Foreword

With the increasing need for learner equity of access and affordable higher education choices, it is with great honor that I am writing about this significant text that provides a deep dive into Open Education Resources (OER), prior learning assessment, open degree plans, and competency-based learning. As an educator, faculty member, and academic administrator in higher education for 20 years, I have been dedicated to the creation and delivery of quality content that supports learner goals. Two of the barriers to achieving these goals are the issues of affordability and equity of access, therefore, these are a great concern for my colleagues and myself. Higher Ed is at a pivot point that signals the need for disruption with more focus on student experience, embracing industry 4.0 of digital technology integration, and as advocates for social justice. Providing resources that are boundaryless is a critical way to vastly improve both the affordability and accessibility to all learners no matter where they are geographically or in their educational journeys. This also enables the consistent collaboration through open access of innovative research and content.

Imagine a world where information, resources, and research are available to all learners. Are you thinking of the IoT? Unfortunately, this open access network is often not populated with the latest research, case studies, and other information used in a higher education context. Those articles are often placed behind pay walls or there is a need to purchase subscriptions. In addition, textbooks and other materials used in university courses are often priced too high for easy access by many. Fortunately, there is recent change in the expansion of the conversation around resources, authorship, and student success, which helps to address some of these concerns. Moving from the teacher-centered view of delivery to student-centered and even more effective, subject-centered, is becoming more of a reality in content and delivery of education. This also means that authors, researchers, editors, and publishers are seeking ways to distribute their work to the largest audience and with the least amount of monetary barriers addressing key concerns of affordability and equity of access in education. The high cost of texts, course resources, and courses themselves are all themes that higher education needs to be held accountable.

With the emerging shift of higher education supporting student success as professionals at any stage of life, this allows for upskilling and reskilling those already in the workforce to close the skills gap and enable career growth. To add to this support is the implementation of prior learning assessments for professionals to gain credits for prior courses taken, and if moved into experiential learning, for those who have dedicated time in a professional capacity to organize prior work and life experience to count as credits towards a degree. Prior learning assessment is a relevant next step in equity of access and affordability since it provides a means for professionals in their fields who have coursework or experience to seek college credit. With the current 1.6 trillion dollars of student loans in the U.S. and less than a 40% overall rate of degree completion, learners are in need of avenues that are easily accessible and affordable to continue their education.

This book has immense relevancy to those in education who are seeking the latest content while focusing on equity of access to resources and to the higher ed experience in general. With OER, no longer is the newest content available only to those who can afford to purchase it, it is now available to anyone, anywhere. Another positive to providing learners with free access to resources is the community of engagement that occurs when learners can engage in exploration, analysis, and dialogue, enabling diversity of thought and conclusions. Although OER resources have been available for years, the preference of authors to be in OER databases and the like is increasing. Still, faculty, administrators, and other gatekeepers of curricula building and course delivery are largely unaware of the full scope of available resources and how to access them to include in their offerings. This book provides a deep view of these elements of OER and also expands into the other higher education initiatives that add to equity, affordability, and access such as prior learning assessment and open degree plans.

As an educator who is vested in social change, and creating an educational system that provides equity of access and affordable options to enable all learners to benefit from academic endeavors, this book is not only useful for general context, but can be used as a guide for reimagining content options. For educators who wish to embrace innovation, large scale resource dissemination, and social equity, this book will provide the detail needed to further those goals.

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