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Blurring the boundaries..whose learning is it anyway?

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Some background.....

- Work-based, workplace, work-related ...learning and higher education
- Direction of travel...from learning to working, from working to learning?

Some boundaries ...

- 'whose' knowledge ...? 'who' is producing... 'whose' authority giving recognition and legitimacy?
- Higher education, continuing education and training, organisational development ?
- Individual developmentaligned to organisational development?

Boundaries matter

- Potential for learning when moving across boundaries
'...as sense-making processes and informal learning is given impetus to produce 'ontological security' in the new environment'
- Complex social and cognitive processes take place when 'crossing boundaries'

[Saunders, From 'organisms' to 'boundaries': the uneven development of theory narratives in education, learning and work connections, 2006]

....as do theories of learning from experience..

- Distinctions between learning by acquisition, learning by participation, situated learning
- Distinctions between formal and informal learning
- Jarvis' adult learning theories: non-learning; non-reflective learning; reflective learning

[Brennan, Little et al., 2006; Jarvis, quoted in Brennan and Little, 1996]

....some findings ..

- ‘...undergraduates do not automatically know how to learn, see the relevance....or make connections between the situation in which they learn and the opportunities they find to use their learning’

[Houghton and Bagley, Learning from work: making connections between work and study, 2000]

Making connections matter .1..

- Theories of ‘transfer’....and extent of adaptation required by individual
- ‘low road’ (automatic between 2 situations with much in common)
- ‘high road’ (cognitive processes enabling individual to abstract key features from one situation and adapt/apply appropriately in another, different situation)

[Perkins and Soloman; quoted in Brennan and Little, 1996]

Making connections matter .2..

- ‘transferring skill’ as a meta-skill
- ‘..concept of transferability..rarely subject to critical scrutiny by protagonists of ..skills agenda..’

[Bridges, quoted in Brennan and Little, 1996; Fallows and Stevens, Integrating key skills in HE.., 2000]

'Experience' - necessary but not sufficient for learning?

- The need for active engagement with experience...and to transform experiential knowledge (which may be bound to specific workplace context) into propositional knowledge (shared and open to interrogation?)

...motivation matters as well...

‘..it is really what you put in, you do get out..my other colleague ..didn’t get that much ..he didn’t show a proactive attitude..even though we both worked in the same ...[department] ..our experiences were very different ..’

[Harvey and Little, 2006]

...as does support ...

- Offer of formative support within workplace important
- But, changes in care-giving environment ..led mentors having less time to supervise, assess and give feedback ..led to criticisms of placements..

[practice-based learning - Yorke, 2005; Leeds University CETL interim evaluation, 2007]

Learning gains and crossing boundaries -1

- Personal and interpersonal skills - confidence, teamworking, oral communication, networking
- Broader understandings, 'the bigger picture'
- More active engagement with learning, increased motivation

[Little and Harvey, 2006]

Learning gains and crossing boundaries -2

- Broader understandings, 'the bigger picture'
- Increased confidence (+ increased motivation and commitment)
- Gaining new knowledge and understanding of theories linked to workplace practices

[Greenwood and Little, forthcoming]

(work) context matters ...

Factors affecting individual learning at/from work - the social nature of workplace learning

- Learning factors – challenge and value of work; feedback, support and trust; confidence and commitment; personal agency and motivation
- Context factors – allocation and structuring of work; encounters and relationships with others at work; individual participation and expectations of performance and progress

[Eraut and Hirsch, The significance of workplace learning for individuals, groups and organisations, SKOPE, 2007]

also transfer issues...again..

- ‘ Learning to use field knowledge in practical situations is a major challenge in its own right’ (requires critical questioning of its appropriateness and effectiveness)
- ‘ Such learning requires time and support...and rarely any clarity about who is responsible for providing it’ [the support]

[Eraut and Hirsch, 2007]

Messages from learning in the workplace..1

- Whose learning - individual or group?
'emphasis on individual learning doesn't align with evidence that most learning occurs in group contexts'
- Tacit knowledge - '....greater awareness of the pervasive presence of tacit knowledgemany modes of learning rely on their ability to transfer tacit knowledge without making it explicit ...tacit knowledge contributes to ...understanding situations, decision-making, skilful action and monitoring (of self and others)

Messages from learning in the workplace..2

- Assessment – whose purpose?
‘..appraisee judged on performance needs to know both what in particular needs improvement and be offered ideas about how that might be achieved ..that shifts focus from judgement to development ...’

[Eraut and Hirsch, 2007]

....messages for work-related learning..?

- Culture and value systems of work – practical, issue-oriented
- Culture and value systems of higher education - thematic and analytic
- Whose values and norms being privileged in work-related learning?

Thank you

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