

Constituting learning settings and outcomes: Conceptions of and prospects for the recognition of learning



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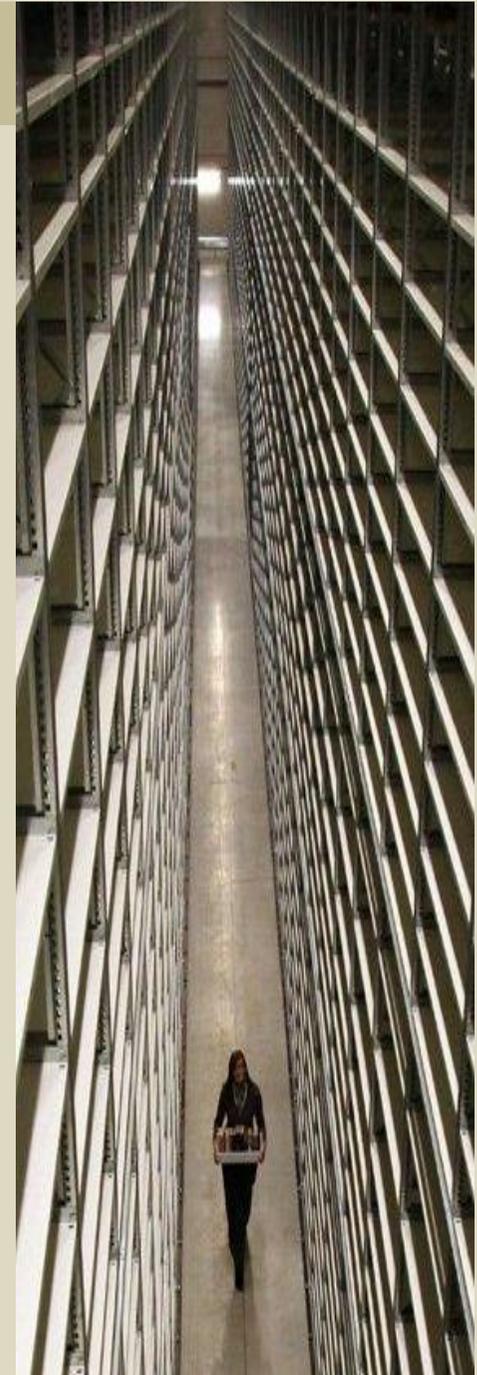


Progression

- Preamble
- Experience and learning
- Some assumptions, definitions and unhelpful concepts
- Learning within and across social setting
- Affordances and engagements
- Recognising learning through practice (how should RPL progress)

Preamble

- RPL prompts a fresh consideration of learning processes and outcomes
- Includes, understanding about and legitimisation of learning across different kinds of settings
- Learning occurs continuously in and across particular settings
- Proposes – no qualitative distinctions amongst settings as environments in which to learn
- Four key concepts:
 - i) activities and ii) interactions; and
 - iii) affordances and iv) engagement,
- - they emphasise relations between social and personal factors



RPL is often directed towards social justice goals

workers without certification paid less, have more tenuous employment and limited prospects for advancement (Groot et al., 1994; Grubb, 1996; Leuven & Oosterbeek, 1999; O'Connell, 1999).

Yet, there are complexities hindering achieving these goals:

- identifying and selecting appropriate focuses for recognition,
- how it might be undertaken fairly (i.e. with validity and reliability) and
- what organisation should organise the recognition of these skills.

