Where does the learning take place? Learning spaces and the situated curriculum within networked learning

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Abstract

This paper presents the concept of learning spaces to demonstrate where and how learning takes place within a networked learning programme. The focus of the study is a ten month leadership and development programme, called LEAD, for owner managers of small to medium sized enterprise (SMEs). The programme incorporates different types of learning interventions including experiential sessions, masterclasses, coaching, action learning and business shadowing and exchanges which are brought together with an online virtual learning environment. The paper draws upon data from an ethnographic study including a virtual ethnography of one cohort of 25 delegates on LEAD. The data is supported by interviews and observations from six previous cohorts.

LEAD is based on a social theory of learning and the SMEs learn about management and leadership predominantly through peer-to-peer learning. The paper conceptualises five learning spaces; (1) LEAD, (2) reflective, (3) social, (4) peer-to-peer and (5) future. These spaces are relational and the paper explores what they mean in terms of the SMEs' learning. Drawing on situated learning theory the paper shows how participants engage in these spaces through Lave and Wenger's (1991) reading of legitimate peripheral participation. Building on this the concept of the situated curriculum (Gherardi *et al*., 1998) is used to show how the delegates learn to 'behave' in these spaces and how their identity shifts according to which learning space they occupy. Finally, building on Ponti and Hodgson's (2006) networked learning principles for SME managers the paper will present some learning principles for designing networked learning programmes for SMEs. This paper will be of interest to academics and practitioners alike who have an interest in learning technologies, SMEs and debates surrounding communities of practice. Additionally the paper has relevance to government policy in the area of higher education and knowledge transfer through networked learning and SMEs.

Keywords

Learning spaces, legitimate peripheral participation, situated curriculum, networked learning, SMEs.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore where and how learning takes place in a networked learning programme for small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs). The focus of the study is a leadership programme for small business owner-managers, called LEAD, which is a networked learning programme incorporating different learning interventions including an online learning environment. The paper will begin by contextualising LEAD by describing what the programme is and also by providing a brief overview of why it exists. The paper then follows a line of enquiry which asks, 'where and how do SMEs learn on LEAD?' Situated learning theory is used to frame the concept of learning using legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and the situated curriculum (Gherardi *et al.,* 1998) as lenses for analysis. The study focuses on one cohort of LEAD of 25 small business owner managers over a ten month period of their engagement with LEAD and is supported from qualitative data from six prior cohorts. The paper finishes with a discussion and proposes some networked learning principles for creating learning spaces for SMEs.

Background: Small Businesses, Higher Education and Networked Learning

LEAD aims to contribute to raising regional productivity, competitiveness and skills by developing leadership within the context of the SME sector generally, and in particular in the owner-manager's business. LEAD is delivered over a ten month period in cohorts of up to 25 owner-managers of SMEs throughout the northwest of England. The programme adopts an integrated learning approach to develop both the owner-manager and the business through the following learning mechanisms:

- A two day, overnight experiential session which aims to lay the foundations of trust and confidentiality between the delegates through practical activities, discussion and reflection to ground the learning in the delegates' own businesses.
- Ten masterclasses: five on the theme of leadership, delivered by different leaders and inspirational speakers, and five on the theme of business growth, delivered by academic faculty. The masterclasses are designed to act as stimuli to generate discussion rather than a 'traditional' teaching approach as such.
- A series of one to one coaching through face-to-face and phone sessions. Each delegate has their own professional executive coach to provide a confidential space to work through issues through a solutions focus approach (see Jackson and McKergow, 2007).
- Action learning sets made up of six to seven delegates with a facilitator meet six times to provide the opportunity to address real issues through open questions and dialogue (see Smith, 2010 for a discussion on action learning and LEAD)
- A series of business shadowing and exchanges are designed for delegates to learn about each others' organisations and get feedback on their own leadership style and see their own organisation through a fresh pair of eyes. Delegates work in pairs or threes and set their own objectives for what they want out this experience.
- Learning and reflection days take place across LEAD to encourage the delegates to reflect upon their learning and plan actions and future needs.
- The LEAD forum is a virtual learning environment predominantly focused on discussion through forums. It provides a confidential space for the delegates to ask questions, share learning points and to post and download resources. There are three areas to the forum, one is open to the whole cohort (and LEAD team), another is open only to the members and facilitator in each action learning set (and not the LEAD team) and the other space is a learning log only open to each delegate (and the LEAD team).

