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## **How we do things around here: practice architectures that enable learning in the in-between spaces of the workplace.**

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### **Abstract**

Those entering a new workplace often come with knowledge and skills relevant to the job they are employed to do: however there will be site based practices that they are unfamiliar with. Most of the learning about 'how we do things around here' occurs after a new role is commenced. This is certainly the case with novice Vocational Education and Training teachers. This paper considers what enables and constrains the learning of such new teachers. We use a particular form of practice theory, the theory of practice architectures, to focus on the arrangements that support the development of communicative learning spaces. At work there are a range of spaces that are 'in-between' the personal and professional. We show how in-between spaces become communicative learning spaces where professional learning takes place. The development of communicative learning spaces is supported through arrangements that enable the intersection of the personal and professional, the sharing of stories, and the development of relational trust. The paper argues that while the fragile nature of in-between spaces means that formalising such arrangements can be counterproductive, approaches can be put in place to assist the development of communicative learning spaces.

Workers typically enter a new job with general education, and some training and experience from previous work. They are unfamiliar with the environment, their new colleagues and many aspects of the work in which they will be engaged. While they may receive some induction or additional formal training, they are faced with the immediate task of learning 'how we do things around here'. This includes not just the technical aspects of the work, but how it is arranged and practised, how to access what they need to do it, who does what with whom and what is regarded as having completed the work successfully. It may differ from what they have learned in their training. They are faced with the challenge of learning the specific practices involved in their work, typically with little organised support to assist them. This challenge continues as new problems are encountered and what is expected of them alters over time. While the issues raised are relevant for all workers, here we focus on VET teachers.

The problem the new VET teacher faces is a contextual and a relational one: 'How can I deploy what I know in this environment, with these people, with respect to these practices?' They need to learn to be able to do this, but the learning is of a different nature to that required to develop the knowledge and skills that got them the job in the first place. This new learning is situated and immediately purposeful.

It is often not until engaging with the practices in a particular workplace that people come to know 'how to go on' (Wittgenstein, 2009) in those practices and in that workplace. This paper explores how people learn to know how to go on in particular practices and particular workplaces. It focuses on how this might happen for VET teachers in the spaces between the personal and the professional, and what enables and constrains this learning. It explores their learning in a new workplace: where they are new to the organisation; new to a particular site within an organisation; and new to this particular form of employment. The workplace in which this issue is explored is that of newly appointed, often casually employed, vocational education and training teachers in Australia.

The paper begins by outlining the conceptual framework of the theory of practice architectures, which we use to explore the workplace learning of new VET teachers who had not experienced formal teacher education. Next we discuss learning spaces more broadly, and then outline the concept of communicative learning spaces. An overview of the longitudinal study drawn on in the study follows. Findings are illuminated through four case studies and the practice architectures that enable and constrain teacher learning in in-between spaces are discussed. Finally, we argue that in-between spaces can be nurtured to become communicative learning spaces, but that such spaces are fragile. While such spaces cannot be too tightly controlled or they slip away, we suggest structural arrangements that organisations can provide

that could support the development of such spaces. A study of this kind does not seek to make recommendations of what *should* be done, but to improve understanding of the learning challenges of novice teachers in the complex workplaces of training organisations.

### **Learning in Practice**

Rather than framing the problem of ‘how to do things around here’ in terms of the characteristics of individual learners, we focus instead on seeing the workplace as a set of practices in which participants engage and through which they interact. Practice theories enable us to see learning as contextualised, in relationship with other people and with material objects. Practice theories have increasingly been used to explore learning in the professional fields and in the workplace (see Hager, Lee and Reich; Green, 2009) and Nicolini (2012) argues that practice theories can provide a “distinctive contribution to the study of work and organisation” (p.1). Nicolini (2012) goes further to argue that practice theories are “theory-methods packages that produce a shift in our understanding of social and organisational phenomena” (p. 7). Importantly for our explorations, they foreground practices and at the same time acknowledge the influence of human agency.

