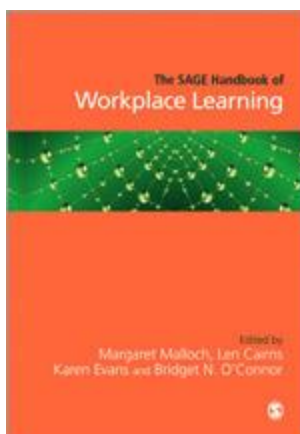


Book Review



The SAGE Handbook of Workplace Learning

By Margaret Malloch, Len Cairns, Karen Evans and Bridget N O'Connor

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Reviewed by **Nigel Davies**

This book is relevant to those interested in or undertaking research, generating policy or managers commissioning educational programmes concerned with learning in the workplace. The volume covers the breadth of workplace learning, introducing the reader to different perspectives, models and frameworks that have developed over the past two decades as this area has gained prominence as a field of study in its own right. The volume runs to nearly 500 pages (34 chapters) and is divided into three sections covering workplace learning theory, research and practice, and issues for the future. The volume is one of the social science reference handbooks published by Sage which aim to explore new topics from an international standpoint with chapters from scholars in the field.

The first section on “Theory” addresses a range of theoretical positions including communities of practice (chapter 6), activity theory (chapter 7) and includes a meta-theory of learning and performance (chapter 9). The section starts with an introductory chapter by two of the editors (Cairns and Malloch, chapter 1) that sets the scene with “new directions” and the section ends with a chapter led by one of the other editors (Evans et al, chapter 11) which “re-thinks” learning.

The second section deals with “Research and Practice” and gives truly international perspectives with chapters filled with examples from the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, Korea and Scandinavia. The section begins with two complementary introductory chapters (Sawchuk, chapter 12 and Eraut, chapter 13) giving different perspectives, and ends again with a chapter by Evans et al (chapter 26) - one of the editors.

The third section is titled “Issues and Futures” and considers current and potential future research and development associated with workplace learning. This section addresses the impact of technology (chapters 32 and 33), changing corporate perspectives (e.g. public and private partnerships in business and in higher education - chapters 28-31) and learning beyond the workplace (chapter 27). The section finishes with a chapter (Johnson, chapter 34) examining ethical issues associated with workplace learning.

The editors of this text have succeeded in giving the reader a global perspective. As individuals and as a quartet they have international experience collectively in the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States of America and in Europe, and they draw upon professional associations in these countries throughout the book. All of the editors contribute chapters with additional chapters from notable academics in this field including Michael Eraut, David Boud and Stephen Billett amongst others. The authors have succeeded in their aim to bring an array of perspectives together that not only signpost but also critique different

approaches relevant in culturally diverse workplaces. Distinctions are made and overlaps acknowledged between the theory and research into 'workplace learning', 'work-based learning', 'organisational development' and 'post-compulsory education'. Generally the volume considers that 'workplace learning' is concerned with activities that lead to learning that occurs in the places where people actually work, including broad definitions of work to include paid or unpaid activities and occupations.

While the international perspective is to be congratulated, the variety in the background of authors does mean that different styles of language (and spelling) are used in different chapters, which can sometimes be irritating. Although the sections each have introductory pages, the approach of one or two specific chapters drawing overarching themes together in sections one and two is helpful but is missed in section three, which is a pity.

As a nurse, manager and now researcher concerned with healthcare education I found this volume interesting and thought provoking. For others like me either embarking on research or teaching in the workplace then this volume provides a starting point to explore the evidence underpinning workplace learning, and encourages a wider appreciation of different perspectives and different work places.