LEAD is based on a social theory of learning whereby the participants learn from each other, relying less on the tutor(s) as the sage on the stage but as the guide on the side (Jones and Steeples, 2002, p.9). It supports a constructionist view of learning with the delegates using their existing knowledge and prior experience in interaction with each other to develop their leadership competencies. LEAD supports situated learning theory and can be conceived of as a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger ,1998) which involves people who interact and develop relationships that enable them to address problems and share knowledge (Wenger, 2004). Ferreday *et al.* (2006) suggest that networked learning assumes that learning emerges from relational dialogue, 'In many instances the relational dialogue associated with networked management learning occurs through educational approaches that seek to foster collaboration and interaction that is supported by communications technology' (p. 223). LEAD supports this view and attempts, through the different learning mechanisms, to foster learning through interaction and collaboration.

It is important to locate LEAD 'politically' as it has been consistently part-funded by economic regeneration funds. Initially a pilot programme its remit was to raise regional productivity. Evaluation of LEAD has shown that on average the small businesses increase their turnover by £200k (Wren and Jones, 2006). Designed and delivered by a university in the UK LEAD is part of the 'third mission' or 'knowledge transfer' activity in higher education. Knowledge transfer is seen as a way to boost world class excellence and strengthen the work of universities in supporting the regional economies (Department for Education & Skills, 2003, p. 5). LEAD is therefore partly driven by the regional and national policy agendas in relation to skills, higher education and knowledge transfer to support businesses that would otherwise not be able to access this kind of provision.

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The SME sector is under-represented in training programmes with most, if not all, other training programmes being designed for and marketed to managers within larger companies (Peters, 2006). LEAD is based on a pedagogic assumption that owner managers need a trusted, confidential space to come together and share their experiences. The integrated learning model of LEAD draws upon many different learning mechanisms. What makes LEAD 'networked' is the online virtual learning environment in which discussion forums dominate. There is very little written within policy documents about the potential of online forums and for businesses large and small, the Cabinet Office (2005) makes reference to online forums but in the context of providing a 'lifeline' to people suffering from debilitating conditions. Although there is little written within policy about how networked learning can support regional development, but we can turn to the networked learning literature for guidance on design principles to understand how a well thought out and pedagogically sound programme can achieve certain learning outcomes. One such text is Ponti and Hodgson's (2006) paper that sets out eight learning principles designed to assist in the design of a networked management learning programme for SME managers. Their aim was to identify learning principles that would guide and assist in the design of a networked management learning action-based learning programme for SME managers. Drawing on socio-cultural learning theories, Ponti and Hodgson designed a model informed by the following eight learning principles (2006, p.3);

1 Our focus is on learning which has a perceived value to the learners.
2 Responsibility for the learning process is shared (between all actors in this process).
3 Learning is situated and context dependent.
4 Time has to be allowed to build relationships.
5 Learning is better supported in collaborative settings and dialogue plays a major part in the collaborative learning process.
6 Social interaction allows for co-construction of knowledge, which promotes engagement of learners in work based and problem-based learning.
7 The role of the facilitator/animator is essential for collaborative eLearning.
8 Critical reflexivity is an important part of the learning process for evaluating and examining both the learning process itself and the resultant actions taken.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to these design principles for practical application for designing networked learning programmes with SMEs.

Methodology

This is an interpretive study that draws on empirical qualitative research gathered over a period of four years. The main method of enquiry has been through an ethnography both online and offline with one cohort of 25 owner managers who were on LEAD between 2007-8 which was informed by pilot research.

