

Rethinking the Learning Space in the Workplace and Beyond – and what does it mean for intergenerational learning?

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Contributors

- Research carried out by Natasha Kersh, Karen Evans with practitioners in Information Technology teaching and learning in England and Wales.
- As part of the ASEM RN2 Workplace Learning network research into Working Places as Learning Spaces.

The relationships between spaces and learning

- have been considered from a range of perspectives and within various disciplines.
- Foucault (1980) Soja (2002) and Goffman (1990) are among the social scientists who have drawn attention to the significance of the notion of space for the social science research
- social science research largely focuses on the ways space is constructed through social processes.
- spatial theories seek to provide a relational understanding of how these spaces are constituted and how they are given meaning through human action. (*Brooks et al 2012*)

Spatial perspectives bring new insight for LLL research

- Recognising spaces as learning contexts
- Space is conceived as continuously produced – a product of cultural, social, political and economic actions.
- Complex interrelationships between spaces and individuals

Plurality of spaces for Education and learning

- Knowledge-based economy
- Globalisation
- New technologies
- Mobility (transnational learning spaces)

...have facilitated a shift away from fixed spaces of learning towards more fluid locations

Workspace as a site for learning (1)

- A significant body of research literature (reviewed in Malloch, Cairns, Evans and O'Connor in *The Sage Handbook of Workplace Learning* 2011) focuses on role of the workplace context in learning:
 - Working spaces are learning contexts in which people are working together, usually in mixed age teams, to put their different forms of knowledge to work in day-to-day work activities (e.g. Evans et al 2010, Kersh and Evans, 2012)
 - These forms of knowledge include subject knowledge, tacit knowledge, 'know-how' and work process knowledge.

Workspace as a site for learning (2)

- Workplaces are then characterised by being both work and learning spaces where the boundaries between the two are considerably blurred
- Attention to the learning dimensions of workspaces can potentially enhance effectiveness, creativity and social practices, within constantly changing contemporary workplaces (Kohlegger et al, 2013).
- The active participation of employees (including employee representatives (Evans et al 2006) and intergenerational communication (eg Fuller and Unwin 2009) is a key ingredient.

Realities:

keeping the employment relationship in view

- Intensification of work
- differential access to informal learning opportunities and career progression
- ‘learning poor’ v ‘learning rich’ environments
- power relations between managers and workers
- employee ‘voice’-heard or unheard
- Social inclusion/exclusion – hidden mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion operate in the knowledge and prior learning are recognised and used in workplaces.

Malloch, M., Cairns, L., Evans, K. and O'Connor, B. N. (2011)

- There is a need for a broader conceptualization of workplace learning, arguing that work should be understood and defined as *more than* employment for remuneration,
- the concept of workplace learning needs to be considered in the context of three terms: ***work, place, and learning.***



Workplace learning is a term open to wide-ranging interpretation.

- ‘work-related learning’ (Streumer & Kho, 2006)
- ‘work-based learning’ (Avis, 2004)
- ‘learning at work’ (Boud & Garrick, 1999).

...considered through the lens of different theoretical perspectives:

- situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1998)
- knowledge management (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995)
- social ecology (Evans, Waite, & Kersh, 2011).

Workplace learning

Evans et al. (2006): workplace learning...

- derives its purpose from the context of employment: *learning in, for, and through the workplace,*
- relates to different types of learning including both formal and informal learning modes

The concept of the learning space can be considered from various angles and perspectives (Kersh, Evans and Waite, 2011)

- physical spaces
- informal learning spaces
- virtual learning spaces
- combination or overlap of a range of spaces

Physical space

The learning space can be perceived as a physical space where learning is taking place such as a classroom or any other form of teaching/learning space



Physical learning space: Open plan office has both strengths and weaknesses



An IT teacher, part of further education college staff team, comments on his work space

- *So just...that's a typical fill open plan office [...] it has its strengths and weaknesses. Without going into it too fully the strengths would be that the immediate contact with the peers is very, very good so we don't need to have weekly meetings, we're talking about these issues on a daily basis. And the weaknesses would be that it's, because it's open plan, forget about things such as preparation and marking, you just can't get that done, two minutes and you're interrupted. And then there's a corridor beside you and colleagues are always walking up and down this corridor and there's certain ones that will stop you every time. (IT tutor)*