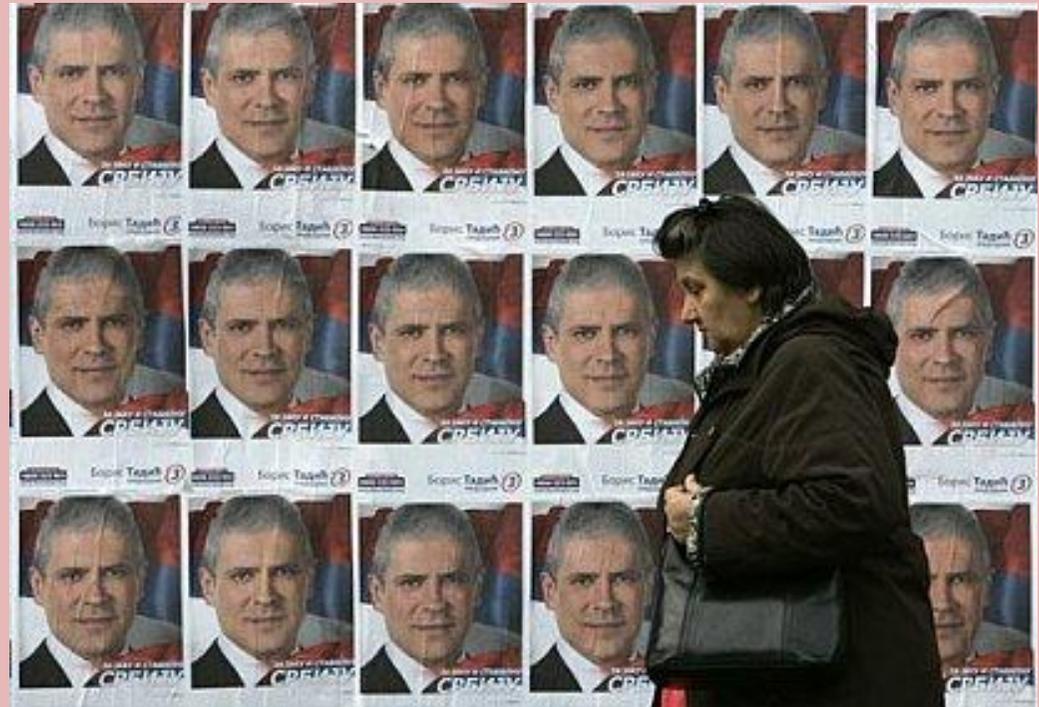
For instance, should that recognition be based on individuals' development, the specific requirements of a workplace or on occupational-wide criteria?



Starting point: Understanding what constitutes experience and learning

Experience and learning

Some assumptions, definitions and unhelpful concepts



Assumptions

- Experiencing and learning is ongoing across our lives
- Activity structures cognition (Rogoff & Lave 1984)
- Experiences in educational settings not privileged: robust (i.e. transferable) knowledge also arises through practice setting (Raizen 1994, Scribner 1984)
- What is experienced (i.e. activities and interactions) and how they are engaged with (Billett 2001) are key premises shaping that robustness
- Different kinds of settings provide particular kinds of experiences (e.g. activities and interactions), and potential experiencing for individuals
- Yet, individuals' process of experiencing (i.e. their construal and construction) is person-dependant by degree and central to what is learnt
- Experiences (e.g. in workplaces educational programs) are nothing more or less than an invitation to change



Two kinds of change: individual learning and the remaking of culture

Key concepts defined

- Microgenetic development – moment by moment learning (or change) (Scribner 1985)
- Ontogenetic development – ongoing development across life course (Scribner 1985)
- Pre-mediate experiences – those individuals have had earlier that both shape their cognitive experience and shaped it (Valsiner)
- Immediate experience – how individuals' cognitive experience, interest, intentionality and energy construe and construct in the immediate moment (Valsiner)
- Affordances – the invitational qualities of the experience (i.e. degree by which individuals are invited and supported in their learning)
- Engagement – how individuals engage with and learn through what they are afforded (i.e. how they take up that invitation)
- Duality between affordances and engagement (Billett 2001, 2006)

How does this experiencing and learning occur?

Microgenetic (i.e. moment by moment) processes of experiencing comprise negotiations between personal (i.e. pre-mediate experiences) and contributions of social and physical world (i.e. immediate experiences)

This experiencing is mediated by individuals' subjectivities, capacities, the discourses they have access to, their gaze, that arise through life histories.

