

## The Challenges of Adult Pedagogy in Workplace Learning

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### Abstract

*The article will deal with the process of the transformation of the terms **workplace learning** and **workplace pedagogy** nowadays, examining the context of Latvia in more detail. The new form of workplace pedagogy is learning at workplace, which is not understood as internship, but lifelong learning. For several years two tendencies have become apparent in the administration of Latvia-based global corporations, which are proud of their modern Human Resource policies. First, workplaces are increasingly turning into learning places; secondly, the employees frequently play the role of teachers, namely, colleagues teach colleagues. In the studies published so far, the authors have concluded that in fact there are very little things that one cannot learn at his or her workplace [Eraut, 2004b]. Also, the terms **learning for** and **in the workplace** are differentiated [Billett, 2002]. Consequently, the author of the article examines the new forms of workplace learning and questions whether there is a reason to speak about workplace pedagogy as a separate study in Latvia. Semi-structured interviews and the author's personal experience have been used as key data collection methods.*

**Keywords:** *workplace learning, workplace pedagogy, adult education;*

### 1. The aim of the research

In Latvia the term “workplace learning” is mostly discussed in relation to professional education, vocational education or to work-based learning. The latter has been introduced only lately thanks to the projects funded by the European Structural Funds.

From this perspective, this process has a long history. Workplace learning could be considered as the beginning of passing information, skills and competencies. In all cultures, but in Latvia especially, in traditional or local industries – such as crafts, fishery, agriculture – passing skills and knowledge has been very popular historically. In this way the craftsmanship was transferred from generation to generation – with “workplace learning”. Consequently, it can be stated that workplace pedagogy, although not always defined as such, is nothing particularly new. It has only obtained new forms and manifestations. The aim of this study is to understand how the term “workplace pedagogy” has transformed from the past to nowadays, especially examining the context of Latvia.

Now, when the trade is passed or learned from one's father/mother only on a very few occasions, vocational education and internship places fulfil the role of the father/grandfather or mother/grandmother. However, the transfer of craftsmanship among the family members or learning the trade at professional schools is an example from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is still in force. It is reformed from now and then, but is still functional.

The new form of workplace pedagogy that the author wants to discuss in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context is learning at workplace. It is not understood as internship, but lifelong learning. In order to obtain information on the tendencies in terms of workplace learning in Latvia, as well as to understand how this term is understood and how learning processes are implemented, semi-structured interviews were carried out to survey the Human Resource specialists from four big companies (each employing more than 1000 employees). The key trend, which became noticeable from the results of all interviews was the fact that **colleagues teach colleagues** among the office/administration workers.

### 2. Key terms and definitions

It must be noted that the term “pedagogy” has been used since the times of Ancient Greece., American educator Malcolm Shepherd Knowles used the term “andragogy” as a synonym for the term “adult education”. According to Knowles [1984], andragogy is the art and science of adult learning, thus andragogy refers to any form of adult learning.

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In Latvia the term “pedagogy” is mostly understood and defined as the science of education. The term “andragogy” is defined as “*science of the adult education process (...)*” [<https://www.letonika.lv/>]. However, the term “andragogy” is not widely used in Latvia. Similarly, the term “adult pedagogy” has been rarely mentioned in the academic literature in Latvian language. Sometimes the word combination “adult **learning process**” is used as a synonym for andragogy [Ivanova, 2012]. Ivanova refers to Knowles, where he discusses andragogy and pedagogy as the **learning process**. The learning process is directed by educators in one case and self-directed or andragogical in another case. The author of the article will not list the differences and will only confirm the she agrees with those scholars, who claim that the differences exist and that the “process must be directed” in different ways.

In Latvia the Law on Education defines the adult education in the following way: “diverse education **process** of individuals, which ensures lifetime development of personality and competitiveness in labour market” [<https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=50759>].

The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia has added the age to the definition of the adult education – these are persons aged from 25 to 65 [<http://data.csb.gov.lv/>].

In accordance with the above-mentioned definitions, the **processes** that take place at one’s workplace and are not defined as work-based learning, should be defined as **workplace learning**. This term is much wider than work-based learning and exceeds the boundaries of the professional education. However, the normative acts in Latvia do not define the term “workplace learning”. The Law on Education has provided such terms related to the adult education as formal, informal and continuing education.

The fact that workplace learning is becoming increasingly popular and that the boundaries of this learning are broadening was already mentioned in 2000 by professor Billett [2000] from the Griffith University (Australia). Billett argues that there is a pressing need for workplaces as environments in which to initially learn and develop further individuals’ vocational practice.

“Describing workplaces as “informal” learning environments is negative, inaccurate and ill-focused. These descriptions do little to assist the standing of or understanding about workplaces as learning environments” [Billett, 2002].