Informal learning spaces at work*

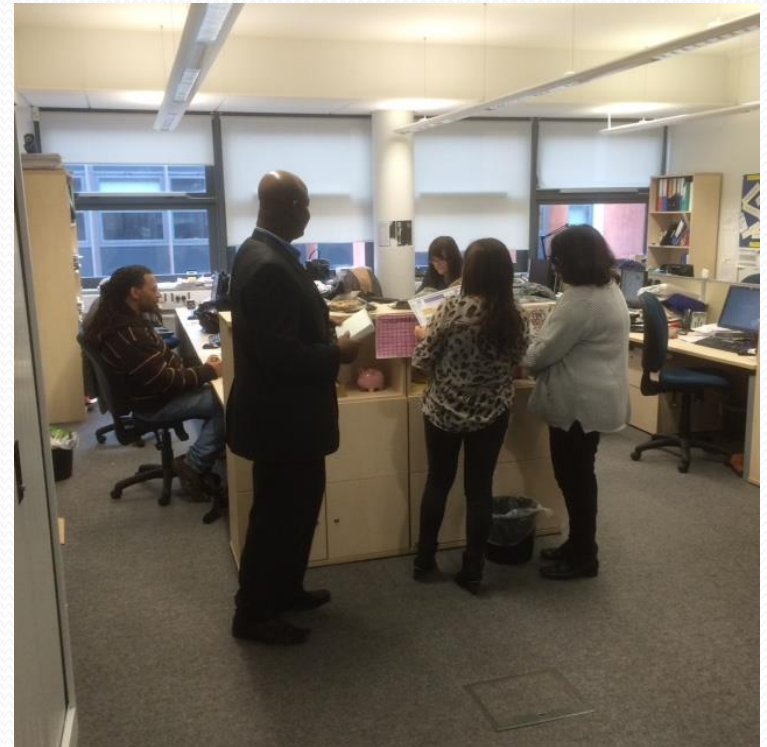
- learning 'beyond the classroom' settings
- informal learning at work
- workplace spaces are characterised by being both work and learning spaces where the boundaries between the two are considerably blurred. (Kersh, Evans and Waite, 2012)
- * see ASEM Education and Research Hub RN2 Annotated Bibliography, eds. Maslo, E. and Lunardon, K.

Informal learning at work

‘interaction with colleagues, and so therefore it does enforce a sharing situation ...’



‘also we share materials, we share resources, we share knowledge quite freely in my department.’



‘... he’s helping me and I’m helping him, so there is a good – and he sits next to me...’

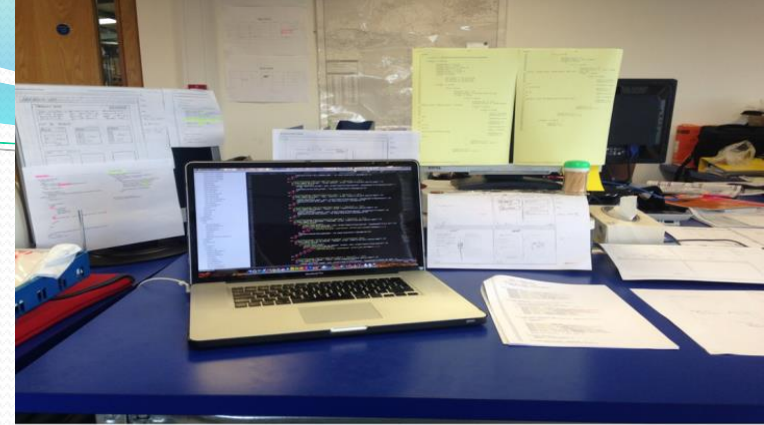
Informal learning at work

Some of my best learning is done over a ciggie outside. No problem is too big to be resist the combined forces of nicotine and caffeine



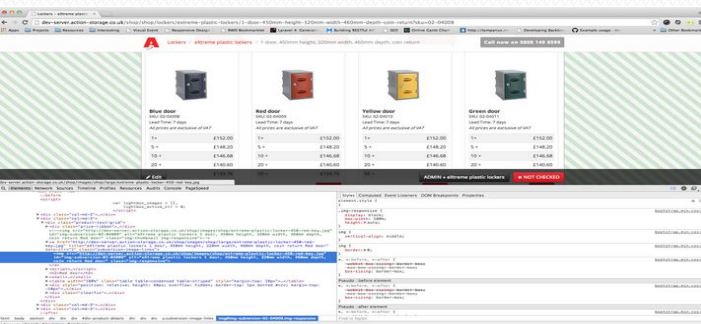
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Virtual learning spaces



When ever I'm learning a new system, I like to surround myself with my notes, diagrams and reference material making the whole area focussed on my current problems. This immersion helps keep me focussed.

- Virtual spaces change the boundaries of learning spaces, making them more flexible and mobile (Felstead & Jewson, 2012).
- 'CHROME DEV TOOLS provides a key virtual space for me to learn by doing. Allowing me to change the code and live in the browser...' (*IT trainer/developer*'... see above and below.)
- Whenever I'm learning a new system, I like to surround myself with my notes, diagrams and reference material making the whole area focused on my current problems. This immersion helps keep me focused'.



CHROME DEV TOOLS provides a key virtual space for me to learn by doing. Allowing me to change code and view the results live in the browser. Perfect for learning the detailed niggles that happen in web design.

