

Improving incentives to learning in the workplace

Network grant holders: Helen Rainbird, Karen Evans, Phil Hodkinson and Lorna Unwin

Aims:

- The Network aims to contribute to improved practice among a wide range of practitioners in teaching and learning in the workplace, including trainers, Human Resource professionals and trade unionists.
- The workplace is an important site of learning and access to learning opportunities, yet its primary purpose is the production of goods and services. In order to understand the incentives and barriers to learning at work, learning must be located in the broader context of the employment relationship and developments in work organisation which can support or undermine effective learning strategies

Within the network, five projects investigate apprenticeship as a model of learning and the influence of regulatory frameworks on opportunities to learn in the workplace. In addition they have common concerns with the role of tacit skills and individual dispositions in contributing to learning; and with the relationship between articulated knowledge and informal learning acquired at different sites.

The projects are:

Project 1. The regulatory framework of the employment relationship

Helen Rainbird (University College Northampton) and Anne Munro (Napier University, Edinburgh).

Project 2: Recognition of Tacit Skills and Knowledge in Work Re-entry

Karen Evans, Natasha Kersh, Akiko Sakamoto (Institute of Education, University of London).

Project 3: The workplace as a site for learning for mature workers and new entrants: opportunities and barriers in small and medium sized enterprises

Lorna Unwin and Alison Fuller (University of Leicester).

Project 4: An exploration of the nature of apprenticeship in an advanced economy

Peter Senker (University College Northampton).

Project 5. The School as a Site for Work-based Learning

Phil Hodkinson and Heather Hodkinson (University of Leeds).

Findings – Developing expansive learning environments in the workplace:

The workplace is a major site for learning but many organisations need to improve the quality of their learning environments. This would benefit the organisation as a whole and the individuals who work there. The Expansive-Restrictive Framework has been developed as a practical tool to help organisations develop their learning potential. Key findings are:

The expansive-restrictive framework can be used to analyse the organisational characteristics which determine the nature and extent of the learning opportunities available across the workplace.

The way work is organised and the culture of the workplace will determine the extent to which learning opportunities are expansive or restrictive.

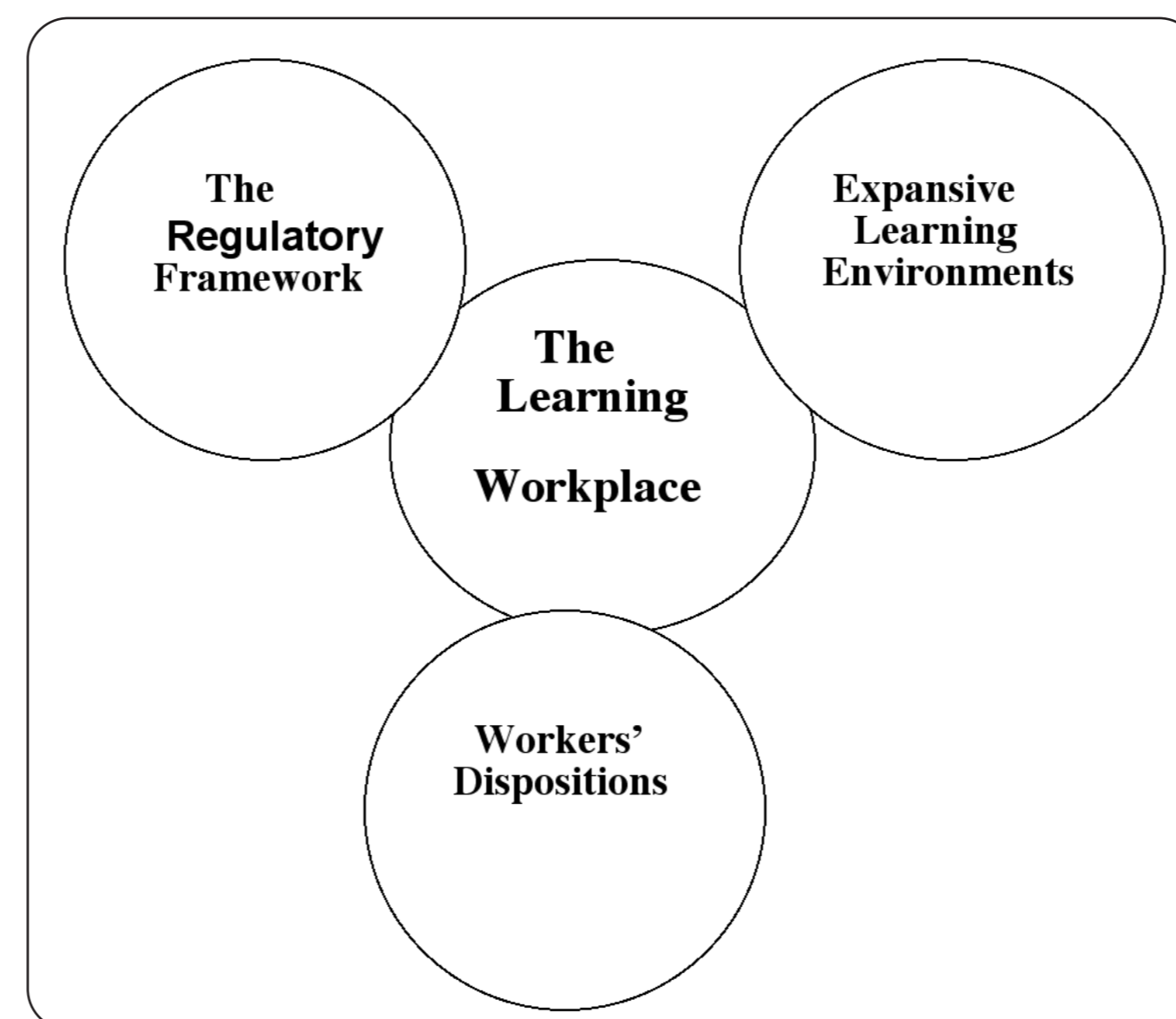
All employees, regardless of age, status and level of competence are engaged in helping each other to learn new skills and knowledge. For example, apprentices draw on their education and work experience to help older colleagues and are no longer 'novice' in the traditional sense.

