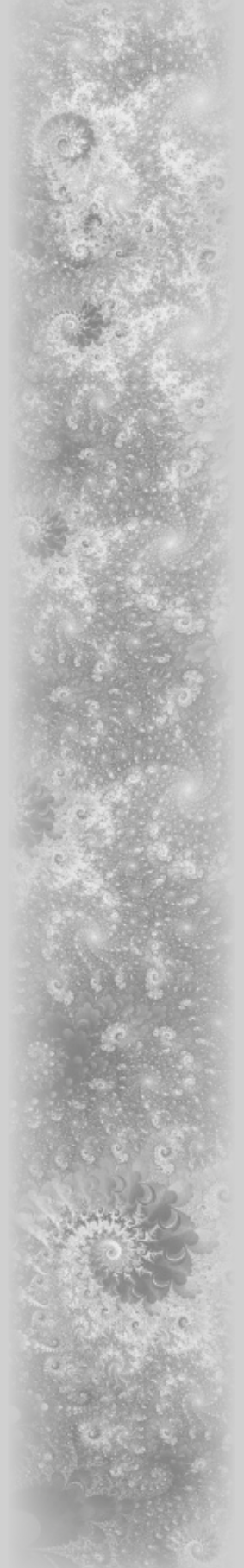


Summary



Social developments and trends lead to multiple challenges within the residential care for older people within the Netherlands. For example, the magnitude and complexity of care have increased as has the expectation that the care provided should better reflect the care needs and desires of the older person concerned. The limited financial resources and bureaucratic quality systems that are often imposed by the government make it difficult for care providers to adequately deal with these challenges. In addition, nursing and residential care homes are often hierarchical and traditionally organised, and employ mainly vocationally trained care workers who are not always sufficiently prepared to meet the increasing complexity of care.

Besides a more appropriate government policy and funding system, surmounting these challenges requires new shared cultural values and new knowledge, skills and ways of working within residential care organisations for older people. Workplace learning has the potential to benefit professional and personal growth, to promote innovation and to transform the context, and should therefore be facilitated and promoted within nursing and residential care homes. The research reported in this thesis investigates how workplace learning can be conceptualised, promoted and researched in the context of residential care for older people.

Chapter 1

Besides describing common challenges within the residential care for older people, the first chapter recounts the common assumptions and general characteristics of learning during, from and at work and shows how these draw heavily on cognitive, social-constructivist and socio-cultural insights into learning. It is argued that workplace learning is situated within the working or organisational context in which learners (employees, students, and others) participate. Workplace learning is based, furthermore, on natural and often unexpected opportunities in real work situations and takes place by doing the job itself, by interacting and working with others, by experiencing and dealing with challenges, and by evaluating and reflecting on work experiences. Workplace learning can take different forms. It is often implicit, informal and incidental. However, explicit, formal, and intentional forms of learning also occur and are needed; this type of learning can be encouraged by learners taking responsibility for their own learning and reflection. Besides being an individual endeavour, workplace learning is also a social and collective process whereby knowledge is explicated, shared and co-constructed. As such, workplace learning is multi-levelled and takes place, for example, on the individual, group, community, organisational and inter-organisational level. Further, it is assumed that the effectiveness of workplace learning depends on the

characteristics, (learning) skills and motivation of the learner as well as on the characteristics of the context in which the learning takes place.

Alongside these general assumptions and characteristics of learning within the context of work, differences exist between the many learning theories that are present in literature, for example regarding the relationship between the individual, the collective and the wider context. Also, common beliefs concerning learning are on occasion challenged within the literature. They are seen as primarily cognitive in nature and therefore insufficiently holistic, and other aspects, such as power relations and politics, are often neglected in research on learning. Furthermore, definitions and assumptions of learning are seldom explicated in the literature hindering a cross-disciplinary dialogue and the refinement and enrichment of approaches to and perspectives on learning. For these reasons, it is argued that researchers should engage in the on-going debate about the nature of learning and how learning at work should be guided or facilitated in the actual workplace. It is concluded that in-depth research is necessary into the underlying relational processes among and between people and the levels of learning, to explore how knowledge actually emerges and what the consequences and outcomes are for individuals, teams and organisations.

