AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

Journal of Adult Learning, Knowledge and Innovation

4 (2021) 2, 41–43

DOI:

10.1556/2059.2021.00046

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EDITORIAL

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Professional learning in the workplace

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In today's rapidly changing society, there is a consensus across professions that undergraduate education is only the beginning of learning in professional life and the need for continuing professional development is emphasized not just as an implicit responsibility for professionals but also identified as different pursuits of effective and efficient practices that support lifelong learning (Jarvis, 2004; Webster-Wright, 2009).

An increasing body of empirical research supports the idea that effective professional development is based on a professional learning process that is continuing, active, social and related to practice (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Wilson & Berne, 1999) highlighting the relevance of authentic work experience. Professionals learn from a diverse range of activities: from formal professional development programs through interaction with work colleagues, integrating different experiences outside work, and all these in different combinations can shape their practice affecting professional development.

During the past decade the workplace has become an essential setting for continuous learning and researching those learning processes too. Employees learn informally from a diverse range of activities and this informality accounts for up to 70 percent of learning (Noe & Ellingson, 2017.) Likewise, the use of technology-based methods including e-learning and mobile learning are growing rapidly and affecting professional learning. Parallel to these tendencies, organizations expect their employees to develop themselves, to become more autonomous and self-regulated; and in this way, to contribute to the company's competitive advantage (Barney & Wright, 1998). Workplace learning has become a widely researched topic, gathering world-wide interest among scholars and practitioners as well, trying to answer different issues related to learning *about*, *through* and *at* work (Malloch, Cairns, Evans, & Bridget, 2011). Various new concepts, theories have been developed or redesigned in this enriching field of theory, such as the dichotomy of informal-formal learning, new approaches of work-based learning, as well as expansive theory of workplace learning (Engeström, 2009), listing just a few salient advancements that may indicate the complexity of the topic. We propose a comprehensive definition of WPL which is task-related knowledge building and sharing among employees that becomes a powerful tool for adult learning and development and lifelong learning in organizations (Littlejohn & Margaryan, 2011; Metso & Kianto, 2014).

In this special issue, we focus on the issue of professionals learning in the workplace starting from the premise that learning at work is necessary for professional development, and workplaces are serious learning environments where this can be enhanced (Cheetham & Chivers, 2001; Metso & Kianto, 2014). The papers that form this issue offer some empirical and theoretical insights into professionals learning in the context of workplace from different viewpoints. For the integration of the results that the papers offer, we employ the model of learning in working life by Illeris (Illeris, 2004, 2011.) The model combines two different types of human learning processes: an external interaction process between the individual and their social, cultural and material environment and an internal psychological process of elaboration and acquisition (Illeris, 2011).

The two triangles represent the two dimensions (see Fig. 1). The individual learning process is visualized by the triangle of the top, the working practice is demonstrated by the triangle at the bottom. They are strongly interconnected and this connection is displayed by the two circles in the central part of the illustration. In the learning area, the focus will be on the learner's personal identity, and especially those parts of the identity that include the personal relations to working life, in which way, it constitutes the learner's working identity. The other central area of the model is workplace practice and it comprises all the work activities with tools, artefacts, work attributes, personal and social relations, positions, power relation, etc. Illeris (2011) states that workplace learning takes place in the interaction of

Fig. 1. Learning in working life (Illeris, 2011)

learner's work identity and working practice, and for this reason, most of the phenomena connected to workplace learning can be interpreted in this cross-section of the two variables.

The special issue starts with Zagir Togtokhmaa's and Helga Dorner's (Zagir & Dorner, 2021) article. Their paper *Adult learning facilitators' professional identity* presents the results of a detailed exploratory review of selected literature on adult learning facilitators' professional identity. As the researcher highlights the background of the analysis, there is a lack of unified identity constructs of adult learning facilitators, even though the professionalization processes and professional development initiatives both need a unified and coherent view of professional identity. The paper offers a vivid description of the different interpretations of professional identities, how these interpretations are created and what the common constructs and characteristics are that appear in the selected and analysed studies. Most of the studies enhance the dynamic aspect of the identity referring to the fact that professionalism in this field is constantly changing over times and context. Hence, the review gives a new perspective of work identity formation in the field of adult learning facilitation.

The second paper of this issue *Teacher Educators' Understanding of Integrating Lesson Study into Pre-service Teacher Education* by Yin Mar Win (Win, 2021) presents new details about professionals learning through *lesson study*, which appears here as a tool for continuous professional development of teacher educators in Myanmar. The interviews administered for the pilot study reveal that those teachers who use *lesson study* in their teaching practice consider the method an effective way of learning and developing their expertise. The results offer new understanding about how integrating new methodologies in work practice can enhance learning and development of teachers in their profession.

Still, in the domain of teacher education, the next empirical paper, *School-university partnership: Perceptions*

and experiences of school teachers and student teachers on current collaboration in teacher education in Myanmar by Khin Khin Thant Sin (Thant Sin, 2021), highlights the role crossing boundaries, networking and collaboration play in knowledge sharing and knowledge creation, as well as professional development. Her work demonstrates how school-university partnerships may provide rich learning opportunities for all stakeholders. By conducting mixed methods research, Khin Khin Thant Sin collected data from 56 participants with a questionnaire and interviewed four participants. She argues that collaboration between schools and universities is essential and beneficial for the professional development of both cohorts of individuals. Her paper is further proof as to how intertwined the individual and social components of Illeris' model are.

On a similar note, the fourth article by James Mmari, *Education sector policies and their role in the integration of workplace learning and higher education: A case of Tanzania's higher Technical and Engineering Education* (Mmari, Kovács & Kálmán, 2022), explores how policymakers, employers, instructors, and students view the importance of policies in integrating workplace learning and technical higher education to reap the benefits of collaboration in order to enhance professional development in both kinds of institutions. James Mmari conducted semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders and found that apart from the challenges the participants voiced their concerns about, most of the interviewees thought policies played a significant role in ensuring the smooth integration and implementation of institutional learning and learning in the workplace context. He also describes how policies in the learning environment might contribute to the identity formation of individuals in the context investigated.

The last two years—due to the Covid-19 pandemic—has challenged and questioned our understandings about how workplace practices and environments can affect work efficiency and individual learning and adaptation processes.

The final paper, *The role of self-regulation and perceived self-efficacy in adaptation to home-office work during the pandemic* by Zsuzsa Kovács and Csaba Kálmán (Kovács & Kálmán, 2021) tries to unfold the characteristics of the learning and adaptation process of employees that emerged during the switching to working from home after the Covid-19 restrictions had been imposed. The main question of the administered case-study considered perceived work efficiency and the factors that could affect it. As a conclusion, a model of three constituents was created in which the *communication patterns*, *work-design* and *regulation-control* dimensions were emphasized as elements of working-context that give a firm background to employees for both effective work and perceived work efficiency.

The papers of this special issue demonstrate how intricately the constituents of Illeris' (2011) model are intertwined, and how individuals' work identity and work practice continually interact in the process of workplace learning and professional development. As we stated at the beginning of the Editorial, due to the ever-changing nature of our working environment and in a broader sense, society at large, it is certain that workplace learning and professional development will remain an exciting field of enquiry in the future as well.

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