

Foreword

It is a delight to see a high quality book integrating these two important topics. The work described here in learning design and in learning objects reflects a common goal: to leverage the expertise of our exemplary teachers beyond their own classes and institutions so that we can enhance learning outcomes and student success in a range of educational contexts. I am delighted to have the opportunity to set this volume in the context of larger issues in education and in other sectors of professional practice.

Let me first identify my personal stake in these matters. As a university administrator, I have been responsible for encouraging and supporting the adoption—or better, the adaptation—of innovations in learning and advances in technology to support teaching. I know first hand the time pressures experienced by our teachers and the need for new ways to foster communities of teaching practice which overcome the isolation of our classrooms. As a researcher in knowledge mobilization within corporate and public sector organizations, I have seen the benefits of systematic programs to share exemplary practices, and collaboratively develop and test advances in knowledge. How ironic it was to observe that so many of these knowledge mobilization efforts involved our faculty as catalysts and researchers, yet we lagged behind in taking advantage of these methods ourselves. Most importantly for me, as a teacher in higher education for over 30 years, I know how much I have yet to learn and also how much I have to share. (My apologies to my colleagues in other sectors of education and learning for focusing on the sector I know best. I have no doubt you will be able to translate my musings into your context to see how this book impacts your own work.)

In framing the focal issues explored in this book, I find it useful to contrast our context in higher education with that of other professional communities, especially in the high tech companies that have been partners in much of my research. They commonly distinguish amongst learning *for work*, learning *at work*, and learning *from work*. Learning *for work* takes place away from the job, and is the natural setting to establish a conceptual framework for understanding and advancing workplace knowledge. For teachers in higher education, there has traditionally been only superficial training in the conceptual underpinnings about how people learn and the implications for how we teach.

Most of us in higher education learned to teach *at work*, sometimes by mentoring from or interactions with colleagues, often by trial-and-error with our patient students. I contrast this with other contemporary knowledge workers, generating high value with their professional expertise, who benefit from significant investments in learning *at work* by just-in-time delivery of knowledge to their workplace at the point of need. More recently, online communities of practice have been instituted within corporate and public sector organizations to mobilize the best talent for the benefit of all community members. Again, higher education has often studied and validated these advances in knowledge mobilization, but failed to instantiate them ourselves.

Finally, learning *from work* involves reflective practice: a disciplined approach to asking what worked, what did not, why we got these results, and what we can learn from our experience to improve our

future actions. This is common practice at the conclusion of projects in the high tech companies with whom I have worked, and it seems natural to regard teaching a module (or “course” in North America) as similar to a project in providing a natural unit of reflection. I think most teachers in higher education would like to do more of this, but like me will have found that these good intentions fall prey to other time pressures at the end of a term.

Of course, the domain of teaching in higher education is different from that of other professions, and we must develop our own methods for learning in these diverse ways, for mobilizing expertise and collaborative knowledge-building. That is why this book, and the growing body of knowledge and practice on which it reports, is so important at this time. We are at last starting to see the emergence of distinctive methods for higher education to systematically advance teaching and learning by mobilizing the wisdom of our exemplary practitioners and the knowledge uncovered by scholarly researchers.

Learning objects provide concrete illustrations of exemplary teaching practice which can be exchanged, re-used, evaluated and adapted—learning *at work*. New infrastructures are now being developed for learning objects to provide reflective spaces in which collaborative learning *from work* can take place. We are moving from thinking about repositories supported by communities to communities supported by repositories. Recent studies are exploring how we can link learning objects to research digests and other tools providing new pathways to learning *for work* in practical and focused ways.

The situation is similar for innovations reported here which are advancing learning design representations as a pathway for knowledge mobilization and collaborative knowledge-building. While some of the early work in the learning design field was focused on the possibility of automating the design or delivery of online instruction, the focus now is much more on the community knowledge aspects and social infrastructure for which learning design can become a catalyst.

Of course, pathways to advance learning resources and to mobilize teaching expertise will only be effective in the context of a larger motivating vision for enabling change in educational practice. Such a vision will be a shared image of the future education we want and are working toward, an affirmation of educational purpose that resonates with our sense of identity and values, a calling for educators that energizes a commitment of our gifts, our resources, and our time.

You will not find such a comprehensive educational vision articulated in this book—that is not its purpose, and the editors have done a fine job of keeping the authors focused on a few common themes explored in depth. But I am confident that you will feel the energy and commitment that underlies the work reported by these innovators, and that you will sense how these new pathways will support your own vision of educational opportunities and success for all our learners.

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