Located within the wider range of practice theories, the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al. 2014; Mahon et al. 2017) provides a particular theoretical and analytical framework for exploring learning in the workplace. It takes an ontological view of practice, focusing on the site-based practices that are undertaken as well as the arrangements that enable or constrain particular activities and practices. It provides a framework to investigate the doings, sayings and relatings in site-based practices, as well as the investigation of site-based arrangements that enable and constrain these activities. It allows the investigation of the everyday world, the lifeworld, in which we all operate. For our purposes, such a framework provides a structure for identifying what enables and constrains the site-based learning of workers in in-between spaces. The theory outlines practice architectures across three dimensions: the cultural-discursive; the material-economic and the social-political (Kemmis et al, 2014). These practice architectures enable and constrain particular practices and activities.

*Cultural-discursive arrangements* are within the semantic dimension. They operate in the medium of language and prefigure the sayings in and about a site (Kemmis et al. 2014). These include what is said, how it is said, and what is thought. For instance, the language used and the ideas discussed in a court room are likely to be different to the language used and the ideas discussed in a commercial kitchen.

*Material-economic arrangements* are in the physical space-time dimension and prefigure the doings of a site. They operate in the medium of work and activity (Kemmis et al. 2014). These arrangements include physical arrangements such as furniture in a room, and the layout of a building; material artefacts, such as

documents; scheduling arrangements such as staff meetings; pay rates and work hours.

*Social-political arrangements* are in the social dimension and prefigure the relations. They operate in the medium of power and solidarity. These arrangements “make possible particular relationships between people and between people and non-human objects” (Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 32). In an organisation these might include social arrangements such as hierarchical expectations, role expectations and other interactional arrangements.

The theory of practice architectures is useful both as a theoretical framework and as an analytical approach to developing an understanding of the arrangements that enable and constrain particular practices. In reality these arrangements are usually enmeshed, with changes in one impacting on changes in others.

### **Spaces for Learning at Work**

The concept of space has been a topic of consideration across a range of research areas. Acknowledging the work of Edwards and Usher (2008), Brooks, Fuller and Waters (2012) refer to an “emergent spatial turn” (p. 1) in the social sciences, and argue that the construction of spaces through social processes is increasingly being emphasised by researchers (p. 2). Fuller, Brooks and Waters (2012) argue, that “space is both constituted through social relations and constitutive of them” (p. 261). Here we focus on spaces for learning at work.

It is well-established that different arrangements in the workplace support or constrain learning that occurs there (see for instance Billett, 2001; Fuller and Unwin, 2004). As Kersh (2015) notes “Making a workplace a learning space has been considered one of the challenges of contemporary workplace development” (p. 847). In exploring the changing spaces of learning, and the increasing attention being paid to learning spaces in the workplace, Fuller, Brooks and Waters (2012) call for “more sophisticated conceptualizations of ‘learning space’” (p. 262).

An important aspect of learning at work involves interacting with colleagues (Billett, 2001; Eraut, 2007; Hoekstra, 2018). In their ground breaking work on situated learning, Lave and Wenger (1991) identified learning to be “an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” (p. 31). Dall’Alba notes that “engaging with others is integral to the professional lifeworld, with language playing a key role... The process of becoming a professional occurs, then, through continual interaction with other professionals...” (2009, p. 42). We take the value of interactions with colleagues in supporting learning relevant to the activities of the workplace as a point of departure for this paper.

One of the ways in which people engage with others in the workplace is through the sharing of stories and this has been identified as being important in

supporting learning. For instance, Rantalo and Karp (2018) identified storytelling as valuable in supporting the learning of police recruits. In that study, a number of themes emerged in relation to the storytelling of police recruits including 'belonging' and 'making contributions'. The theme of belonging related to becoming part of an occupational community (police). The 'making contributions' theme related to being able to bring "'new' fresh knowledge, outlooks or perspectives" (p. 172) to that community. Rantalo and Karp (2018) note that "storytelling practices afford sensemaking of occupational experiences...[and] stories increase knowledge of how to function in an occupational community" (p. 173).

The value of the sharing of stories and the development of trust between people in the development of a communicative learning space that supports learning was identified by Sjolie et al. (2018). They identify communicative learning spaces as communicative spaces (Habermas, 1996; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005) where professional learning takes place (although not the only place for this). Communicative learning spaces are supportive contexts where participants feel safe to discuss issues and ideas: where there is an intersection of the personal and the professional and relational trust can be developed.

