

Connect - Reflect - Learn

Shaping the learning environment

19/3/26

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DEVELOP
CONNECT
DISCUSS
SUPPORT GROWTH
MEET
CHALLENGE
IDEAS SHARE
COMMUNITY
REFLECT



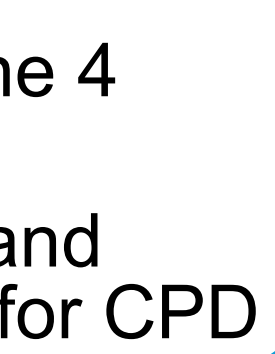
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Welcome!

- Plan
- 10.00 – welcome and introduction to the CPD series
- 10.10-10.40 – facilitated talk about learning environments
- Proposing some areas to reflect upon based on research findings
- 10.40-11.10 – small group discussions
- 11.10-11.30 – sharing reflections and drawing together

DOMAIN 1	DOMAIN 2	DOMAIN 3	DOMAIN 4
Working with others to organise an effective learning environment.	Teaching, facilitating and supporting learning and professional development in practice.	Managing the fair and transparent assessment of students in practice.	Developing knowledge and continuing performance as a practice educator.

PEPS domains

- Today is based on domain 1
 - Aim of events to align with the 4 PEPS domains
 - To help make them familiar and encourage different themes for CPD
- 

Let's start with where can we learn?

- Anywhere
- Formal / Informal
- Incidental – along the way
- It's not all new...we can acquire, unlearn, re-learn, reintegrate
- We learn by seeing, sensing, feeling, experiencing, processing emotions, muscle memory, integration of past experience.....the emotions and memories come way before the cognitive stuff.
- It is continual and lifelong (Jarvis 2010)

#changell facilitated by @carosa



Learn



Unlearn



Relearn

@guliaforstine

- Toffler
as cited in
"NOW YOU SEE IT"
by @CathyNDavidson

What is a learning environment in 2026?

A social space –
performative space
where we have
performative scripts?
(Goffman 1990; Argyris
and Schon 1974)

Physical space / Digital
space / AI

Team environment –
formal and informal
learning opportunities

Supervision relationship

Organisational or wider
profession? – learning
organisation? – culture /
sub-culture

Psychological space –
the mind

The learning environments presented in my research on



Learning anything new is a risk so it needs a receptive environment to soften the blow

Lesson #1

It hurts to get it wrong.....

- Risk of failure / risk of success
- Risk of unexpected outcomes
- Exposure of lack of knowledge
- Feeling like you don't want to stand out
- **How we have experienced something stays with us**
- **What learning environments have shaped you?**

"Ah well, that was super fun. Mistakes are always fun to focus on (laughs)....I should probably put that on ...deflect with humour"

"I hate making mistakes...I'm a kind of 'type a' perfectionist."

"I have high expectations of myself"

"Impulse to hide"

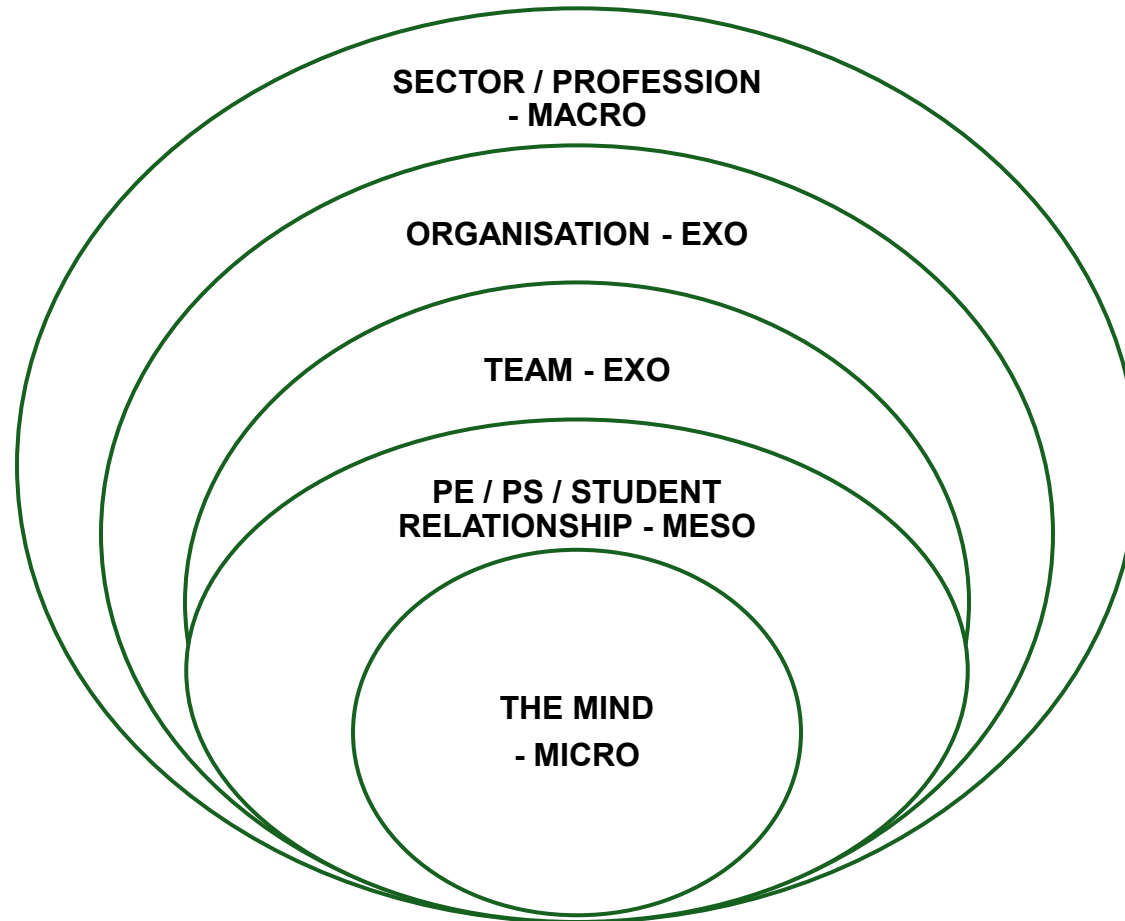
Anxiety leading to "FAILURE "