As discussed LEAD is rooted in a pedagogic assumption that peer-to-peer learning would be beneficial to the SMEs. The aim of the study was to explore *where* and *how* the learning takes place for the SMEs. The pilot stage involved qualitative interviews which were loosely structured with questions exploring the delegates' general LEAD experience. A total of nine interviews were carried out and, although rich with stories of how LEAD was impacting them personally and professionally, it became clear that interviews alone were not sufficient in understanding where and how learning was taking place. These interviews were followed up with a series of observations both in the workplace of the interviewees and while they were engaging in some of different elements of the programme. This led to a redesign of the methodology in time for a new cohort of LEAD being recruited and starting. This time an ethnography was undertaken whereby the researcher immersed herself as fully as possible in LEAD, trying to experience LEAD when and where the delegates experienced it. Ethnographic research is based on observational work in a particular setting (Silverman, 2001, p. 37) and allows qualitative researchers to get 'inside the minds' of those being studied (Curran and Blackburn, 2001, p.113). The ethnography presented some challenges because some of the elements of LEAD are confidential, for example the coaching takes place between the delegate and the coach. Observing this could potentially be harmful to the desired learning outcomes and as such this element was not observed directly although coaching as a learning mechanism was discussed during conversations, interviews and online discussion. The action learning sets are also confidential and operate in a group of six to seven with a facilitator. The researcher gained permission from

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one action learning set to sit in and observe the set meetings for the duration of the programme. Observing the action learning set was not perceived to have a negative impact on the learning outcomes as it was a group setting and the group asked the researcher to sit on the outside of the circle of chairs. After LEAD had finished, this action learning set continued meeting after LEAD and the researcher was invited to participate in it.

Ethnographies are typically carried out in a physical space, a tendency which is exacerbated by the historical roots of anthropology in the study of relatively isolated communities (Hine, 2000). Certainly there is a tendency to treat the field site as a physical place where one goes and writers stress the importance of face-to-face presence in events and interactions (Van Maanen, 1998). In addition to a 'traditional' ethnography including observations and interviews, a virtual ethnography was conducted online on the LEAD forum. There are few texts which explicitly combine the internet and ethnography. One such text is Hine's (2000) "Virtual Ethnography". Hine proposes that it could be useful to treat the internet as a separate cultural sphere in order to understand how it is articulated into, and transforms offline relationships (2000, p.59). She continues "This would enable a much richer sense of the uses of the Internet and the ways in which local relationships shape its use as a technology and as a cultural context" (p. 60). Debates surrounding virtual ethnography concentrate on authenticity and identity, i.e. questioning whether the participants are who they say they are (see Wellman and Hampton, 1999). However, such studies tend to focus on the pure online setting without an offline dimension. The richness of this study comes in the combination of both the online and offline observations and the exploration of learning spaces within these settings. Having an offline relationship with the delegates also gave the researcher what Tapscott *et al.* (2000) term 'digital capital' during discussions with the delegates online. Combining the offline and online ethnography allowed the researcher to follow the delegates into different areas and elements of LEAD although as with any ethnography the research cannot be 'everywhere at once' or to record everything that happens within a particular group or context. Data partiality is a topic of discussion within qualitative research. Drawing on Silverman (2005, p.52) a claim is not made to 'give the whole picture' and the inevitable partiality is celebrated through the validity and reliability of the analysis and interpretation.

The study was inductive and the data were thematically analysed relying on systematic processes common to the grounded theory 'methodological package'. This research is not conceived of as grounded theory as set out in the original presentation of the method by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Langley (1999) claims that the grounded theory has become a synonym for any kind of inductive theorizing. The study did not set out to develop a theory as such and data collection and analysis were not conducted together, each informing the next stage but the analysis has similarities to grounded theory in that it is an approach that develops the theory from the data collected rather than applying a theory to the data. Mason (2002, p. 80) calls this inductive reasoning whereby the researcher will develop theoretical propositions or explanations out of the data. Once themes were identified a constant comparison method was followed broadly using these steps as set out by Lincoln & Guba,1985, p.339): comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory. The action learning set proved to be a useful in the data analysis with the researcher frequently feeding back her interpretations and findings and checking her understanding with the members of the set. The themes undertook a process of data reduction and were refined and the interpretation identified the concept of learning spaces, which will be discussed next, to show where they learning was taking place. The learning spaces were then applied to other data collected on previous LEAD cohorts and on two of the past online LEAD forum discussions. The learning spaces identified here were also present in the other data.

