
Publications

Abstract

A qualitative study was undertaken that explored the conditions for transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000) in a specific form of work-integrated education (WIE), co-operative education, towards the development of a theoretical model. The research question considered was ‘what pedagogical and workplace practices available during WIE contribute to transformative learning?’ WIE students, supervisors and their co-op coordinator were the participants in this study. Four case studies were developed based on evidence from interviewing these participants at the beginning and end of one work term. Aggregated data from the coordinator, student and supervisor interviews were analyzed. The Kelly repertory grid was used as a way to elucidate and rate participant constructs of transformative learning during WIE. Activity theory, which theorizes that transformative learning is a result of a dialectic, mediated process embedded in a socio-cultural context (Engeström, 1987), provided the theoretical framework to examine these constructs and their relationship to the conditions for transformative learning. The findings from the study revealed several results that add to our theoretical models for WIE. First, WIE, including co-operative education, relies heavily on the constructivist perspective of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) yet the participants cited transformative learning from critical-cultural, psychoanalytical, situative and enactivist perspectives (Fenwick, 2000) with each perspective providing a different lens through which critical reflection, the antecedent to transformative learning, could be supported (Mezirow, 1998). Second, critical reflection, in addition to being supported from a variety of perspectives, was found to occur as a result of the resolution of contradictions found in the dialectic and mediated processes explicated by activity theory’s cycle of expansive transition (Engeström, 1987). Third, the enablers (mediators) most involved in contributing to this process were: opportunities for work and learning, a supportive environment, student capabilities, co-workers, supervisors, and assessment and reflection practices. Fourth, within the context of WIE, activity theory introduces the dimensions of time, context and transformative processes (Keengwe & Jung-Jin, 2013) to our understanding of how transformative learning occurs and results in the transformative outcomes of self-formation (Dirkx, 2012), and social transformation (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Fifth, the integration of these transformative outcomes into the WIE workplace was dependent upon the time and value given to transformative processes, institutional requirements and a positive emotional environment that supported the resultant changes to the students’ world view and ability to act (Avis, 2009; Hanson, 2013; Holman, Pavlica, & Thorpe, 1987; Taylor, 2008). The implications of these findings are that WIE theoretical models include considerations of: perspective, socio-cultural context, dialectic and mediated processes and creating a positive emotional space to support the critical reflection necessary for transformative learning. Including these considerations shifts WIE theory from a constructivist perspective towards an enactivist perspective with the potential that programs intentionally support both students’ individual change and the social change of organizations where they work and study. Furthermore, adopting a view of WIE as an interaction between two systems, with the resultant “knotworking”, “boundary spanning” and “co-configuration” (Engeström, 2009), opens up possibilities for innovation and renewal in WIE programs and workplaces.

Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships

- CAFCE: Dr. Graham Branton Research Award, 2011/12
- United Way of Greater Victoria: Best Workplace Campaign award co-winner as Chair of the University of Victoria campaign, 2009
- CAFCE: Volunteer Recognition Awards: 2000, 2005/06
- Canadian Association for University Continuing Education: Program Award co-winner, 1996
- Graduate Assistantship, 1986
- Delta, Delta, Delta Alumnae Fellowship, 1983

Presentations

9. McRae, N., (April, 2010). ACE Research findings from a UVic perspective and Co-op and Career Curriculum Development at UVic. Presentation at Memorial University, St. John’s, Newfoundland, Canada.