"that is like instantaneous. When I make a mistake, it's like fail.

Like you failed. Failure"

(Tate – Student 1)

Using Bronfenbrenner systems theory (1977) as a lens for learning environments



The mind

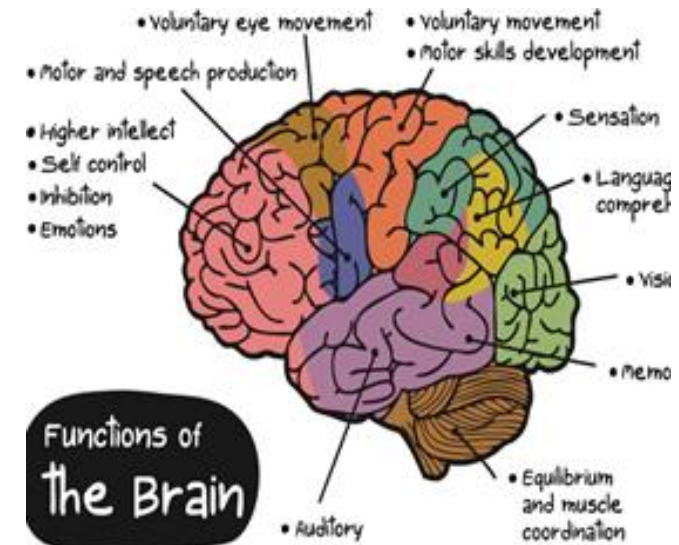


1. MIND (MICRO)

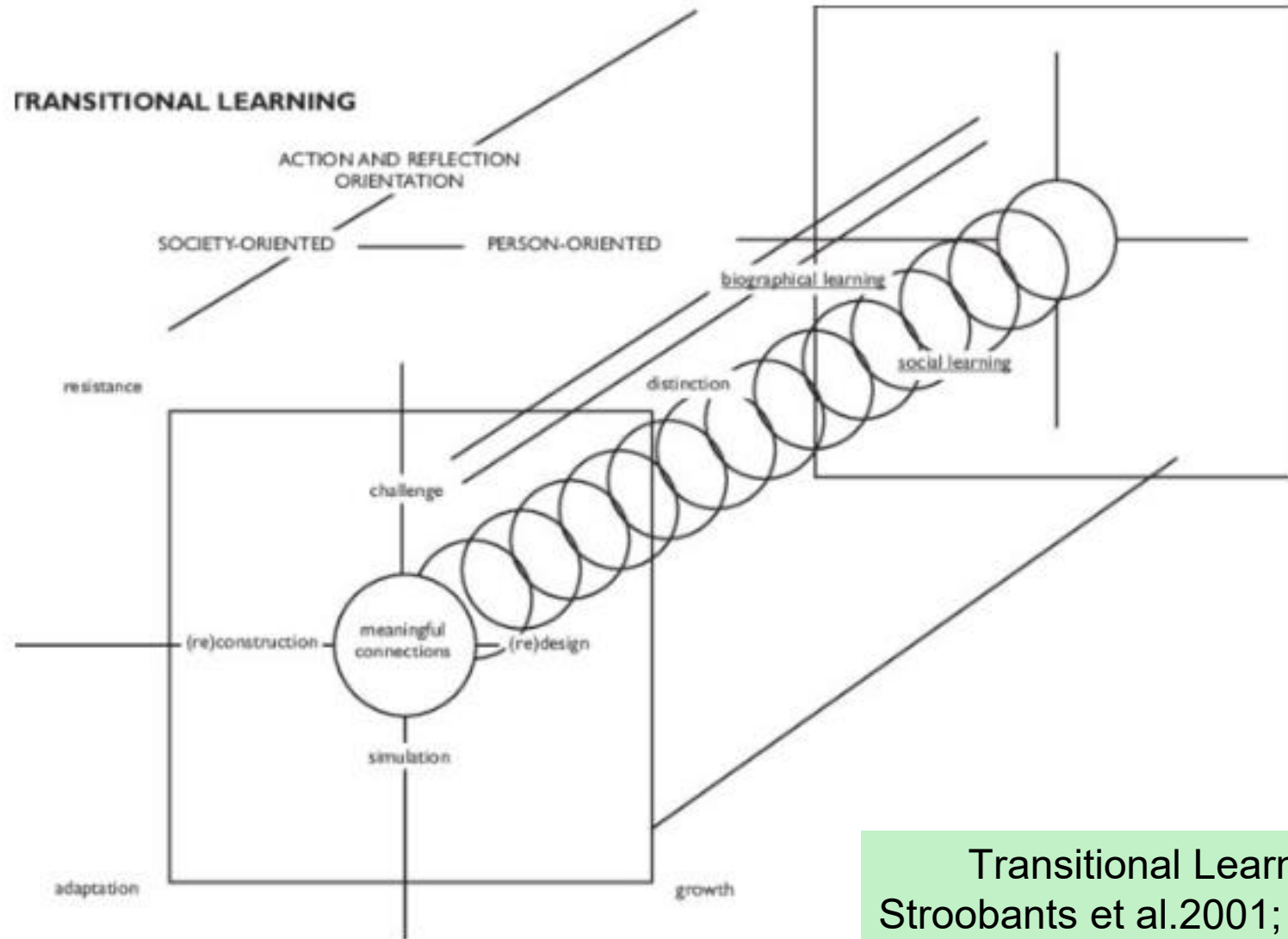
- Legacy of past experience
- Learning differences
- Emotions, feelings, thoughts
- Emotional drivers
- Growth vs fixed mindset
- Motivation to be in a particular setting

The mind....

- The legacy of experience
- Voices of experience – who are you hearing?
- How has your student been shaped in the way they handle setbacks, mistakes or adversity?
- What exists as a narrative in their mind?
- The bio-psychosocial elements of this learning environment.
- Research highlights the powerful emotional reaction triggered by mistakes – this is part of the brain's biological feedback mechanism
- How does this shape their intrapersonal learning environment?
- How does that sit in interaction with the MESO space? What do you see? What masks may be worn?



Your student.....



Transitional Learning Model by
Stroobants et al.2001; Stroobants, 2005)

The PE / PS relationship



2. PE / PS / Student relationship (MESO)

- Understanding of learning process – it is ok not to know
- A right way and a wrong way – binary
- Hostile versus growth
- Tensions of power

Meet Helena

