

Book Review

**Learning in work: A negotiation model
of socio-personal learning**

Raymond Smith
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Learning in Work A Negotiation Model of Socio-personal Learning by Raymond Smith is Volume 23 of a Springer series on Professional and Practice-based Learning, a comprehensive series exploring learning through practice or work-based activities in the workplace from a wide range of perspectives, for example, agency, simulation, digitalization, and individual and social influences on professional Learning. Smith's 2018 publication is a welcome addition to the series and to an enhancement of our understanding of the processes for learning in the workplace.

The book questions:

1. What are the workers' personal work and learning practices?
2. How can these practices be understood as negotiated practices?

3. How can negotiated practice be understood as learning?

The structure of the book is in two Parts and evolves from the conceptual theoretical foundations of work, learning negotiation (Part I) to the three dimensions of negotiation framework (Part II).

Part I: Chapter 1 sets the conceptual context noting ‘the emphasis is on workers, as adults, as people, unique and individual ...’ with ‘the focus on negotiation ...’ (p.5), and begins developing the negotiation framework of Form, Frame and Flow (pp.22-25). Chapter 2 explores the interchanging of negotiation and learning through an exploration of the concept, models, theories, stages, practices and skills of negotiation and learning in the workplace. Expanding on this, chapter 3 examines ‘the context and conditions in and by which work-learning occurs’ (p.65). Chapter 4 takes the reader to the ‘people as work-learners’ (p.99) and their commitment to and assessment of their work.

Part II: Chapter 5 presents the first of the three dimensions of the model: Form. The content in this chapter builds on the conceptual and relational work in chapters 2 and 3. It focuses on the ‘forms of negotiation’ workers engage in through and for their practice (p.129). Chapter 6 expounds on the second dimension of the model – Frame – with a focus on practice as ‘the sociocultural context of activity’; developing an understanding of negotiation beyond interaction to the complex situations that ‘mediate activity and its enactment’ (p.161). The third dimension – Flow – is addressed in chapter 7. An understanding of negotiation ‘as a personal practice’ with the potential to transform ‘self and practice’ (p.187) is developed, using three themes of Flow: person, practice and resources. The three dimensions of the model are integrated into chapter 8 with concluding summaries of key concepts and practices.

Learning is a social practice, taking part in collective activities facilitates engagement in the social world, and the interactivity is mediated by all participants. Hence, negotiation is between the person and the social environment in which they act and learn and contribute to the social world and learning.

The selection of a focus on socio–personal learning emphasises the social world’s contributions to individual engagement and construction of knowledge about their occupational practice through work.

One may well ask why the focus on negotiation? Negotiation is certainly an aspect of learning in, for and through work, one not frequently brought to the fore. Examples include a learner negotiating a learning plan, or a work-based learning programme. The case studies in the book highlight the experiences of workers in a gymnasium, a suburban restaurant, an ITS support unit in a university and a large metropolitan fire station. Employing a socio–constructivist approach and an ethnographic methodology, the three workers from each workplace were interviewed five times and were observed at least three times over 18 months. The workers were of differing employment status, occupations and workplaces. Work, learning and change were the guiding themes of the interviews.

Workers were found to engage in both telic and atelic negotiations – the former highly purposeful activities that secure objectives and the latter incidental activities not realising outcomes.

The research generates a three dimensions negotiation framework. Negotiation has different forms that can be identified and considered; it can be an enactment and a context in which that enactment occurs. The three dimensions are Form: telic and atelic forms, a matrix of contingent forms and compounded and nested form, Frame: composite and contiguous, and Flow: transforming the person, practice and resources (p.119)

Smith's scholarly work makes a valuable contribution to our conceptualisation of learning and work. The workers' negotiation of their environments provides insight for readers into how they navigate their own work. The book is also a comprehensive, thorough and intelligent exploration of this model of socio-personal learning. It is ideal for researchers, research students and those wanting to reflect on what work-based and workplace learning means, particularly to the individual worker.