Communicative learning spaces often develop in in-between spaces (Sjolie et al., 2018). Solomon, Boud and Rooney (2006), using concepts of third space and hybrid spaces (Bhabha, 1990), developed the notion of in-between spaces in the context of learning and work. In-between spaces are figurative and sometimes literal spaces between work and learning; between the social and the professional. These spaces can be in-between physically and/or temporally: in-between the worksite and the home; or out of the office in a coffee shop or lunchroom; in-between standard work hours such as lunch time or travel to and from work.

In this paper we use the theory of practice architectures to interrogate what enables and constrains the development of a communicative learning space in in-between spaces, addressing the specific research question: What practice architectures enable and constrain learning of new VET teachers in in-between spaces of the workplace?

## **The Study**

We address the research question through a specific site-based study which explored the learning of novice VET teachers. The longitudinal study was undertaken over two years, investigating how novice vocational education and training teachers learn to become teachers (Author 2017; 2019). As was typical in the institutions involved, the participants had not previously worked in a formal teaching role, and began as teachers without having undertaken any teacher education qualifications. They did

however have qualifications and considerable experience in the occupation they were teaching about. Like many workers coming to a new job, each teacher was unfamiliar with the physical site, the requirements of their role, and they did not have pre-existing relationships with others in the site.

The research used a multi-case study approach with the setting of each teacher as the unit of analysis (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2007). Ethics approval was given by \*\*\* University, as well as the organisations where the research was undertaken. Participants were nine novice teachers working in four vocational colleges in Australia. Semi-structured participant interviews, and field notes focussing on the local site-based arrangements where each of the teachers worked, were the primary data sources. Face-to-face interviews undertaken in a private area of each teacher’s workplace were conducted with participants within four months of commencing the role, at the end of the first year of teaching, and at the end of the second year of teaching for those still employed (see Table 1). These interviews were recorded and transcribed. Other sources included participant journal entries, sketches and emails; and photographs of each teacher’s worksite. Data collection focused on the practices the teachers were engaged in and the sites where these practices were undertaken. This included the substantive practices they undertook in their role as a teacher, as well as the practices they undertook to support their learning.

Data analysis was undertaken in two stages. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of interview transcripts identified key themes emerging from the data. Other forms of data, especially the field notes, participant journal entries and emails were then interrogated in relation to these themes, and to determine if they provided additional themes that had not become apparent in the interviews (they did not). The theory of practice architectures was then used to analyse what enabled and constrained particular practices. Eight case studies were developed (two of the nine participants were in the same department). Table 1 names the departments that were the sites for each of the cases, as well as the participants’ employment arrangements during the two years of the research. At the first interview all participants hoped to become employed as a full time permanent teacher at some point.

**Table 1. Participants and teaching departments.**

Teaching department	Teacher pseudonym	Employment basis	Other work	Retention <sup>a</sup>
Business Administration	Sarah	Casual 4–16 h/week	No	Left after 2 years
Horticulture	Michael	Casual 6 h/wk	Few small projects and then many small projects	Left after 1 year
Sport and Fitness	Grant	Casual 3–18 h/wk	Various. Full-time work elsewhere by end of year 2	Yes
Community Services	Alice	Casual, contract then Permanent	Few small projects	Yes
Air Conditioning & Refrigeration	Ewan	Contract	No	Position in another college after 18 months
Electronics	Trevor	Permanent	No	Yes
	Simon	Permanent	No	Yes
Beauty Therapy	Tabitha	Casual 3 h/wk	Small projects initially. Then full-time	Left after 1 year
Building Design	Sam	Contract	Small projects	Left after 2 years.

<sup>a</sup>Not untypical in the Australian VET system.

