

SYMPOSIUM 2: Friday, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2009, 09:45 – 11:45 (room: aula)

## **Exploring the potentialities and limitations of workplaces as learning sites for newcomers in the profession**

Chair: Laurent Fillietaz, University of Geneva, Switzerland

Discussant: Etienne Wenger, United States

Research conducted in the field of workplace learning has recurrently shown that workplace participatory actions (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and working lives in general (Evans, Hodkinson, Rainbird & Unwin, 2006) are associated with complex forms of learning. It has also been proposed that these forms of learning are not simply developed through a direct access to practice, but that specific conditions may enhance or restrict the potential learning outcomes associated with the workplace : the availability of expertise; the willingness of experts to provide adequate guidance; the willingness of professionals to engage into learning processes, etc. (Billett, 2001). In this symposium, we would like to address these general issues from one specific perspective : that of newcomers in various professional domains. Are workplaces adequate sites for learning when it comes to train novices? Are there specific potentialities or limitations associated with workplaces regarding this type of learners? What kinds of recommendations could be made in order to enhance the learning potentialities associated with workplace experiences for newcomers?

In order to address these issues, we propose to investigate different empirical domains associated with specific institutional and cultural environments (apprenticeship in initial vocational training; workplace training in higher education, etc.). These domains will provide empirical data for addressing various issues associated with workplace learning: tensions between workplace practices and other forms of learning associated with prior experiences; tensions between workplace cultures and specific needs associated with newcomers; tensions between various facets of identities in the process of entering the profession, etc.

These issues will be investigated from the perspective of a plurality of theoretical and methodological perspectives: vocational didactics, applied linguistics, anthropological theories of learning, etc.