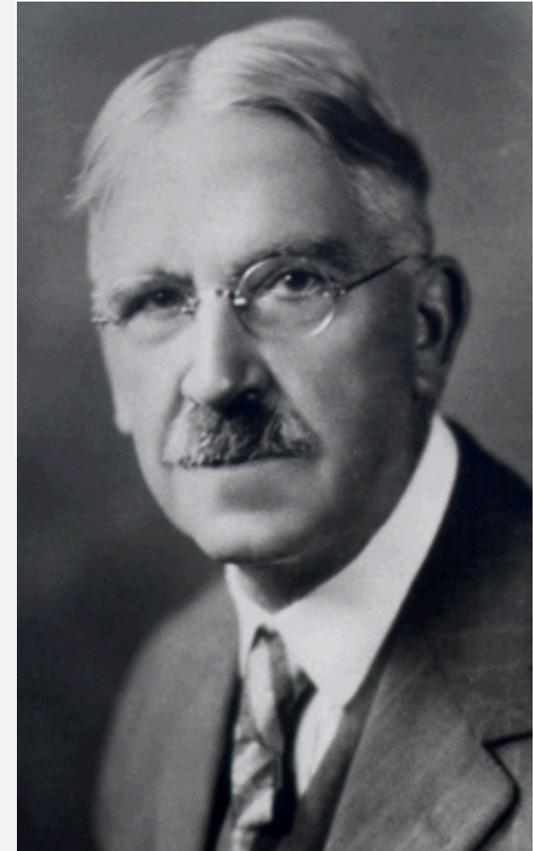
These factors shape and exercise individuals' agency in the focus, intentionality and intensity of their constructive processes of experiencing

Consider the subjectivities (gaze and access to discourses) of immigrant workers, disabled bank workers and women IT workers

The importance of ontogeny (i.e. personal history)

Gergen (1994) proposes:

"As people move through life, we are continuously confronted with some degree of novelty--new contexts and new challenges. Yet our actions in each passing moment will necessarily represent some simulacrum of the past; we borrow, we formulate, and patch together various pieces of preceding relationships in order to achieve local coordination of the moment. Meaning at the moment is always a rough reconstitution of the past, a ripping of words from familiar contexts and their precarious insertion into the emerging realisation of the present." (pp. 269-270)



Higgins (2005) refers to Dewey's (1916: 11) example of a small room with just a telescope in it.

To a brute realist the room seems relatively barren constricted; but to the astronomer who lives there, it opens up onto the entire universe.

Dewey holds that a person's true environment is determined as much by their interest and perception— "by one's axis of salience—as by location and configuration" (p.453)

The cultural psychologist Valsiner (1998) proposes

"... most of human development takes place through active ignoring and neutralisation of most of social suggestions to which the person is subjected to in everyday life" (p. 393).

This is essential to buffer individuals' personalities against the constant demands of social suggestions.



He continues: *"Hence, what is usually viewed as socialisation efforts (by social institutions or parents) is necessarily counteracted by the active recipients of such efforts who can neutralise or ignore a large number of such episodes, aside from single particularly dramatic ones."* (p.393)

Yet, even these dramatic episodes are construed by individuals in ways not controlled by their initiators.

For instance, Foucault (1986) claims that no amount of social pressure can control desire

Negotiations amongst the personal and institutional facts in learning

- External influences shaping the mind (and behaviour) have long been advanced, and before psychological accounts
- Early psychological thought emphasised how human development arises through engagement with experiences external to individuals (e.g. Janet, Claparède, Baldwin)
- Central to more recent conceptions – Piaget's equilibrium and Vygotskian inspired inter-psychological processes and intra-psychological outcomes
- Current accounts also emphasise negotiations between personal and social (e.g. Valsiner, Scribner, Rogoff, early Gergen) in experiencing
- Valsiner refers to how premediate experiences (i.e. those that comes earlier) shape how we construe the immediate experience.