## Findings

The learning experienced by teachers varied considerably, with variations in what was learnt, how it was learnt, and how prepared teachers were to undertake their teaching role. Influences on their learning outside the workplace included: undertaking a certificate level qualification<sup>1</sup> in training and assessment (all completed within the first year of teaching); short courses related to administrative issues (eight of the nine participants); networking with industry (undertaken by three of the nine participants); and attending a conference (one participant). Prior to undertaking the research we had anticipated that these and other outside influences would play a greater role in teacher learning. Instead we found that the participants primarily learnt to become teachers by undertaking the teaching role and through the workplace support of their colleagues and supervisors (Author, 2017; 2019). The availability of this support varied across the sites.

In this paper we use the data related to teacher learning as a result of informal interactions with other teachers in context, and share the findings in the form of case studies. We focus on four of the case studies to explore learning in in-between spaces: Horticulture; Air Conditioning and Refrigeration; Community Services; and Electronics. Other cases are drawn on to illustrate particular points. Three of these cases were chosen because they provide clear evidence of learning in in-between spaces, and the fourth (Electronics) was chosen because the novice teacher made a deliberate attempt to develop an in-between space (although didn't explicitly identify it as an 'in-between space' himself).

### *Case 1 Horticulture*

The Horticulture teaching department had a scheduled daily morning tea around a communal table. Stories were shared, problems discussed and ideas explored. For Michael, the sessionally-employed teacher, the morning tea was valuable in supporting his learning: this included administrative arrangements, teaching, assessment as well as other more tenuous matters. For instance, discussing printing that he had paid for personally because of no access to the staff printer, and later discovering the arrangements that were made for sessional teacher printing, Michael made the point

If you don't have the time to discuss it, you cannot know from management that I don't know, nor can I know what is actually there, and I just start doing things.

Michael saw the daily morning teas as important to attend, noting

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<sup>1</sup> In the Australian Qualifications Framework the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is three levels below a Bachelor degree

I make a big effort to be here for the morning tea break even if I'm not teaching at those times. Just to hear what they are doing. What's difficult for them. What they find nice. All their good and bad stories.

Michael came to the morning teas whenever he was able to, even on days when he was not scheduled to be teaching. He listened to the stories, and gained understanding through the discussions of experienced teachers. Michael was aware of the workload his manager and other experienced teachers had, and because of this found a useful strategy was to 'catch' his manager or other experienced teachers to ask them questions either during or at the end of morning tea. This was particularly an issue for him when he was marking his first assignments and was unsure about some things related to that.

... it's just everyone's struggling for time at the moment...If I get a chance [I approach an experienced teacher] and just talk to someone.

Taking classes together on a shared excursion also provided another in-between space for learning for Michael. He asked questions and shared ideas with the other teacher, finding this especially valuable because they taught the same subject but to different students. Having developed the relationship in this in-between space, Michael was able to seek support from that teacher at other times when needed. This occurred in relation to his interactions with a particular student. At the next morning tea Michael quietly sought his advice for how to address the issue. The teacher provided advice and then together they brought in the manager, and they collectively developed an approach that aimed to address the issue that had arisen while ensuring the student remained in the class. The outcome was a success.

Toward the end of his second semester of teaching, work demands in his other job resulted in Michael not being able to attend morning teas regularly and he noted this had impacted on his learning. He said

If I ...could have been at the school more ... then I would have accessed all those experienced people, cause there's a wealth of knowledge there [but circumstances mean I am unable to do this now]. Otherwise I would have chosen to be here a lot more and hence would have shared a lot more.

Michael learnt about teaching and assessment during morning teas sometimes through hearing the stories that others told, hearing about the issues others were facing and sometimes through asking direct questions. Many of the things he learnt were not matters that are written in a manual, or able to be easily accessed in other ways. He highly valued the learning he was able to do as a result of engagement in this way.



## *Case 2 Air Conditioning and Refrigeration*

In the Air Conditioning and Refrigeration teaching workplace, a daily 'smoko' (morning tea) was scheduled. At this time all teachers met together in a shared kitchen where they made themselves tea or coffee. This kitchen was dominated by a large communal table, and people gathered around the table to chat. In this space they shared stories about a variety of things: their weekend; the latest product on the market for their industry; the latest football game; issues they were having with their teaching, or with a student; administrative arrangements that they didn't agree with and so on. Stories were shared, problems discussed and ideas explored. Ewan, the novice teacher in this site, noted that he discussed any teaching or assessment issues he had with other teachers at smoko

Well I'll discuss with the other teachers, they'd discuss what works for them, or what doesn't work for them, you know just sort of pretty much get around at smoko, saying we'll try this next time, we'll do that. So basically just peer support really.