Findings: Learning Spaces in LEAD

LEAD creates many different spaces for learning. These spaces can be physical or mental, real or imagined. There are indeed dedicated physical spaces where LEAD takes place, for example, the masterclasses, action learning sets and learning and reflection days all take place at the university; other elements of LEAD such as the phone coaching and carrying out the shadowing and exchanges take place where the delegates choose (normally in the place of their work); there is also the online LEAD forum which can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection. However, this just describes the 'mechanisms' of LEAD and does not provide an understanding of *how* and *where* the LEAD delegates are learning. The pedagogic assumption would support the notion that some learning takes places when the delegates engage with the different elements of LEAD, the ethnography on and offline shows there to be a deeper interpretation of how they are learning across spaces. These spaces serve different purposes, for example a masterclass is a 'taught' space whereby the speaker

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stands at the front (as 'dictated' by the room layout) and the delegates are expected to behave in a certain way (listening, being interactive at the request of the speaker etc). There are other spaces such as the refreshment break during the masterclass or lunch afterwards which support the more social view of learning in a 'non-directive space'. LEAD is conceived of as a learning space from which the other learning spaces are developed. The following table presents the five learning spaces with attributes of the space and a limited number of examples from the data.

Table 1: The five learning spaces on LEAD

Learning space	Attribute	Example from data (interviews or posts on the LEAD forum)
LEAD learning space	The whole of LEAD is perceived to be a space (like a container) that provides the opportunity for the other learning spaces to emerge	"Whereas immediately when I stepped into LEAD I felt I could talk to people about those kind of issues, and completely….people really understood, I found that it was a relief to be honest, stepping into it"
Reflective learning space	Reflection is an activity that takes place across LEAD but is perceived of as a discrete space where the delegates undertake this activity	"I found yesterday's session more useful than I realised at the time. The ability to be reflective is a new skill I am learning following the experiential and the action learning. Also the tendency to be judgemental may subside if I reflect a bit more!" "I knew the answers all the time. It was just a matter of having the blinkers taken off, and some thought provoking reflection as to what you are doing, and then having the confidence to follow through with your decisions."
Social learning space	The social learning spaces are non directive spaces such as tea breaks, lunches, sharing lifts, meals organised outside of LEAD. They provide the opportunity for community bonding.	"The listening has to come at break times hasn't it? So, the so called social times if you can term them that.….it is somewhere where you don't have to have your barriers up. ..It is like a doctor's surgery I suppose." "As well as the formal settings I am finding it going on informally as well. Informally we sort of email each other and meet up outside. Even things like car journeys that we share, you know sort of gossiping and finding what somebody has done or informally talking about the other masterclasses as well."
Peer-to-peer learning space	Peer-to-peer learning takes places across LEAD and is a space where the delegates specifically benefit from each other's knowledge and experience.	"It can be lonely; it can be a bit of a distant place sometimes. So, having somebody to discuss similar type problems from similar type companies means that they are going to have something to add without expressing it as a vulnerability." "I always knew that I would get a lot of value out of LEAD just being in the presence of these people, because they have got so much to offer."
Future learning space	There is a desire to continue learning and also the need to have time in the future to implement their learning	"In 12 months' time, this is going to be a different business, it's going to be a different company. And it will take us that long you know." "I know I've really enjoyed learning, I've sort of become quite addicted to that side of it and I really want to be able to learn more"

Findings: The situated curriculum of learning spaces

Bringing any network into being involves developing structures, routines and rituals (Briner and Hodgson, 2003). It is apparent that the LEAD delegates learn how to *be* a LEAD delegate and each cohort develops its own structures, routines and rituals. Lave and Wenger's (1991) legitimate peripheral participation can be used to explain how LEAD delegates *become* LEAD delegates (in terms of the identity) and Gherardi *et al's.* (1998) situated curriculum can be used to understand how delegates learn to *behave* in these spaces with each space developing its own version of a situated curriculum.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) seminal work uses community of practice to refer to communities of practitioners where newcomers enter and attempt to acquire the sociocultural practices of the community. They use legitimate peripheral participation to characterize the process by which newcomers become included in a community of practice. The newcomers learn from old-timers, increasing their legitimacy within the group moving from peripheral participation to full participation as they identify more with the community of practice in question. Here, the LEAD delegates' identity and behaviour changes with increased participation. Delegates often comment that at the beginning of LEAD they don't feel like leaders, rather, they feel they are imposters. Through their participation in LEAD this often changes and remarks such as, 'I know that I am a leader' or 'I have the confidence now to be a leader' are common. The salience of the conversations the delegates have across LEAD lies at the heart of the situated learning pedagogy. Their experiences resonate with one another which addresses the oft-quoted feelings of isolation as owner managers (see Smith and Peters, 2006). The salience of their experience and conversations contributes to their leadership learning in general and their affirmation of their identity as owner managers as well as their increased participation in LEAD.

