Informal Learning, Practitioner Inquiry and Occupational Education

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Introduction

• Theoretical Framework 1 – Informal learning
  – Rationale of this project
  – Informal learning
  – Professional inquiry
  – Occupational education

• Project details – 11 ‘case studies’

• Theoretical Framework 2 – Informal learning

• Preliminary findings

• Tentative conclusions
Theoretical framework – I (Informal learning)

• Learning continuum/spectrum: formal (Clarke and Winch, 2004) and informal (Coffield, 2000; Hager, 2004; Hager and Halliday, 2008; Marsick and Watkins, 2016; Segers, Dochy and Messmann, 2018)

• Perspectives of informal learning

• Perspectives of know-how from an epistemological approach (Evans 2016; Loo 2018)

• Relevance of informal learning and related know-how to the case studies of this project

• Possibility of capturing the nuanced insights from the ‘empirical case studies’ to formulating a conceptual framework of informal learning, professional inquiry and occupational education
Project details

11 Case Studies
• 2 Board level coaches
• 2 Nutritional therapy academics
• 1 academic – equine assisted leadership development
• 1 corporate leadership trainer/consultant
• 1 head of a professional body
• 1 road transportation strategist
• 1 police consultant – child homicide
• 1 Jazz musician / marketing academic
• 1 Actor

HE Exposure
• 3 Mdx Transdisciplinary MProf graduates
• 2 Mdx DProf by Public Works graduates
• 3 Mdx DProf graduates
• 2 current Mdx DProf students
• 1 no exposure to Mdx pedagogy
Theoretical framework II – Practitioner inquiry

- Signature tools that underpin informal learning
- Social / collaborative relationships that underpin informal learning
- Signature processes that underpin informal learning
Preliminary findings

• 8 of the 11 cases report one or more mid career shifts of profession
  – Nursing ➔ Law ➔ Board level coaching
  – Industrial psychologist ➔ academic ➔ Equine assisted leadership
  – European languages ➔ foreign aid ➔ Nutritional Therapy
  – To be explored
    • Does achievement in one profession conveys transferable skills and approaches that reduce time to competence and increase success in a new profession?

• 7 of the 11 cases highlighted the collaborative nature of learning and sense making with and through others.
  – We are already seeing a
    • Social element
    • Process element

• 6 of the 11 cases operate with emerging professions
Tentative conclusions

• Based upon this small sample we are seeing some interesting trends that may be pointers to a wider patterns of how professionals learn and develop within and across careers
  – All 11 have careers that are punctuated by rather than built upon formal education programmes.
  – Only 2 of this sample are operating within the profession for which they were originally educated.
  – 8 of the 11 are consistently engaged in the creation of new understanding and modes of practice rather than the direct application of existing theory
    • None of them think of themselves as researchers and too often their theoretical insights do not feed back into the academy
    • All exhibit natural curiosity
  – 5 of the 11 speak of the importance of
    • Embodied knowledge
    • Co-creating understanding in the moment
Informal professional learning appears to be focused primarily on finding new ways of being in the world.

**Signature tools that underpin informal learning**
- Journaling
- Reflection
- Multiple feedback loops

**Signature processes that underpin informal learning**
- Experimentation
- Improvisation

**Social / collaborative relationships that underpin informal learning**
- Experiencing
- Negotiating
- Relating
- Translating

• Imitate – Assimilate - Innovate
References