This research contributes to this field and is aimed at gaining deeper insights into how workplace learning can be conceptualised (conceptual objective), researched (methodological objective), and promoted (practical objective) within the residential care for older people. The general question that is central in this thesis is:

What is the nature of workplace learning within the context of the care for older people and how can an in-depth emic understanding of learning be generated in a way that is also beneficial to generating learning itself?

The research took place in a health care organisation providing residential care for older people in The Netherlands from 2007 till 2013. During the study three care innovation units (CIUs) were established within the organisation in association with several faculties of nursing. A CIU is a ward where qualified staff members and a large number of students collaborate intensively to integrate care, education, innovation and research with the overall aims of improving the quality of care and creating a challenging workplace. As a facilitator or lecturer practitioner I supported and researched the initiation and development of the CIUs. I collaborated intensively with students and staff helping them in the areas of innovation and research, and mentored and coached two junior lecturer practitioners in their further development.

To realise the CIUs aims, participatory action research (PAR) was chosen as a strategy for both the improvement of practice situations in the CIUs and the

encouragement of workplace learning. PAR is a participatory and democratic inquiry process with, for and by people. It concerns practical issues and purposes and has an emancipatory function. Different PAR cycles were initiated within the CIUs, for example concerning the improvement of daily activities for older people, and enriching family participation on the unit. Data gathered within those action research cycles to evaluate the specific action research project were also used to answer the research question central in this thesis. Furthermore, additional data that transcended the action cycles were collected on several occasions using multiple qualitative methods. Taking into account the multilevel nature of learning, these data were gathered, analysed and presented as case studies, auto-ethnographies and a secondary analysis of a focus group study on five different individual and collective levels of learning:

- The individual level concerning the relationship with self as a researcher and facilitator (chapter 2)
- The dyadic level concerning the mentoring relationship between a junior lecturer practitioner and myself (chapter 3)
- The group level concerning the learning of an action research group (chapter 4)
- The unit level concerning the learning of the nursing team taking place within a unit (chapter 5)
- The organisational level concerning the learning potential of the unit as experienced by students (chapter 6).

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 explores the individual level and my own learning. It presents an auto-ethnography: this is an autobiographical genre of writing and research in which the personal is connected with the cultural to look more deeply at self-other interactions. The focus is on my engagement within the first established CIU. ‘Engagement’ is seen as an important characteristic of action research and the term is often used to refer to the participation and involvement of the research participants. Within this chapter another angle is taken. The concept of engagement is explored in relation to me as an action researcher.

The chapter highlights how I got lost in the situation within the CIU. I faced differences in values, interests and power, but did not respond effectively to these differences. I was unable to step back in order to reflect upon the situation and as a result I held on to my own values. I kept using the same strategies to try and change the situation. As my strategies did not match the pragmatic and hierarchical culture of the CIU, they led to mutual misunderstandings, feelings of insecurity and power issues.

Based on my experience, it is explained that the involvement and ‘closeness’ of the researcher, although necessary within action research, can also have a darker side as people have the tendency to get trapped in their own beliefs and prejudices. If not mindful enough of their own involvement and way of being within the context, the researcher can lose him or herself in the situation and is no longer able to encourage or facilitate the participation and learning of self and others. A lesson that can be learned from this experience is that it is necessary to invest in relationships and to create a communicative space from the earliest beginning in order to ensure participation, (joined) engagement and learning. Dialogues as spoken communication and in physical forms in which differences are welcomed and jointly explored are helpful. Furthermore, the (participatory) researcher or facilitator should have a mindful attitude, meaning that he or she perceives without prejudice what comes to his or her awareness. He or she should be sensitive to the situation and underlying micro-processes as this will guide self-development, personal growth and the establishment and maintenance of relationships.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 depicts the dyadic level and illustrates the growth of the mentoring relationship between myself and a junior lecturer practitioner who works in one of the CIUs. Research into workplace mentoring is principally focussed on predictors and psychosocial and instrumental outcomes, while there is scarcely any in-depth research into relational characteristics, outcomes and processes. This chapter is aimed at illustrating these relational aspects to gain insights into the micro-processes that nurture (mutual) learning. The nature of the relationship and how we learned from each other by facilitating (action research) processes are described in detail, from both perspectives, in a co-constructed auto-ethnography, a method of systematic analysis of and collaborative writing about a shared experience or activity.