Collaborative working practices and approaches to problem-solving facilitate the sharing and acquiring of expertise across work groups.

Individuals have access to a range of learning opportunities that make up their learning territory, including formal learning and qualifications, learning at home, and, for employees, the workplace.

Implications for practice:

Opportunities to learn at work can be enhanced, for example by constructing more expansive learning environments for workers based on assessment of what workers might want, respond to positively, or need, in a particular setting. This may involve changes to working practices, and to structural factors such as pay, promotion and status recognition as these relate to attitudes to learning. It also requires attention to working cultures, as well as to individual differences and preferences. Planning should be responsive to the micro-conditions of specific working groups and contexts as well as to the more usually considered macro- influences. It should pay attention to workplace inequalities, as well as individual wants or needs.



Findings – individuals, dispositions and workplace learning:

The network's research has shown that individual biography and disposition are relevant to learning at work in at least four overlapping ways.

- Workers/learners bring prior knowledge, understanding and skills with them, which can contribute to their future work and learning
- The attitudes, abilities and experiences of workers influence their approaches to work and to workplace learning
- The dispositions and actions of individual workers contribute to the nature of the learning environment at work.
- Working, learning at work and belonging to a workplace community, contribute to the developing attitudes and sense of identity of the workers themselves.

The approach should be to encourage learning through work, not impose it. Such approaches may only have a partial impact, for any changes introduced will affect different workers in different ways, and will result in differing responses from them. However, this is true of all approaches to workplace learning. We need to accept this uneven impact of learning initiatives as a reality, not a counsel of despair.

Findings – tacit skills and work environments:

- Adults gain tacit skills from a range of life and work experiences, but do not necessarily think they have gained anything valuable
- Tacit forms of personal competences which are important for job change include: competences related to attitudes and values; learning competences; social/ co-operative competences; methodological competences strategic (or self steering) competences.
- There is a link between recognition, deployment and development of tacit skills: recognition of tacit skills in expansive learning environments encourages adults to deploy and develop them further.
- Methods which can be employed by tutors/supervisors to make tacit skills visible are relational rather than programmatic, and pay attention to environment, dispositions and micro-cultures of learning or workplace settings
- Practical work placements in vocational courses facilitate work re-entry for adults, by providing opportunities to deploy tacit skills as well as new knowledge in supported settings.
- The assignment of a coach /mentor at the earliest stages of workplace induction could help in the creation of environments which utilise people's skills fully, while challenging tacitly-learned 'bad practice'
- In a 'learning workplace' individual initiative, expansive environments and intermediary support are all significant for deployment and further development of tacit skills.