Participating more fully in LEAD also means learning how to behave in the different real and metaphorical / conceptual learning spaces. In this sense each space can be considered to have its own situated curriculum. Gherardi et al. (1998) use the term to describe the work activities learnt by novices. Here, it is argued that the LEAD delegates learn or develop the work practices of LEAD through a situated curriculum. Some of the learning interventions are facilitated, such as the action learning sets (offline) and the discussion forums (online) and the facilitators guide the delegates on what is expected from each space through demonstration or correction. However, some of the conceptual learning spaces are interpreted by the delegates who develop their own practices and behaviours in these spaces as can be seen in the activity of reflecting which is proposed here as a learning space in itself. During a group presentation on the shadowing exercises one delegate comments, 'I've learnt that I need my own space to reflect to go forwards'. Many delegates allude to the fact that reflecting enables them to be better leaders. The following post by a delegate in her private learning log online shows that she sees the value of reflecting but separates it out as an activity to do or as a learning space to enter;

> Didn't get around to lots of self reflection at the weekend, too busy cleaning and making cups of tea (again thinking of everyone else) - No appointments tonight so think self reflection is on the cards after exercise video so that I feel energised and focused (post on the LEAD forum).

Once the delegates learn the situated curriculum they also learn to challenge it. This is ever present in the action learning sets whereby they persistently try to break the 'rules' that they themselves have set for this space. As well as explicitly agreeing on certain 'ground rules' of how to behave in the action learning set, the group that was observed also developed its own way of behaving, for example, when they wanted to speak they put their pen in front of them indicating that they had a contribution to make. The LEAD action learning sets are designed to help each other learn through reflection by asking open questions and, crucially, not offering one another advice (Smith, 2010). The delegates often tried to break the 'rule' of not giving advice by disguising advice by starting a sentence with, 'an observation I have is...', or 'observation...' and then go on to explicitly give advice. During an observation of an action learning set one LEAD delegate asked the group to tell him what to do even though he had seen the benefit of addressing an issue through open questions. The other set members all responded saying things like, 'we're not allowed to do that' or, 'we don't do that here'.

Legitimate peripheral participation and the situated curriculum can be used to understand the change in identity as the delegates learn to become full(er) participants in LEAD and learn how to behave and operate in the different spaces. In other words, learning and developing the situated curriculum across the LEAD spaces brings them closer to full participation.

Findings: Learning spaces as relational

The learning spaces within LEAD are discrete but they are relational with one another and also with spaces 'beyond' LEAD (such as their home life, social life etc). The following is a post by one delegate on the LEAD forum which is restricted to the other members in his action learning set. It demonstrates the relational nature of the action learning and masterclasses (both part of the LEAD learning space) with the reflective and peer-to-peer learning spaces.

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Just a quick line to say how much I enjoy the ALS [action learning set], both presenting an issue, and responding to someone else presenting an issue. For me, it has made me start thinking about my business more objectively, it is making me create time to think about issues we have and how to resolve them. It is also remarkable how similar some of our problems are.

Peer-to-peer learning space

Reflective learning space

Personally I have started to make changes to my business as a result of a combination of the ALS and all the other aspects of lead, and I am starting to feel liberated. Before LEAD, there was a common objective I kept hearing which was 'to spend time working on the business rather than in the business' and I can really relate to that now. Also Frank Dick's [masterclass speaker] closing words - 'If not you who, if not now - when' (post on the LEAD forum).

Relational nature of spaces across LEAD and 'outside'

As LEAD is based on an integrated learning model it is hard to separate out where their learning takes place. Examples of this include one delegate saying that she saw a pattern in her leadership going right back to the first ever encounter with LEAD (the overnight experiential) but that she didn't realise this until she had nearly finished LEAD. Another delegate notes that he took a point from his exchange project into his action learning set and then on to coaching as he could explore the issue more fully and with different tactics.