The co-constructed narrative, in which my voice and that of the junior lecturer practitioner are presented, illustrates that an other-centred and caring attitude, alongside learning-focussed values, promoted a high-quality mentoring relationship. This relationship was characterised, among other things, by person-centredness, care, trust and mutual influence, thereby providing a situation in which mutual learning and growth could occur. Learning developed through and in relation and was enhanced when both planned and unplanned learning took place. In addition, the narrative makes clear that the learning and growth of both persons involved were intertwined and interdependent and that mutual learning and growth enriched and strengthened the relationship.

It is concluded that the narrative illustrates a number of complex relational processes that are difficult to elucidate and present in quantitative studies and theoretical constructs. It offers deeper insight into the initiation and improvement of high-quality mentoring relationships and mutual learning as a responsive process.

Chapter 4

Learning at group level is central in chapter 4, in this case the learning of the action research group that was responsible for initiating, coordinating and monitoring an action research cycle concerning the improvement of participation of older people with dementia in daily occupational and leisure activities. The groups' perspective of the action research process and what and how they learned from the project is presented as an intrinsic case study. In an intrinsic case study the researcher tries, through longitudinal involvement in the setting, to reveal crucial aspects of the research question as seen from an insider perspective.

The chapter discusses general cognitive and social constructivist beliefs into workplace learning as a dynamic, collective, and preferably conscious process that occurs by reflecting on real work experiences. Based on the case study and in addition to the usual conceptualisation of workplace learning, it is illustrated and argued that learning in and through work is predominantly an embodied and responsive phenomenon that usually occurs implicitly while acting. A learning perspective grounded in complexity, and more specifically in the worldview of enactivism, encapsulates this pragmatic and embodied character of learning and at the same time provides a reality and language helpful in encouraging a critical attitude towards assumptions about learning in organisations.

Understanding learning from an enactive point of view carries consequences for studying and organising learning within organisations. It takes for example confidence and trust for learning facilitators and managers to value the happenstance character by which people learn. They should be mindful of unanticipated directions and possibilities for action to exploit and facilitate these. Furthermore, a challenging and changing work context, role modelling, and multiple forms of reflection that highlight an embodied and co-emerging practice should be promoted and integrated, while multi-source feedback and qualitative approaches for studying and measuring learning, such as participant observation, storytelling or creative expression are suitable.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 explores the unit level of learning presenting the perspective of the nursing team (staff and students) concerning the action research project that is also central in chapter 4. In this case study it is exemplified how learning and change processes unfolded and how simultaneous to the improvement of the older people's involvement in daily activities a cultural transformation took place and the care became more person-centred.

The findings show that spontaneous interactions and responses rather than planned interventions, analysis and reflection contributed to both the improvement of the older people's involvement in daily activities and a cultural transformation. Changes unfolded by sense making while enacting alternative behaviour or as a social and retrospective process of giving meaning to situations and experiences by verbally expressing these and sharing them with others. Such shared and spontaneous learning processes contributed to the individual and collective development of identity. They created shifts in definitions of one's own role and those of others, enhanced collective action and enactments of new behaviour, and caused (gradually) shifts in individual and collective values and norms. Furthermore, it proved to be beneficial that the process of change and the facilitation of that process reflected the same values as those underlying the cultural change.

It is concluded that cultural change is not always particularly susceptible to conscious action and does not necessarily come about by the implementation of a concrete plan. Rather the improvement of care and cultural change are dynamic, interactive and non-linear processes that evolve together. These learning and change processes are characterised by complexity and are difficult to predict or control. Nevertheless, managers and facilitators can facilitate learning and change by creating momentum by means of small, focused projects that are suited to stakeholders, and by realising conditions for sense making, collaborative decision-making, and interaction. Continuous appreciative and adaptive facilitation and practicing the desired values are also required. Action research can support such processes as long as the accent lies on rapid improvement cycles of attempting and evaluating interventions that arise from earlier actions rather than a thought-out analysis and planning phase.

