presents various possibilities provided by virtual environments. It hinges on the idea of using innovative technologies to enhance teaching and learning. The chapters in this book relay the message that education is truly a dynamic force, changing as society advances and new technologies are brought forth. As an educator myself, I value these evolutions, often embracing these new technologies as both a challenge and privilege to use. Innovation is necessary in order to convey important concepts to my students in these modern times.

This book aims at presenting new and innovative ways of teaching through virtual representations. Some chapters lead us to question our way of thinking about teaching and learning and how we present material to students through these new mediums. These types of questions and reflections often lead to change and further innovation. Other chapters shed light on background, historical and technical details and knowledge in several areas related to IT and virtual representations. Readers of these chapters can gain insight on the "How's" and "Why's" of the progress and developments of these technologies. Section three is devoted to learning foreign language through immersion in virtual worlds. Many authors have written about their experiences and firsthand knowledge about using these types of technologies, providing indispensible advice and feedback. In the fourth Section, the authors provide their experiences and knowledge of how these technologies have been used through experimentation and best practices.

The four sections: "Ideas, Perspectives and Education", "Elements of Education in Virtual Environments", "Perspectives of Language Learning" and "Techniques, Applications and Designs for Education using Virtual Environments" all unify into a unique and complete resource. The chapters presented here are a great resource to other educators, researchers and others that are interested in this area of study. Overall, this is an impressive collection of reports on not only theoretical discussion, but also on empiri-

cal studies such as case studies, applications, tutorials, best-practices and many examples of what has been done. It is my hope that through this book more educators can see the potential benefit from using innovative technology like virtual environments and spark many new ideas and experiments.

Yuanqiong Wang
Towson University, January, 2010

Yuanqiong Wang is an Assistant Professor in the department of Computer and Information Sciences at Towson University. She teaches courses on the fundamentals of information systems and technology, database systems, data organization, and decision support systems. Her current research interests include Social Computing, Human Computer Interaction, Online Learning, Knowledge Management and Decision Support Systems.