The learning space can be perceived as a combination or overlap of a range of components and spaces

- the trend is not for work simply to shift from one type of workplace to another but rather to spread out across a diverse network of different sites, which might be linked by information and communications technology.

Workplace space symbolises a 'different' environment

- Workplace space symbolises an environment that is perceived as different from a classroom-like setting where the learner might have had negative prior learning experiences. These can be overcome in learning –conducive workplaces (*see Kersh et al 2012, in Brooks et al 2012*).
- Young people are both teachers and learners in workplaces, and report the extent to which they learn both by helping and being helped by others in the workplaces of real life (*see Fuller and Unwin 2009, Allan, Evans et al 2016 forthcoming, on invisible learning.*)

Intergenerational learning at work

- Creating the spaces (physical, virtual or informal) that support the social practices of learning from and teaching others at work:
- Learning at work is inherently multi-directional and intergenerational.
- Mentoring practices often entail intergenerational learning, in both directions.



Knowledgeable practice develops through learning in and through the workplace itself:

- Through observation of others and peer learning.
- Through mentorship and coaching.
- By drawing on new ideas and experiences accessed through work.

These practices are fundamental to workers beginning to vary and modify existing workplace activities; or working with experienced others to change them.

The power of peer learning in mixed age groups....

- ‘Workers can and do learn off each other in the normal performance of daily tasks... its puzzling that this leveraging of tacit knowledge isn’t formally acknowledged or promoted’ (D.Williams, Knowledge Management Company researching New Zealand companies)
- Has developed tri-mentoring,
- ...using self selecting groups of three workers who share tacit knowledge to build organisational capability.

Example: learning in action among 'freelance' film and TV workers in Singapore

- Cameramen learn about the latest technology by reading the relevant manuals as well as viewing demonstrations on 'you tube'. They also develop their sensitivity towards light and aperture through 'trial and error'.
- 'Helping each other out' on site provide opportunities for practice and learning about other roles (e.g. lighting, key grip, sound) as well as watching and evaluating the potential for new team members.
- '..... I'm very close with 2 cameramen. So both of them have their own individual style, and by watching these two, the good and the bad thing is, I have a mix of that 2 styles, I have a mix of two styles.' (See Bound, H. et al 2014)

An organisational view

Who or what is driving the cogs ?



Employee-driven innovation refers to the 'generation and implementation of new ideas, products and processes originating from interaction of employees not assigned to this task' (Høyrup et al p.8).

It is inherently intergenerational, typically taking place in teams of mixed composition.



See also 'Lifelong Learning in Europe' Special Issue, Dec.2012 (online)

For example:

- Employees participate in work processes with ideas, knowledge and creativity.
- These inputs stem not only from their present work roles, but are also rooted in their previous work experience and general life experience.
- Intergenerational exchanges play a key role.



Evidence: from collaborative research into newly qualified, new generation workers in public services (national health service) by Allan, Magnussen, Horton, Evans – 2014)

[http://www.nurseeducationtoday.com/article/S0260-6917\(14\)00342-6/abstract](http://www.nurseeducationtoday.com/article/S0260-6917(14)00342-6/abstract)

SUMMARY

Aim

- To explore newly qualified nurses' experiences of delegating to, and supervising, health care assistants.

Design

- Ethnographic case studies.

Settings

- In-patient wards in three English National Health Service (NHS) acute hospitals.

Participants

- 33 newly qualified nurses were observed, 10 health care assistants and 12 ward managers.

Methods

- Participant observation and in-depth interviews.

Findings

- We suggest that newly qualified nurses learn to delegate to, and supervise, health care assistants through re-working ('recontextualising') knowledge; and that this process occurs within a transitional ('liminal') space.

Conclusions

- Conceptualising learning in this way allows an understanding of the shift from student to newly qualified nurse and the associated interaction of people, space and experience. Using ethnographic case studies allows the experiences of those undergoing these transitions to be vocalised by the key people involved.

Concluding...

- Employees can learn through a range of learning spaces at work; some workplaces are more learning - conducive than others.
- Employees learn through putting their different forms of knowledge to work in interaction with others, often in mixed age and inter-cultural teams.
- Spatial associations of workplace learning and the organisation of work can play a significant role in facilitating or undermining employees' opportunities for professional development.

Questions

Drawing on your experiences, consider the following:

- *How do different configurations of the learning space facilitate intergenerational teaching and learning practices?*
- *How do spatial associations influence learner (employee) motivations and outcomes?*
- *What is the role of communication and information technologies in facilitating or impeding intergenerational learning?*
- *How do language (including foreign language) and literacy skills contribute to intergenerational learning across work spaces?*

Sources:

- See links/references in text and
- Annotated bibliography link
- http://asemlllhub.org/fileadmin/www.asem.au.dk/publications/RN2_Annotated_Bibliography_first_edition_08-10-2015.pdf