Discussions over smoko were ongoing. An issue raised today might be picked up again tomorrow, and then again in a week or a month. In relation to an assessment change he wanted to make Ewan noted:

We've actually been talking about that and how we're going to improve it next year, so it's just a constant conversation we've been having and we go through it that way.

Within this team there were expectations about how students should be treated, and how teaching should be undertaken. In an early interview Ewan noted slightly disparagingly:

One teacher is very you know, like old fashioned school master, and rules with a stick.

Ewan distanced himself and his other colleagues from the approaches used by this teacher, making it clear that this was not appropriate in this context. For instance, in a later interview he clearly separates himself from such an approach.

I'm not the old school master relationship

He was quite clear that this approach was not part of 'how we do things around here'.

The Air Conditioning and Refrigeration teaching department shared a tea room with the Electrical teaching department, and the advice of the electrical teachers was also valued during this shared smoko. This was particularly valuable for Ewan after he had been teaching for a year and was asked to teach some of the electrical subjects that were relevant for air conditioning and refrigeration.

We're in the tea room and we also share lunch with the electricians. So we all usually talk about teaching experiences there, and we get a bit of an idea from the electricians' side of things.

Ewan saw the other teachers as having the main influence on his teaching. After teaching for 18 months he noted

Well the guys I teach with, all the staff upstairs there, you know my observations of how they do it, talking, the discussions we have with those, that's probably the majority of where I [learn].

Many of these discussions took place in the in-between space afforded by the daily scheduled smoko.

### *Case 3 Community Services*

In the Community Services teaching department there was a communal table, but no scheduled morning tea. The communal table was placed inside the staffroom door and before the alcoves where teachers' desks were located. One of the experienced teachers regularly undertook much of his non-teaching work there. Others often joined him for morning tea, lunch, or a chat after coming in from teaching. Teachers also used this communal table for shared development of resources or teaching plans. For the novice teacher Alice, the communal table became an in-between space for learning. It was in-between teaching and work at her desk. In-between the personal and the professional. It was also invitational for a chat over lunch breaks or coffee breaks.

Alice also had access to another in-between space in the form of a daily walk instigated within her faculty for the purpose of supporting a healthy lifestyle. This began during Alice's second year of teaching and while all faculty members were invited only a small group actually took part. Alice tried to join the daily walk as much as possible, largely for health reasons but also because she found that she was sometimes able to have valuable discussions with experienced teachers and administrators during these walks. These discussions supported her learning about a range of things including teaching and administrative arrangements, however this learning was somewhat limited because other walkers came from a range of teaching areas.

Like Michael, Alice was very aware that

People, they don't know what it is they don't know, and I often don't know what it is I don't know cause I don't know it yet.

After she had been teaching for a year Alice noted

I'm learning from my colleagues, I'm learning what's acceptable and what's not, what's expected and what's not, matching that against my own ideas of what's reasonable and fair and right. They're sort of helping me gauge where I am in the organisation and where I fit in. But my colleagues have been my main source of learning.

Much of this discussion with colleagues took place across the communal table.

In each of these three cases a communicative learning space was developed around a communal table. Stories were told, and trust was developed. While the daily break-time was scheduled in Air Conditioning and Refrigeration and in Horticulture, having the experienced teacher regularly sitting at the communal table and willing to chat in Community Services supported the development of a communicative learning space. In Community Services the scheduled daily walk also occasionally became an in-between space that supported novice teacher learning. The shared excursion in Horticulture provided an ad hoc in-between space for teacher sharing of stories, but was relatively fleeting.

