BOOK REVIEW

Learning In Landscapes of Practice: Boundaries, Identity and Knowledgeability in Practice-Based Learning

Learning In Landscapes of Practice: Boundaries, Identity and Knowledgeability in Practice-Based Learning, Edited by Wenger-Trayner, E, Fenton-O'Creevy, M, Hutchinson, S, Kubiak, C & Wenger-Trayner, B, Oxon: Routledge, 182 pages, 2014, ISBN: 9781138022188

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This short book is the latest output from Etienne Wenger-Trayner and collaborators, an engaging conversation on professional learning firmly grounded in the work and voices of practitioners and those teaching or researching with practitioners across diverse fields, disciplines, professions and contexts – education, health, social care, environment, public relations and management. Over thirty contributors contribute stories of learning in their own practice, those in the first part of the book derive from interactive workshops facilitated by the Practice Based Learning Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (PBCETL) 2005–2010, at the Open University.

The text falls into two halves but is organised in four parts. Part I and the first chapter of Part III from Beverly and Etienne Wenger-Trayner are pivotal in providing the theoretical framing for the subsequent chapters which describe cases from particular professional contexts; the four chapters in part II take a personal focus, whilst the remaining two chapters in part III adopt a broader system lens. The idea that professionals are not restricted to one community of practice but rather negotiate professional journeys through, across and between multiple communities was first introduced in Wenger's seminal 1998 work 'Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity' as 'a weaving of both boundaries and peripheries' (1998, p118). In part I here the Wenger-Trayners build on this idea to explore what it means for different professionals working in dynamic complex landscapes of different communities of practice. They explore how communities frequently compete to define knowledge and good practice, the nature of boundary crossing and how varying degrees of engagement with different communities on a professional trajectory shape the development of professional identity. The notion of 'knowledgeability' is used to describe a person's relationship to the multiplicity of practices across the landscape; professional knowledgeability

being conceived as the ability to transform experiences of the complex landscape into meaningful moments of engagement in practice. As the landscape becomes more complex (and global) individual trajectories reflect this by being increasingly unique and they highlight how development of identity can be problematic for individuals as they participate in and manage tensions between different practices and their associated regimes of accountability within the landscape.

The Wenger-Trayners argue that making boundaries a frame for exploration helps to surface reflexivity in the practices involved, questioning how the perspective of one practice is relevant to that of another and highlight connections between the communities. The four chapters of Part II 'Stories from the landscape' explore these ideas through commentary on detailed personal accounts and descriptions as practitioners engage in informal learning episodes or in transitions within their lives, problematizing how identification and knowledgeability are negotiated and focussing on the potential for learning at boundaries of practice. Chapter 2 highlights the intense emotions frequently experienced in boundary transitions whilst Chapter 3 explores the multiple boundaries negotiated by students on practice-based healthcare, MBA and teaching programmes, the challenges these boundary transitions pose to students and the importance of developing the capacity for a 'continuous and resilient sense of self across situations…' (p45) to successfully negotiate their emerging identities as professionals. Chapter 4 uses highly personal first person accounts to illustrate the learning potential of an 'incongruent' position in a community of practice experienced and possible strategies for legitimately contributing to multiple communities of practice. Chapter 5 is particularly convincing in its theorising of accounts of supporting learning in different spaces – large and small scale, for different groups of practitioners through brokering and the use of boundary objects to facilitate cross – boundary experiences. The importance of legitimacy and shared endeavour are emphasized in successful boundary encounters.

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Taken together these rich individualised accounts drawn from diverse contexts offer highly accessible prompts – the conversation – for those planning and supporting professional learning, challenging us to pay greater attention to students' perspectives and experiences.

Part III centres on the role of people acting as systems convenors, those engaged in establishing new partnerships for learning across social and institutional systems. System convenors are thus intimately involved at boundaries, encouraging, or perhaps cajoling, practitioners and other stakeholders with different interests and practices to come together in cross-boundary endeavours. After an in-depth analysis of the work on systems convenors, made less abstract and enriched by interview quotes from two practitioners working in the role, the authors describe the personal characteristics of systems convenors. The complexity and demands of the role are rather intimidating and I did wonder who was qualified, or would want the role '…convenors can tread a rather lonely path. Behind the cheerful face and sanguine disposition is someone who craves companionship and understanding' (p114) is not an attractive challenge for many. Fortunately the authors recognise this, arguing how system convenors play a 'critical function in landscapes of practice' (p116) and for greater recognition and support for the leadership role along with research to improve our understanding and enactment of the role.

Following the academic piece in chapter 6, chapters 7 and 8 offer accounts of very different examples of convening at large scale in service of social problems. The practices of Chapter 6 are located in The Netherlands where Habiforum is funded by the Dutch Government to bring together social actors to devise and implement plans for land use. Habiforum's innovative approach connected practitioners from diverse backgrounds and disciplines in a shared endeavour to create new knowledge – ways of working and designs, for disused spaces. Much of this success in multiple discrete projects is attributed to the key role of the convenors. But despite these successes in creating collective visions the Habiform master convenor was unable to bridge the divide between its research and practice programmes and these became two distinct networks, here I wanted more analysis of the reasons for this lack of connections. The following case is set in the immense canvas of the US where the IDEA partnership works to convene communities of practice across a highly complex set of services from states/ districts/ schools / informal learning organisations to improve possibilities for productive learning for young people with disabilities. Both cases work across diverse and large landscapes of practice engaging with communities with different histories of competence and accountability. In both examples of outputs are described together with thoughtful and perceptive reflections on aspects of the convening role which have supported and constrained activity. A common feature across these very dissimilar examples is the faith and confidence of the funder in the initial ideas of these initiatives where the modes of operation and outputs were unknown at the start.

The final chapter, written by all five editors, draws together threads from the practice examples but shifts the focus firmly back to the role of the university and a more conversational interactive style. For the reader this is a little unexpected and the second part of the book might have benefited from a third example in which HE played a role to better segue into this final chapter. Etienne Wenger has spoken elsewhere about understanding 'who I am becoming' as the main problem for learners in the twenty-first century and this chapter asks how we might design institutions of learning and learning experiences to help our students pay attention to the things that will help them become a meaningful person and the implications of this for the academic practices of research and scholarship.

I have some reservations about the structure of the book; whilst there is a theoretical coherence in the conceptual shift from the perspective of individuals to systems, the differences in reporting style and approach of the 'cases' in the second half can be disconcerting for the reader. It's not clear how the ideas in the second half of the book relate to the work of the PBCETL and it can feel like two separate bodies of writing rather artificially linked together, rather as if the cases in the first half of the book were insufficient to generate a volume of work on their own. However the cases in the second half bring a welcome international feel to the book; understandably much of the first part is located in UK practice and on occasions the terminology, plethora of acronyms and assumptions of familiarity with details of policy and procedure limit the accessibility of these cases to those from different contexts. On occasions the book is a little repetitive, perhaps due to the large number of contributors but overall the conversation approach with its plethora of questions and suggestions for further exploration of the ideas has much to offer a diverse readership.

Competing Interests
The author declares that they have no competing interests.

Reference
Wenger, E 1998 *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.