

Preface

New Ways of Learning

This story brings another important point about social learning: it doesn't happen in isolation. A story like this is embedded in a broader context — a context that involves many different stakeholders...

(Beverly and Etienne Wenger-Trayner, Interview, 2015)

Beverly and Etienne's thoughts on planning and evaluating a social learning framework for new educational times, speaks to the genesis of this book, whose shape emerged not in isolation but rather embedded within a broader context and guided by the involvement of many stakeholders from many academic and disciplinary backgrounds.

As authors, we began by wanting to share our goal of pursuing a new way of thinking, bringing into being the kind of curriculum that focuses on preparing students for the complexity of the modern world but from within the hallowed halls and ivory towers of institutions steeped in tradition. Through our engagement with like-minded colleagues and learning partners emerged a sense that what we sought to achieve through flipping the classroom could also provide us with much more than minor improvements to learning, but just possibly the first stumbling steps to a new way of learning, a new way of thinking about what might be possible.

Discussing these ideas with Beverly and Etienne served to highlight why we think this book is important in terms of the urgency that is required to transform our approaches to teaching in light of the rapidly changing nature of work and the problems we encountered due to the much slower processes of change to practices within higher education institutions.

Beverly Wenger-Trayner is a social learning consultant who works with organizations to develop strategies and practices for cultivating communities, networks and other forms of social learning.

Etienne Wenger-Trayner is a globally recognized thought leader in the field of social learning and communities of practice. He has authored and co-authored seminal articles and books on the topic, including *Situated Learning*, where the term “community of practice” was coined.

Urgency Versus Old Learning Models

We’re living in a time when things are moving fast. The rules of the game are changing. Science is changing. Technology is changing. Geo-politics is changing. Learning fast is the only mode of survival. But here’s the crazy thing: our models of learning have not kept up. For many people, learning starts with something that’s known. It’s then transmitted to someone who doesn’t know it. But for the projects we’re involved in, this simple view doesn’t work. In the real world things are too dynamic and complex.

(Beverly and Etienne Wenger-Trayner, 2015)

The world of work has changed, but our students are for the most part still constrained by traditional transmission models of learning. If the flipped classroom, through technology, can now quickly, and with high quality, deliver the necessary concepts and facts which can guide action, then perhaps we can reimagine our campuses as places of activity and experience guided by more participatory expertise arranged in more authentic ways:

...very often in teaching situations what is viewed as very problematic is the transmission of knowledge and information, and application is assumed as something that will follow. In our learning theory, applying what you learn is actually very creative, problematic, full of learning itself; so what we mean by a social learning space is we include in the learning the issues of applying that learning to practical situations.

(Beverly and Etienne Wenger-Trayner, 2015)

If you are feeling trepidation at the thought of change at this moment, let us validate those feelings. All of our own stories began in the same way with the decision to move forward and begin to flip our courses, some with a toe in the water and some head first crashing through the bush, but all of us firmly grounded in the research, with many years of practice in teaching and learning at university. Larry Leifer, our esteemed colleague and mentor from Stanford’s Design Research Centre and School originator, encourages us with his metaphors of “way finding” and “hunting” which require us to begin, somewhere, anywhere. The research is there to consult those that have gone before you are eager to guide and support you, and this book will hopefully provide you with new ideas to help you frame, understand, and approach whatever hurdle you may face within your own unique context.

Immediate Value and Potential Value

You meet others who understand you, talk shop, think together, have fun, get to know each other, feel inspired. You get value from just participating. We call this immediate value. All going well, this activity gives you confidence, new insights, good ideas, new perspectives, unexpected solutions, a new contact ... We say that these things represent potential value, because they may – or may not – end up being helpful to you. For many people learning ends there. Not for us.

(Beverly and Etienne Wenger-Trayner, 2015)

Having started flipping our classrooms, we found ourselves connecting with others interested in the idea and made many allies with whom we could share ideas and experiences. The essence of this book is essentially the immediate value we created through these connections. In 2014, we ran thirteen invited workshops across institutions, disciplines and countries; we exposed our techniques and our practices to over a thousand academics in that twelve-month period. Many of the contributors to this book engaged in these workshops, sharing and learning about our flipped classroom practices. Their stories, like the story we share in Chap. 9, which is located in Part II of this book, are a collection of practical experiences of implementing flipped classroom approaches involving the trials, tribulations, and jubilations in making the change.

What is also unique about our contributors' chapters are the broad-based disciplinary backgrounds their stories hail from. This reflects the true nature of the new working world that our students will experience in which boundaries are seen as hindering change. It is through negotiating these cross-disciplinary boundaries that the sharing of knowledge facilitates greater positive change and this is much needed within higher education. As Beverly and Etienne Wenger identify, community boundaries have become blurred and complex and it is important that we practice and embrace this if we are still to be the academic gatekeepers:

...the communities that we are asked to facilitate have become more complex. In the past you had for example engineers trying to form a community ... But more recently... there are more communities among people that would not work naturally. They are being brought together and they may well be thinking 'what am I doing here?' we have nothing in common with these people.

(Beverly and Etienne Wenger-Trayner, 2015)

We hope this book can act as a catalyst for change to your practice or at least stimulate a conversation among you and your colleagues as to the potential value that flipping your class can provide. We leave the last words to Beverly and Etienne as to why we feel it is important to at least try and change your practice:

Applying things in practice is not only a creative act but it is also something that may be successful or may fail and what you learn from it being successful or what you learn from it being a failure or anything in between is a significant part of the learning.

(Beverly and Etienne Wenger-Trayner, 2015)

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Reference

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The Flipped Classroom

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