#### *Case 4 Electronics*

In the electronics department, the new teacher, Trevor, had little support. There were few experienced teachers he could access to seek advice from. His supervisor was located some distance away in another area of the campus, had a heavy workload, and was rarely available. A range of other site-based factors also impacted on Trevor's learning to become a teacher including a shortage of physical resources, a lack of administrative and technical staff, and outdated teaching materials. One experienced teacher who was teaching another qualification was a source of support and advice. When asked how he accessed this advice, Trevor said "well usually we just bump into each other" often in the corridor or one of the staffrooms. After about six months Trevor arranged a regular afternoon tea around a communal table with teachers working in his building. Some of these were in his teaching department, and most were not. He noted

We've started a thing on a Friday afternoon to all get together and have a hot chocolate, and this afternoon I brought in freshly cooked muffins, just to get together and talk, and that's when you pick up things. Just general conversations rather than talking seriously with them, just talk openly, like ah I had this problem with this guy, oh that guy was with me before and this is how I got round the problem, and go talk to such and such, they'll know.

Trevor was aware of the value of the informal chats in the corridors and over morning tea. It was however not as supportive as that experienced in the other three cases discussed.

This case helps to highlight some of the arrangements that existed in the other cases where a shared morning tea, or other engagement in in-between spaces, was available. While it had some similarities with these other cases (regular meetings, mix of personal and professional, sharing of tea/coffee and food, communal table) other aspects were either missing or not as apparent. The shared afternoon tea that Trevor organised included a range of teachers, some from his teaching area and some from other areas. So the shared occupation/trade language that was apparent in the other cases was absent here. Similarly, shared industry experiences and understandings were also not as apparent. There was also no indication of the development of a trusting relationship between this group of teachers.

These cases show that the development of communicative learning in-between spaces can be valuable in supporting worker learning, including in relation to more immediate issues and the more difficult problems. For Michael, Ewan, Alice and Trevor the shared space around a communal table and an expectation of regularly scheduled opportunities to engage provided the possibility of an ongoing conversation. If a novice teacher received advice about a particular issue, they could make the suggested changes and trial the changes. They knew that their colleagues would be meeting the next day or the next week and there would be the opportunity to discuss the issue further if they needed.

#### *Practice Architectures that Enabled and Constrained Learning in In-Between Spaces*

We now discuss the cases in relation to the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political dimensions of practice architectures. Exploring each of these dimensions allows us to more clearly see the arrangements that enabled and constrained the development of in-between spaces that impacted on teacher learning. In reality, these arrangements are enmeshed, with each impacting on or influencing the other, however for clarity we explore them separately below.

The cultural discursive arrangements varied between each of the sites. For instance, what was said, and the way it was said in the Horticulture workplace was quite different to what was said and the way it was said in the Community Services workplace. However there were broad similarities in cultural-discursive arrangements of the in-between spaces for each site. In each in-between space that became a communicative learning space, the sharing of stories was part of the arrangements. In the sharing of stories, novice teachers were using the same industry language (for instance, the language of the horticulture industry) as the experienced teachers, and quickly came to learn the language of vocational education and training through hearing it used in the shared stories.

The material-economic arrangements also varied between the different sites. Here we focus on the physical arrangements and scheduling arrangements. The

availability of a communal table, together with easy access to tea and coffee making facilities was an important contributor to the development of a communicative learning space in a number of the cases. However a communal table was also available in two of the cases (not outlined in this paper), and they were not used. So a focus point enabled by the table was valuable, but was not the only requirement.

In all but one of the examples of the development of a communicative learning space, scheduling was an important contributor to creating the in-between space. In the cases where regular discussions over morning tea supported teacher learning the same physical environment was available for lunch, and people had their lunch there. However lunchtimes varied, and these were rarely identified as supporting teacher learning.

The social-political arrangements were important contributors to the development of a communicative learning space in in-between spaces. In Vocational Education and Training, teachers need to have expertise in the industry about which they teach, as well as teaching expertise. Novice teachers are experienced practitioners in the industry (it is the basis on which they are employed as a teacher). While they lack teaching expertise, they often have more current experience of the industry they are preparing students for than do full-time teachers. Novice teachers noted examples where they provided current industry information to experienced teachers who had limited or no current industry experience. This provides more reciprocal information sharing and impacts on the hierarchical arrangements between experienced and novice teachers, especially in in-between spaces. The morning tea arrangements in the Air Conditioning and Refrigeration department and the Horticulture department enabled novice teacher access to other teachers in a non-hierarchical environment. This occurred daily, and many of the discussions were ongoing. In each case, participants' intersubjective interactions with others was important in enabling or constraining their learning. Shared language of the trade and shared experiences in the industry provided an initial commonality (the cultural-discursive arrangements). Through regular and ongoing sharing of personal and professional stories people came to know each other and to develop trust and solidarity.