Billett [2002] claims that providing mere opposites to some terms and definitions is not helpful (for example, formal versus informal, structured versus unstructured). From Billett’s point of view, **workplace pedagogy** is necessary and should be developed at modern workplaces in terms of learning processes.

Billett also provides arguments explaining why there is a need to discuss workplace pedagogy [Billett, 2000]:

- 1) for large cohorts of workers across a range of industry sectors, the workplace provides the most likely situation to develop vocational knowledge;
- 2) the most prized initial vocational preparation programmes (e.g. trade apprenticeships, being an articulated clerk, internships of doctors) usually include lengthy workplace experiences;
- 3) workplace experiences are prized in educational programmes for diverse purposes ranging from understanding the “world of work”, the development of specific vocational skills or to recontextualise what has been learnt in educational institutions;
- 4) most of the learning throughout adults’ working lives will probably be the activities in workplaces.

The author of the article examined the situation of Latvia in order to provide cross-comparisons to Billett’s arguments [2002] on the basis of the afore-mentioned structured interviews. As a result, the author has concluded that there are three key reasons for the workplace learning nowadays:

- I. the requirements of the labour market are constantly changing and the formal education cannot provide a correspondingly flexible education;
- II. due to the restricted availability of workforce the current employees must become multifunctional;
- III. the time factor – the companies are not willing to wait for the school, university/training programme to educate the specialists they need. Besides, the formal system of education does not offer to study the specific features of each individual company.

Billett [2000] discusses a three-level model of workplace learning, for workplace pedagogy:

- I. Participation in work activities
- II. Guided learning at work
- III. Guided learning for transfer.

In all levels of Billett's model only the employees and colleagues of one company are involved. This is not learning from a classical point of view that would be led by a teacher or educator, yet it definitely requires pedagogical skills and abilities.

### 3. The aim and content of learning at the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace

In Tynjala's article [2007] the latest studies on workplace learning have been provided. He notes that although the history of this process is considerably short, studies on this topic have significantly increased within the last few years. These studies have resulted in providing differentiation among the concepts, models and theories. Up to 2007 the researchers have concluded that:

- The nature of workplace learning is at the same time both different from and similar to school learning;
- Learning in the workplace can be described on different levels;
- Workplace learning is both informal and formal;
- Workplaces differ widely in how they support learning.

Professor Eraut [2004b] was the first to discover that most of the learning is informal and takes place during the normal working process. According to Eraut, it is possible to recognize this kind of learning as learning and to improve it.

Billett [2000], in his turn, differentiates between the processes and uses *learning for and in the workplace*. Eraut et al [2004b] have marked that there are a very few things that cannot be taught or learned at one's workplace. They have summarised the following categories that can be acquired at one's workplace:

- Task performance;;
- Awareness and understanding;
- Personal development with aspects such as self-evaluation and management etc.;
- Teamwork ,problem solving;
- Role performance.;
- Academic knowledge and skills;
- Decision making and problem solving;
- Judgement, including quality of performance etc..

The author of this article has worked for 15 years – since 2002 – in a private business company offering services in the adult education area in Latvia. Consequently, she is advantaged to assess these processes from a practical point of view, as well as to obtain the latest information from the biggest companies of Latvia.

In January 2018 the author carried out four semi-structured interviews with an aim to find out the latest trends and principles in the context of employees' learning, thus in the context of the workplace learning.

The respondents were the managers or specialists from the Human Resource departments and all together they represented more than 6000 employees.

Several common tendencies were noticed after analysing the interview data. To a great extent, the content of the learning process is determined by the aim and needs. The author has concluded that the learning process can be divided into two big groups:

- 1) Technical training. Any kind of training, which is directed at the improvement or development of technical skills. It is determined by the specific features of the company, business area, normative acts.
- 2) Professional development (for example, leadership skills, professional development training, including language training) – to a great extent refers to the ideas mentioned by Eraut [2004b] in his research. It must be noted that using Billett's [2002] division, the aim and context of the author's interviews was

learning *for* the workplace, whereas professor Eraut et al discuss the skills in the context of learning *in* the workplace.

#### 4. Conclusions

The author agrees with Billett [2000] that it is high time to discuss the necessity of the workplace pedagogy. As noted by all respondents, in the last few years the employees of the company have implemented both the technical training and the professional development training. It is an outstanding trend and takes place in two ways. First, not all the employees who are potentially interested in the training, but only one employee is delegated to attend valuable courses or training. When the employee returns, he/she has an obligation to pass the obtained knowledge to others in the form of a presentation. The second way is to ensure that the most experienced employees take up the role of mentors in relation to the new employees. In some companies one can notice a tendency, which is not related to the professional activities, namely, when colleagues teach/show each other their special talents or skills (for example, in cooking, painting on silk, etc.). In any case, everything that has been mentioned above requires pedagogical (or andragogical) skills. And that is the reason for introducing a new term or even sub-branch of adult pedagogy – workplace pedagogy.

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