

Preface

Research on student learning has undergone important changes in the last decade. One of these shifts is the research methodology which has advanced in many different ways on the level of complexity of data collection and rigor of data analyses. In the quantitative research perspective, many off-line and online measures and statistical analysis techniques have been further meticulously developed. In the qualitative research perspective, a broader range of data collection tools are applied and the use mixed method data analysis is increasing. Although in some research strands on student learning, the monomethod approach of quantitative research is still 'the golden rule', in other research strands we notify more methodological creativity in mixing research paradigms and designs which can be very fruitful advancements for further knowledge development. In this book we focus on the domain of research on learning patterns in which these methodological shifts are in rapid evolution.

The main aim of this book is to present and discuss by means of a variety of research cases, how different methods of research on student learning can be applied and be useful for future research. In seven chapters, we focus on current practices of quantitative, qualitative and mixed method research dealing with methodological issues in research on student learning and outcomes. These studies have been carried out in different international research units and depict a rich variety of research perspectives that are currently taken. In a last chapter, the benefits and boundaries of these designs are critically discussed and future perspectives are proposed. We hope that this book will serve as a resource and reference work for new and senior researchers in how further methodological advances in learning pattern research can be made and further developed.

Many of the ideas and methods that are presented in this book have also been discussed during scientific meetings and symposia of the 'learning patterns in transition' network (www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/learning-in-transition/). It is an international research network of 12 research units across Europe and beyond, which has been started up at the University of Antwerp, research group EduBRON (www.edubron.be) in 2011, and is sponsored by the Scientific Research Network of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO). We present research perspectives that are at the core of this network. In this way we are convinced to present an important slice of the ongoing methodological perspectives used in the field.

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