Unhelpful concepts !!!!

Informal learning

Lifelong learning

Unlearning

Prior learning



Informal learning

Three critiques

1. Describing something by what it is not (i.e. informal) and in comparison to what occurs something else (i.e. in educational institutions) is unhelpful, - rich learning arises through such settings

2. Workplaces and other social settings have norms and practices that shape opportunities for learning, so they are 'not unstructured'

3. Explaining the process of learning on the settings in which it occurs (i.e. 'formal' or 'informal') denies the significance of individuals' contributions to their learning – suggests behavioural and unthinking responses

(Billett 2002)



Lifelong learning

Learning is an ongoing process, like thinking, breathing, tasting etc

- i.e. - this is something people do, and all the time

Legacy of strong associations between teaching and learning: it is required to be made to happen

Often gets confused with and mis-interpreted with lifelong education (i.e. the provision of educational experiences) and that ongoing learning only ever occurs through such experiences



'Unlearning'

Suggests it is possible to reverse a process of learning, as in wiping clean parts of the human mind (like a hard disk)

How does this process occur? Putting the experience that generated that knowledge in reverse!

There is likely to be exhaustion and decline in cognition from lack of opportunity to rehearse

But this process is gradual and quite distinct from an alleged conscious process of unlearning



Prior learning

Prior learning implies something that has occurred earlier and is now finished and, as such, can be measured and assessed

- It is fixed rather than ongoing
- Would it be better just to refer to recognition of individuals' learning, rather than prior learning?



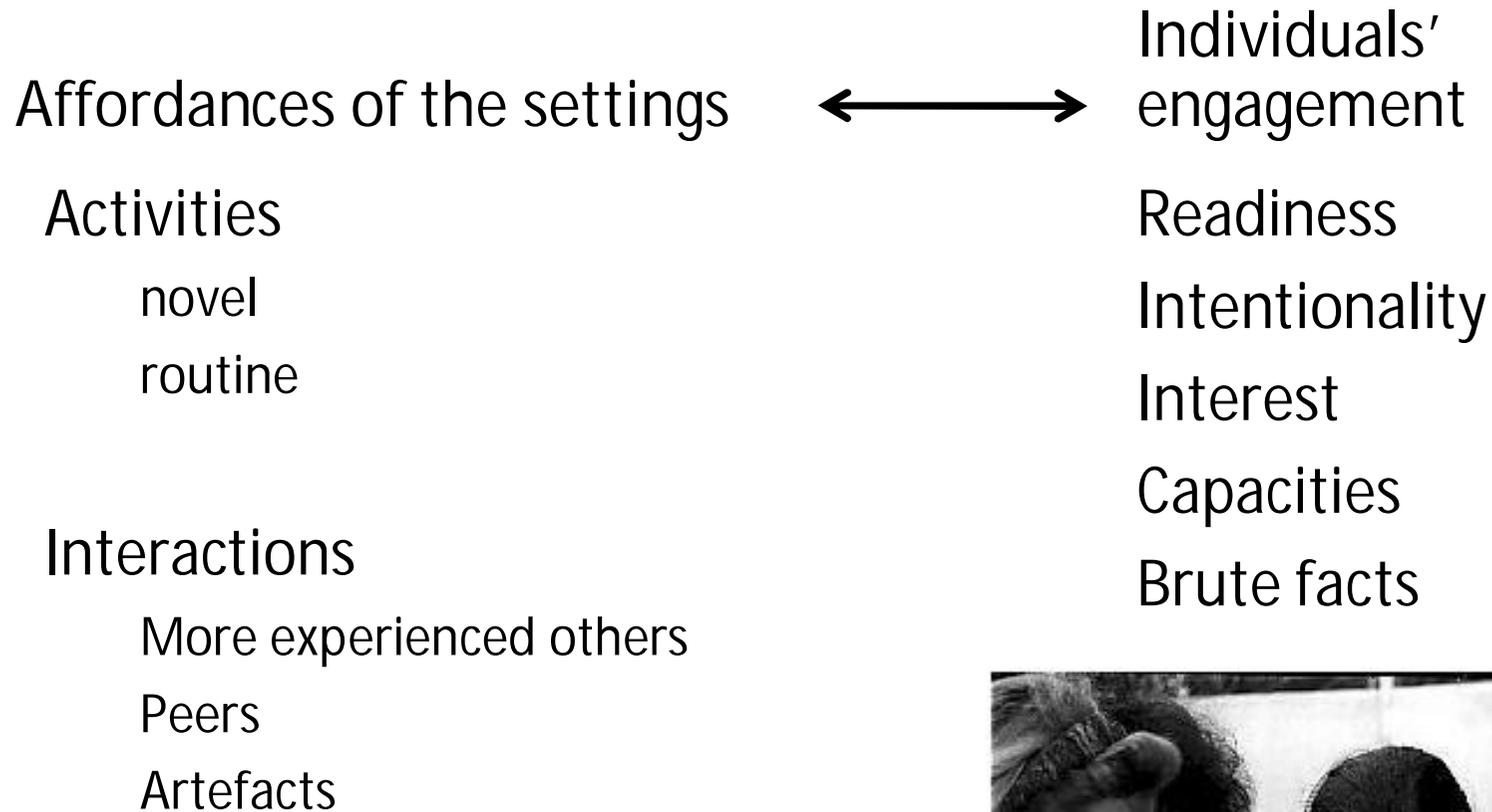
Learning through and across settings: a duality

