Guest editorial

Introduction to work and learning in the era of globalisation

Articles in this special issue of *Journal of Workplace Learning* (JWL) were first presented in the ninth international conference "Researching Work and Learning" (RWL) hosted in Singapore by the Institute for Adult Learning, Singapore University of Social Sciences (formerly known as SIM University) and the National Institute of Education from 9 to 11 December 2015. Its theme "Work and learning in the era of globalisation: Challenges for the 21st century" welcomed presentations describing how globalisation mediates skills, performance and work; the implications of the changing nature of work for learning through/for work; and the ways in which vocational education and training (VET) policies or systems can be responsive to unpredictable yet rapid global and regional pressures. Held every two years, RWL is an international conference drawing participants from across the globe and attracts those with extensive expertise as well as newcomers in the field of work and learning.

Rather than reproduce the many competing accounts of what is globalisation, we focus on change as change is an overriding outcome of globalisation. Although it is indisputable that change is a constant feature of the world in which we live and work and that generic applications of the extent of such claims are not helpful, rather it is the many differences in changing practices and identities that are highlighted in this edition. Specifically we underscore the "permeation of globalization into everyday work practices" (Zukas and Malcolm; this edition) and that globalisation makes for, indeed highlights the need for different practices and identities in everyday work and learning for work.

The six papers here reflect different methodological approaches and sub-themes with research focusing on changes in work practices, evolution of professional knowledge and ways of knowing, the fluidity of work in complex adaptive organisations, the importance of place and spaces of work and learning and the need for networks for learning and collaboration not only between individuals but also between institutions. There is a visible focus on practice methodologies; nonetheless, we have two articles that draw on quantitative methodologies to explore/model what is happening. The editors thus proudly present papers here from emerging researchers, including doctoral students as well as those who are deeply established in the field.

How were these diverse papers selected? All RWL9 presenters were invited to submit their manuscripts for consideration for the *JWL* special issue, also a tradition of the RWL conference series. The three editors first identified (following *JWL* criteria) peer-reviewed manuscripts where one or both reviewers indicated that the study was worthy of inclusion in the aforementioned. Not wanting to deprive anyone, we additionally considered non-peer reviewed papers that were at an advanced stage of writing. Once we had independently generated an initial selection of 12-15 items from this pool, we then ranked these again using *JWL* criteria for quality and potential contribution to the field. Finally, we jointly selected ten manuscripts and invited their authors to rework their papers for the special issue – double-blind peer reviewing was followed without exception. Six authors met the required standards or tight deadlines (including revisions) here, which we now introduce briefly.

In this special issue, a range of methodologies and theoretical constructs have been used to investigate the richness of workplace learning. The methodologies are diverse, ranging from international survey data (PIACC) (Hämäläinen), surveys/questionnaires (Kohlström, Rantatalo, Karp and Padyab), action-based research (Island and Snis), phenomenographic

approaches (Lizier), work shadowing (Zukas and Malcolm), to Reich, Rooney and Hopwood looking across previous studies that had used ethnographic and case study approaches. This diversity is indicative of multiplicity in the field of workplace learning and a reminder of the value of various approaches to address troublesome questions.

There is an overlapping focus on the future, be it the dynamic, changing nature of work, the effect of technology on practices and requirements for skills that enable workers to become or to operate within fluid, dynamic environments. Hämäläinen's study of problem-solving skills among working adults points to the complexity of the application and the development of such skills, finding that cultural capital, and perhaps not surprisingly, the consistency of experience of problem solving are important for its use, flexibly and fluidly. If anything, it shows how extremely difficult it is to understand (partially at best!) these issues, much less translate them into policies for human development. In discussing the changing international and local requirements of learning to be a police officer, Kohlström *et al.* illustrate the shift from operational training towards police education. Using national survey data, their study not only reveals and poses questions about what new Swedish police students value and why, but point also to the unpredictable interplay of practical and theoretical knowledge over the span of a career.

Two articles (Reich, Rooney and Hopwood; Lizier) drawing on socio-material approaches make reference to emergence as a condition of the work requiring high levels of agency (complex adaptive organisations by Lizier) and the distinctive features of different sites of emergent learning (Reich *et al.*). Reich *et al.* and Zukas and Malcom also make emergence visible through investigating practices as socio-material phenomena. This approach has enabled these authors to reveal learning that is differentiated across time and place, in relation to artefacts and changing practices that may be subtle and barely visible but nevertheless consequential. For example, Zukas and Malcolm report that life in academia is cultivated on the job through seemingly mundane tasks such as processing emails and forms, attending conferences and being supported by a strong online presence, activities not usually cherished or taught in graduate school! By uncovering the tapestry of everyday practices, all of these authors highlight the richness of learning, the dynamic, fragile nature of knowledge. In the workplaces in healthcare and engineering investigated by Reich *et al.*, participants interrogate the status of knowledge–what/how do we know as an expert and what does it mean? Lizier's article implicitly highlights the importance of such questioning in her portrayal of work that is highly fluid and the degree of agency required in negotiating the demands of work where emergence is a defining element. Island and Snis likewise examine practices, but through the boundary object of a new *mHealth* mobile app illustrating its power to reshape learning (i.e. interactions, identities) for the cared and the carer and prompting a desire for learning more for both.

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