Ryberg and Larson (2008) explore the idea of a 'networked identity' whereby they hope to capture the richness and complexity of the relations we continuously engage in across contexts such as work, school, spare time, online or off-line (p. 112). The LEAD delegates' identity is also located in a 'complexity of relations'. Writing about LEAD, Robinson (2008) proposes four key relationships the LEAD delegates have, that is, with themselves as a leader, with their business in learning to lead it, with their partners and staff in asserting the leadership role and stepping back from managing and micro-managing and with the wider business community in relating with and learning from other small business leaders. This supports the view that LEAD learning is relational with other spaces. The following LEAD forum post shows how one delegate recognises that LEAD is affecting other parts of his life;

The strangest thing for me is not only is this working in the work place, but I also now find myself helping my children and coming out with some quite profound inspiring statements and it really works! Also in the gym I now know that I have still got a little bit more to give (post on the LEAD forum).

Discussion

Space is a topic of discussion in the networked learning literature. Often it is used to present frameworks for networked learning design, for example Chan, *et al.* (2001) present four spaces of learning models, namely, the future-classroom, the community-based, the structural-knowledge, and the complex learning models. These spaces, they hope, will provide a profound grasp of the future changes in education and pose as a theory for networked learning (p. 144). Other discussions look at the implications of ICT in the design of distance learning (Twining, 2001) or the sociocultural context in online learning (Warschauer, 2001). This paper theorises space in a different way to these uses of space by other authors with an aim of contributing to an understanding of where and how learning takes place and how this can be used to design some networked learning principles.

Given LEAD is underpinned by a social view of learning, it is important to create situations and spaces whereby the delegates can come together on and offline in a trusted, confidential environment to exchange their experiences, share stories, ask for advice and help and discuss their learning on LEAD. Hodgson (2008) suggests that social identities are being constantly negotiated and (re)constructed within such learning dialogues in online learning communities. This paper suggests that the LEAD delegates' social identities are being constantly negotiated and (re)constructed across the different learning spaces on LEAD. The importance of the

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offline learning spaces on LEAD cannot be underestimated in the construction of their identities which helps them to learn how to 'be' a LEAD delegate bringing them closer to fuller participation in Lave and Wenger's (1991) terms and thus learning how to be better leaders in their own contexts.

Inspired by Ponti and Hodgson's (2006) eight learning principles designed to assist in the design of a networked management learning programme for SME managers, along with the analysis of LEAD in this paper, a set of learning principles are suggested. In particular the learning principles here build upon the first and sixth principles as set out by Ponti and Hodgson. Ponti and Hodgson's first principle recommends focusing on learning which has a perceived value to the learners. Within this principle it also matters to develop a capacity of *interacting* with other relevant interlocutors to support the generation of new valuable knowledge, and bring change in their organizations (2006, p. 3). Their sixth principle proposes that social interaction allows for co-construction of knowledge, which promotes engagement of learners in work based and problem-based learning. SME managers can co-construct knowledge with the help of experts and peers through participatory social practices (p.5). For networked learning programmes such as LEAD, aimed at owner managers of SMEs, the following learning principles are suggested:

1. Create opportunities that address the isolation and loneliness felt by owner managers
2. Lay the foundations (in as far as is possible) for a 'trusted' environment which is confidential where the participants can ask for help, share stories and engage in critical reflection on and offline
3. Allow for the opportunity for multiple learning spaces to emerge and develop whether they are physical, virtual, metaphorical or imagined
4. Acknowledge the situated curriculum within the spaces and allow for interpretive flexibility (Bijker, 1995) of the spaces by the participants
5. Recognise and build upon the relational nature of learning spaces within and beyond the programme

Conclusions

This paper has explored where and how learning takes place in a networked leadership and development learning programme for SMEs. Five learning spaces were identified to show where the delegates were learning on LEAD, namely; (1) LEAD, (2) reflective, (3) social, (4) peer-to-peer and (5) future. It was argued that these spaces are relational with one another and to other spaces outside of LEAD. Situated learning theory was used to frame the concept of learning using legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and the situated curriculum (Gherardi *et al.,* 1998) as lenses for analysis to show how delegates learnt in addition to where they learnt. It was argued that through learning how to behave in the different learning spaces, the LEAD delegates' identity changed as they become full(er) participants on LEAD. The aim of the paper was to present networked learning principles some learning principles for designing networked learning programmes for SMEs which advocate creating opportunities for learning spaces to emerge and develop that would address the isolation and loneliness felt by owner managers.

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