

In the next activity Nicky Solomon and her colleagues consider how space and learning are related when members of different working groups talk about their experiences of learning at work. Their focus was on ‘local’ spaces connected to the broader social relations and networks of power in organisations. They refer to these as ‘hybrid’ or third spaces where the boundary between work and learning spaces are blurred; spaces that offer possibilities for ‘new ways of being, working and learning’ (Solomon et al., p.77). These are spaces ‘where what is said and not said is not as governed by institutional judgment, accountabilities and hierarchical positions as other work spaces’ (p.79). Their three year study took place in a public sector organisation concerned with vocational education. The four groups of workers observed and interviewed included two groups of teachers. In their article they discuss some of the data to demonstrate something of the complexity of how space was discussed. Excerpts 1, 2 and 3 are from this article republished in the E846 reader ‘Pedagogy and Practice: Culture and Identities’.

Excerpt 1

In this excerpt two comments from the male trade teachers’ group provide examples of these ‘hybrid’ spaces.

‘On my way here this morning I had a look at a job that the owner’s not happy with. It’s a townhouse in a block of four where the tiles are all cracking. There’s no obvious reason for it. I’ve never seen it before in a cottage situation. And I was going to toss it around with these guys at lunchtime and see what they thought.’ (p.79)

...

‘Well it’s like we had someone talking to us from industry at lunchtime – it was pretty much an informal thing just over the lunchroom ... And he was talking to us about different changes, quite often we have stuff like that where someone from industry comes out and talks to us and we find out new ways of doing things.’ (p.79)

How these spaces were described raised challenges to the research team about how learning in the workplace was understood. Excerpt 2 provides some further data from the trade teachers’ group who are described as ‘resistant’ and ambivalent when talking about learning through work and of being or not being learners.

Excerpt 2

Researcher: How do you learn from each other as a team of teachers – do you learn from each other?

Trade teacher: Well, we don’t ... OK, we do to an extent. Every lunchtime we’re always sitting around the table and something will come up and we’ll look at it there. (p.80)

Another teacher revealed resistance too when the researcher tried to label the lunchroom space as an informal learning space.

Researcher: ... you know how we were talking about informal learning spaces and how the lunchroom is a good example of that. And there's a lot of everyday talk that goes on there ...

Trade teacher: I don't think we think about that as learning. I don't walk about there thinking I learned something today. To me it's not a learning environment. The classroom's a learning from me, to the student. The lunchroom sitting around here, it's not a learning environment at all. Even though I've learnt something.

Researcher: ... it seems to me a lot of learning takes place ...

Trade teacher: I'm sure there is learning there all the time but I don't look at it as learning ...' (p.80)

Excerpt 3

In this excerpt a further group of teachers responsible for delivering workplace training reveal a different viewpoint. These teachers current course programme was new and involved in and for both public and private sector organizations and their personal and professional spaces are described as 'already complicated hybrid ones.' (p.81)

Work training teacher: ...we sit around the tearoom a lot ... I think the value without realizing it is that we're analyzing and reflecting and improving and discussing and it's one of the things that keep you going.

Colleague: We make a cup of tea and solve a problem. (p.81)

Reference

Solomon, N., Boud, D. and Rooney, D., (2006) '*The In-Between: Exposing Everyday Learning At Work*', International Journal of Lifelong Education, vol.25, no.1, pp. 3-13 (Taylor and Francis Group Journal).