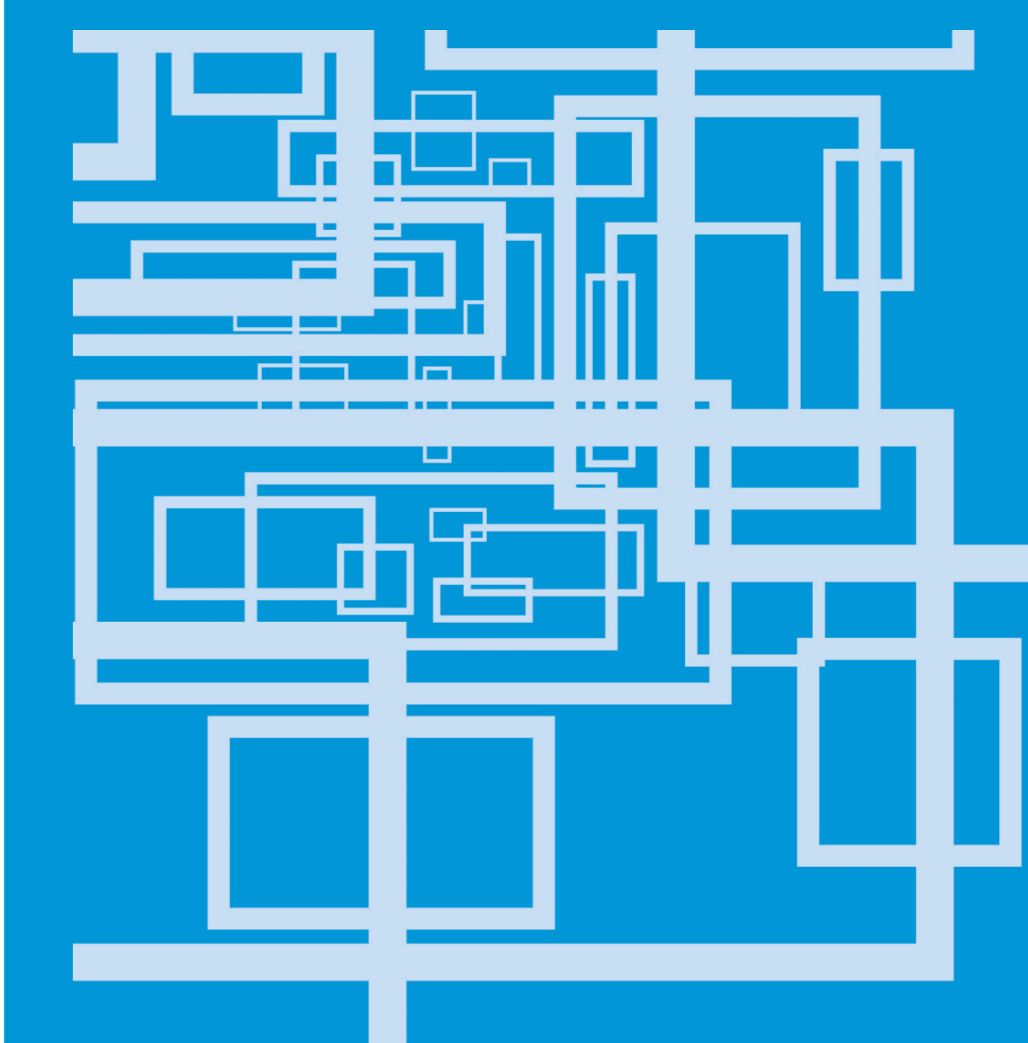
Research team:

Prof. Helen Rainbird (University College Northampton)
Prof. Karen Evans (Institute of Education, London)
Prof. Phil Hodkinson (University of Leeds)
Prof. Lorna Unwin (University of Leicester)

Contact details:

Professor Helen Rainbird,
Network Co-ordinator,
Tel: 01604 735500 ext. 2482
E.mail: helen.rainbird@northampton.ac.uk

Teaching and Learning Research Programme



TLRP involves over 30 research teams with contributions from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Work began in 2000 and will continue to 2008/9.

Learning: TLRP's overarching aim is to improve outcomes for learners of all ages in teaching and learning contexts across the UK.

Outcomes: TLRP studies a broad range of learning outcomes, including the acquisition of skill, understanding, knowledge and qualifications and the development of attitudes, values and identities relevant to a learning society.

Lifecourse: TLRP supports projects and related activities at many ages and stages in education, training and lifelong learning.

Enrichment: TLRP commits to user engagement at all stages of research. It promotes research across disciplines, methodologies and sectors, and supports national and international co-operation.

Expertise: TLRP works to enhance capacity for all forms of research on teaching and learning, and for research-informed policy and practice.

Improvement: TLRP develops the knowledge base on teaching and learning and policy and practice in the UK.

TLRP Directors' Team

Professor Andrew Pollard ■ Cambridge
Dr Mary James ■ Cambridge
Dr Kathryn Ecclestone ■ Newcastle
Dr Alan Brown ■ Warwick
John Siraj-Blatchford ■ Cambridge

TLRP Programme Office

Dr Lynne Blanchfield ■ Lsb32@cam.ac.uk
Suzanne Fletcher ■ sf207@cam.ac.uk

TLRP

University of Cambridge
Faculty of Education
Shaftesbury Road
Cambridge CB2 2BX UK

Tel: +44 (0)1223 369631