Whether referring to what occurs in educational institutions, workplaces, the home, community engagements etc, the process of learning progresses on the basis of what is experienced and how individuals enact their experiencing

Duality: affordances and engagements



Duality: Affordances and engagements



So, what does all this mean for the recognition of prior learning?



Means that processes of recognition of prior learning need to account for:

- ✓ Ongoing learning and development across life (i.e. 'prior learning' is not fixed)
- ✓ Recognition premised on the kinds of activities they have engaged in and how they have engaged with and utilised that knowledge.
- ✓ Need to go beyond 'school like activities' and evidence of that kind



Recognising learning through practice (how should RPL progress?)

- Suggests that there is a need to consider purposes, focuses and inclusive means of assessing and recognising learning
- Making sure purposes and focuses are appropriate
- Processes are consistent with these purposes and focuses
- Consideration of process: what kinds of activities have individuals participated in and, therefore generated what kinds of knowledge
- Consideration of outcomes: importance of bench marks/standards

Reminder: Learning is ongoing, not just fixed and prior



A range of purposes for using RPL:

- ❖ Prerequisite knowledge for work or educational purposes (employment/entry into programs)
- ❖ Occupational recognition
- ❖ Credit for courses
- ❖ Advance standing within an educational program

all these require assessments across some benchmarks and summatively

Often, strong social justice imperatives

Three possible focuses for RPL

- i) individual development - an individualistic, humanistic, and potentially critical approach focused on individuals' development,
- ii) workplace practice - focused on the performance requirements of a particular workplace in which individuals are employed and
- iii) occupational practice - the focus on the capacities expected to be deployed effectively by somebody working in the particular occupational field (e.g. cooks, production work, teachers).

See Billett 2005



RPL in practice: key issues

Benchmarks for RPL

- Not always available
- Availability often privileges those relatively advantaged
- Course outcomes are abstracted from the circumstances of practice
- Emphasise outcomes rather than learning and development processes
- Issues about validity and reliability

Use of a range of evidence to make judgements about individuals' learning

- Challenge testing
- Accounts of work activities
- etc

In sum,



Need to view the process of learning as being ongoing and not inherently privileged by particular settings

Rather, it is the duality between affordances and individuals' engagement that mediates their learning

Educators and educational administrators, in particular, may struggle with such concepts

All of this legitimises RPL, yet presents challenges for how that recognition of learning might best progress