

A relational re-view of collective learning:  
Concerts, condiments and corrections

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## **Certificate of Authorship/Originality**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## Partial List of Publications

The following list represents my published journal articles and refereed conference papers that received academic awards and prizes. Some of these publications are referenced throughout this thesis document to support my points on the conceptualisations of collective learning from my investigation. A complete list of publications generated during my doctoral candidature is included in Appendix 5.

### Journal Articles

- Hager, P. & Johnsson, M.C. (2008). Working outside the comfort of competence in a corrections centre. *Australasian Journal of Correctional Staff Development* 3(3). 11 pages.
- Hager, P. & Johnsson, M.C. (2009). Learning to become a professional orchestral musician: Going beyond skill and technique. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 61(2): 103-118.
- Hager, P. & Johnsson, M.C. (2009). Working outside the comfort of competence in a corrections centre: Toward collective competence. *Human Resource Development International* 12(5): 493-509.
- Halliday, J.S. & Johnsson, M.C. A MacIntyrian perspective on organizational learning. *Management Learning*. Prepublished 13 November, 2009. DOI: 10.1177/1350507609347589.
- Johnsson, M.C. & Hager, P. (2008). Navigating the wilderness of becoming professional. *Journal of Workplace Learning* 20(7/8): 526-536.

### Refereed Conference Papers Receiving Awards and Prizes

- Hager, P. & Johnsson, M.C. (2008). Working outside the comfort of competence in a corrections centre. *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Human Resource Development Research and Practice Across Europe*, 21-23 May, Lille Catholic University, Lille, France. ISBN 2-9516606-9-3. Winner of the Alan Moon Memorial Prize for best conference paper.
- Johnsson, M.C. & Hager, P. (2007). Navigating the wilderness of becoming professional. *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Researching Work and Learning: Researching work and learning: Rethinking the centre, rethinking the margins*, 2-5 December, The Universities of the Western Cape and Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa. ISBN 978-1-86808-658-0. Received Runner-up Best Paper Award.

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## **Abstract**

Work in organisations is a shared and joint endeavour often accomplished by groups, teams or other collectives. Yet groups at work do not always learn at work, limiting an organisation's capability to thrive in knowledge economies. Research investigating collective learning at work continues to place the analytic focus on entities or abstractions representing the collective. For example, culture, power, group membership, group structure, group communications, motivations and skills are often examined to explain why groups learn or not in organisations.

In contrast, this thesis investigates what it means to learn together when people act, talk and judge at work through their relational and responsive interactions. This relational orientation conceptualises learning as emerging from patterns of interactions that are responsive to local contexts and shaped by practical sensemaking that occurs in the everyday practice of work life.

Specifically in the case study interpretive tradition, I investigate the relational practices of dyads and small groups in three disparate organisational contexts and professions. The organisational, group and individual characteristics differ widely for musicians in an orchestra, apprentice chefs in a commercial kitchen and rehabilitation staff in a corrections centre. Yet these three groups shared relational similarities in learning how to weave ways of acting, talking and judging together to make their work 'work'. Such weaving together is enabled by shifting conceptually from notions of context as descriptive setting or situatedness to the notion of groups contextualising together.



This thesis contributes to collective learning research by highlighting the significance of patterns of interactions and the dynamics of practice. The findings enhance existing collective learning theory by including spatio-temporal concepts from theories of organisational change and complexity. The findings have implications for guiding the learning of commencing practitioners into professions as well as for generating modes of transdisciplinary learning across professions. Re-viewing collective learning in relational ways recognises that learning is an emergent phenomenon, each time practised anew from interactions between people and the possibilities that lie within.

The Latin prefix *con* means *with*. It seems appropriate that *concerts* performed by musicians, *condiments* added to dishes by chefs and the *consequences* of behaviours by corrections staff across diverse *contexts* of work can provide practical insights for better understanding how groups learn collectively at work.