Chapter 6

The organisational level of learning is discussed in chapter 6. From the perspectives of students the learning environments of two CIUs are studied to

deepen understandings concerning the conditions that facilitate workplace learning.

This study concerns a secondary analysis of focus groups held by lecturer practitioners and teachers with 216 nursing students with different levels of education and experiences over a period of five years. The thematic analysis revealed that students are satisfied about the learning potential of the units, which is formed by various inter-related and self-reinforcing qualities or affordances of the workplace: co-constructive learning and working, challenging care situations and learning activities, being given responsibility and independence, and supportive and recognisable learning structures. Time constraints sometimes had a negative impact on the units' learning potential.

The study stresses placement learning as a relational phenomenon and illustrates coherence and synergy between the different inter-related and self-reinforcing invitational qualities or affordances. It is argued that the learning potential of workplaces can be enhanced by promoting certain conditions and different structures and activities, while being neither completely predictable nor manageable given the co-emergent and reciprocal nature of context and individuals. Based on the insights gained it is suggested to involve all stakeholders in bottom-up processes to enhance the workplace's learning potential from the early beginnings, and to encourage ownership and the development of shared learning-centred values. Furthermore, it is advised to keep an open mind and attitude for unforeseen hindrances or positive reinforcing interactions to be able to anticipate and play to these circumstances.

Chapter 7

In chapter 7 the diverse individual and collective levels of learning are brought into relation to one another to answer the following research question: What is the nature of workplace learning within the context of the care for older people and how can an in-depth emic understanding of learning be generated in a way that is also beneficial to generating learning itself? After connecting the different levels of learning by means of my own learning within the CIUs, the concept of workplace learning within the residential care for older people is examined more closely as well as how learning within this context could be advanced and researched.

It is argued that learning in dynamic workplace settings is on-going and often spontaneous and implicit. It emerges through bodily and cognitive engagement, and in reciprocal relationships with all elements (individuals, interactions, processes, structures) at and between interrelated and evolving levels of learning. It is thus a responsive, embedded, and embodied process enmeshed within a web of many heterogenic elements that reciprocally influence each other. Such a

perspective of workplace learning could be grounded in complexity theories and, more specifically, enactivism, and questions common dualisms in the learning literature like body and mind, individual and social, and processes being planned or happenstance. It is therefore concluded, in answer to the first part of the research question, that workplace learning is a complex and embodied phenomenon that can be defined as the on-going and relational adapting through the enactment of small and large perturbations in which both agent(s) and environment change and co-evolve towards enlargement of the space for possible action. Furthermore, it is argued that such learning takes place within multiple holistic, relational and dynamic spheres rather than on static and clearly defined levels.

As an answer to the second part of the research question it is clarified that researching workplace learning is a form of learning itself aimed at supporting and accelerating learning processes. Such research focusses on the spontaneous and improvisational nature of relating by way of exploring the embodied actions and responsive interactions of those involved, which generates learning, emergent and self-organising processes and changes. Appropriate designs are intersubjective, participative, flexible, and multi-method, and should bring embodied and tacit knowing unfolding in action and relation to the surface. Suitable methods encourage the narrative expression of experiences and include the use of creative qualitative methods. In addition, it is claimed that the researcher's being and attitude is of great influence. He or she should be open and respectful, sensitive for flows of energy within him or herself and the unit, and mindful and adaptive to dynamics and surprising possibilities that arise within daily practices.

This thesis finishes with some practical suggestions intended as inspiration for the enrichment of workplace learning. These are focussed on inspiring and inviting people to participate and engage (together) in daily work situations and sense making, and on the promotion of conditions that preserve and promote complexity and emergence, like allowing messiness, minimalizing structures and rules, and creating a challenging and changing workplace. Recommendations for further research concern the broadening of such research to other organisations, the further development and attempting of methodologies that fit complexity and more specifically workplace learning grounded within an enactivist worldview, and the garnering of insights into how the researcher or facilitator can develop and cultivate a mindful and adaptive attitude and stance of inter-being.