Learning in in-between spaces needs to be supported by the practice architectures of the site. In three of the sites outlined here there were practice architectures which enabled the development of a communicative learning space for the teachers involved: the Air Conditioning and Refrigeration teaching department; the Horticulture teaching department; and the Community Services teaching department. In a number of other cases (not addressed in this paper) there was no evidence of the development of communicative learning spaces. It might be that

there were communicative learning spaces and we did not see evidence of them, however we suspect that these spaces were not created.

### **Learning How we do Things Around Here**

Communicative learning occurs in a variety of places, including in-between spaces. However in-between spaces are not always communicative learning spaces, and communicative learning spaces are not always in-between spaces. In communicative learning spaces there is an intersection between the personal and the professional and learning is intersubjective and interactional (Sjolie et al. 2018). A communicative learning space can be seen to have developed at times during morning tea or as a result of interaction around a communal table in the Horticulture, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration and Community Services teaching departments. Shared industry language and shared industry experience provide common points of reference, and serve as an entry language of shared commonality. It can also be a gateway into the development of VET language for the novice teacher. The development of a communicative learning space was not apparent in the afternoon tea arranged once a week by the Electronics teacher. While shared discussions around a communal table were common to these cases, there were factors that were apparent in the former cases, and not in the Electronics case: daily scheduled meetings; shared industry language and the development of trust. This suggests that the social and relational aspects were critical in the development of a communicative learning space.

The shared stories of experienced workers are valuable for novices in coming to learn ‘how we do things around here’: what is expected, what is accepted, and what is not. Similarly, Tyson (2016) has identified the value of sharing stories for Vocational Education students. In some of the cases presented from our research, teachers had access to others on a daily basis with a broader range of teaching experiences. By hearing stories shared regularly, novices could begin to build a repertoire of possible approaches. More than this, they knew they were able to seek advice quickly because there was only a short time between each informal meeting. This is especially important in increasingly busy workplaces where novices might be reluctant to impose on busy colleagues.

Like the police recruits from Rantalo and Karp’s (2018) study, shared stories helped the teachers in our study to develop a sense of belonging (and solidarity). An environment where stories can be shared can also provide an avenue for novices to “make contributions” (Rantalo and Karp, 2018: p. 172) to the shared understanding of a group of colleagues supporting a more reciprocal interaction and decreasing the power imbalance between experienced and novice workers.

Scheduled arrangements such as the shared morning tea or the daily walk that was available to all members of a teaching area were valuable for all teachers, but perhaps more valuable for casually employed teachers. Casually employed teachers usually have less access to support from experienced teachers (Francisco, 2017), and are less likely to access professional development than permanently employed teachers (Guthrie, 2010). These in-between spaces can provide one avenue for them to gain access to stories that illustrate 'how we do things around here' as well as advice and support.

In identifying the value of worker learning undertaken in in-between spaces, there is a danger that organisations might attempt to formalise such arrangements. We caution however that the practice architectures that enable the development of communicative learning spaces are likely to be fragile and easily disrupted. The cases presented in this paper suggest that the social and relational aspects of interaction in in-between spaces is critical in supporting the development of communicative learning spaces that can support novices to learn 'how to go on' in this place and at this time. One of the aspects of the development of a communicative learning space is the flattening of hierarchies, and there is a danger that if an in-between space (such as morning tea) is organised to deliberately provide professional learning it could be seen to be a management decision that is not owned by the people involved (Boud, Rooney and Solomon, 2009). Further, the substantive practice of a shared morning tea or shared walk belongs to all. When management is focused on setting up the shared 'space' to be a learning event Boud, Rooney and Solomon (2009) have shown there is a risk that it can result in resistance from those involved .

