

Becoming at work: Building occupational capacities and identity through work

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The process of novice workers building occupational capacities and identity constitutes dual processes and trajectories comprising workplace participatory practices (Billett 2002). On the one hand, there are the kinds and qualities of activities, interactions and support afforded by workplace settings that mediate and regulate novices' learning experiences. Then, there are personal bases by which individuals elect to engage with and learn through these experiences. In the process of learning for work and developing an occupational identity, these contributions comprise a duality that is both interdependent and relational. These are exercised in negotiations between how workplaces afford opportunities to participate and learn and how individuals elect to participate in what is afforded them. Yet, this also acknowledges two distinct trajectories for novice workers that may or may not be parallel and/or consonant. There is progression with the development of the capacities (conceptual, procedural and dispositional knowledge) that permits individuals to practice the occupation. Yet, there is also a personal pathway of constructing and adopting an occupational identity (i.e. vocation) through participating in and securing the competence to particular instances of the occupational practice. This process of becoming and being is central to individuals' engagement with, continuity in and trajectory beyond their initial preparation, yet can be distinct from, although related, to the formation of occupational capacities. The paper draws on a program of inquiry into learning in workplaces that has progressively investigated issues of skill formation in, through and for workplace across a range of industry sectors, and also the formation and transformation of occupational identity. The conceptual heritage used to elaborate these processes and trajectories include cognitive, socio-cultural and cultural psychological perspectives, as well as anthropology and sociology.