Nonetheless, there may be some aspects, particularly structural and physical arrangements that could be more deliberately formalised. For instance, the provision of communal tables, and the timetabling of a shared break time for morning tea can be material economic arrangements that support the development of a communicative learning space. Again, there is a delicate balance between allowing/affording/protecting/enabling initiatives and controlling.

In-between spaces are constructed through the contingencies of work and the nature of the workplace. When structural conditions do not facilitate these there is still the possibility of them being constructed through the agency of one of the players, such as deliberately arranging regular morning teas, travelling to work together in the same car, or arranging lunch time walks. It is however, challenging for the novice to construct such opportunities when workplace arrangements inhibit their contact with colleagues.

We recognise that there are limitations to the learning undertaken in in-between spaces, and that not all learning in such spaces is necessarily positive. It is also serendipitous, highly contingent and cannot be assured. There is the possibility that the learning may be related to the reproduction of poor and/or inappropriate practices. This issue has been raised in relation to learning in the workplace more generally (see for instance Dixon et al., 2010) and is not restricted to learning in in-between spaces. Issues of poor or inappropriate work practices are larger than the issue of novice teacher learning and should be addressed through normal management arrangements. Another risk is that because in-between spaces are less formal environments there is a possibility that rather than work through tensions or disagreements that arise (Sjolie et al, 2018), groups can fracture and learning is inhibited.

Nevertheless, powerful learning occurs in communicative learning spaces, of kinds that cannot be easily or efficiently replicated in organised settings, and the interactions that occur provide a foundation for relationships needed for subsequent learning for work. We do not suggest that learning in communicative learning spaces, or even workbased learning more broadly, is superior to undertaking more formal education, or well-designed professional development arrangements. We recognise that unplanned learning necessarily occurs in workplaces regardless of the quality and extent of formal learning. Thus, we argue that the workplace, and communicative learning spaces, offer an important avenue for teacher learning (and worker learning more generally). Further, learning in the workplace is often available to workers when other forms of learning are not.

### **Implications**

In outlining the implications of this study we acknowledge the uniqueness of each local site, and thus cannot provide a list of things that will invariably result in the development of communicative learning spaces. We do however identify some relevant considerations. In exploring what practice architectures enable and constrain learning of new teachers in in-between spaces of the workplace a number of important factors became apparent. These are both structural and relational.

While it needs to be approached with sensitivity, managers and others can put in place structural, organisational and discursive interventions that support the development of a communicative learning space in in-between spaces. These relate to the enabling of non-hierarchical informal interactions with colleagues, and include the availability of opportunities for novice teachers to interact and be able to tell stories about their teaching experiences, to listen to the teaching related stories of others, and to seek advice and support, in a relaxed and informal environment. Material-economic arrangements can include a scheduled time and place for meeting



regularly on an informal basis; and social-political arrangements can include opportunities to develop trust and solidarity with colleagues. Specifically this might include approaches such as scheduling a time for regular morning tea, or creating opportunities where all staff have the same time available to interact in an informal manner. Providing a communal table and kitchen facilities to be used during the scheduled morning tea (as well as at other times) provides further support.

## Conclusion

The cases presented here show that communicative learning spaces in in-between spaces can be valuable for supporting novice teachers to learn how to go on in this place at this time. In-between spaces can provide novices with opportunities for interaction with more experienced colleagues in an informal way. Further, they allow for just in time questions to be asked, problems to be solved together with others, and stories to be shared. This paper contributes to our understanding of teacher learning in the workplace. It is also relevant for worker learning more broadly. In particular the paper highlights how particular arrangements in the workplace can enable or constrain learning in in-between spaces. It is through close attention to particularities of local sites that we can better understand what enables and constrains learning. The paper also highlights the importance of the relational aspects of learning in in-between spaces. The study portrays what is possible in such spaces. Further research is needed to explore conditions which inhibit learning in spaces which may appear to share characteristics in common with those that have promoted worthwhile learning in the present study. With changes to the way people work brought about by the coronavirus pandemic further investigation of in-between spaces when co-workers are not physically co-located will also be of value.

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