I know I'm an adult because I'm twenty four...but I felt like a child in an adult's world....and all the colleagues I was working with were so much older....I went to a colleague who was newly qualified quite a lot of the time...she was kind of my knight in shining armour.” (Helena,S3)

Helena S3 – 'I' poem	YOU	WE / THEY
I went to a colleague who was newly qualified quite a lot of the time ...she was kind of my (laughs) knight in shining armour.		
I could go to her and not feel judged.		Quite often with the colleagues you're working with they're also marking you....they're also determining whether you pass placement or fail placement.
I was really struggling		
I just got to the point where I kind of said.....(to my mum)		is it normal to go and feel like you are constantly in an exam ...
	so....you're kind of sitting in that state	
I was like...this is a problem.		
I need to try and discuss		
I felt I was never enough		
I quite often had to have my hand held because of my learning differences.		
I really struggled with processing because I was really behind on the practical side.		
Office culture was new...I had a situation where I was with a colleague, and I didn't say 'hello' to them.		Then they kind of voiced in front of the whole office why are you ignoring me?
I was so embarrassed		
Culturally...I am part Finnish, and when I go through the front door I don't say hi to everyone (laughs) as I walk in ...and that would have come across as really rude.		
I didn't mean it like that.		

THE MESO SPACE – PE / PS / STUDENT

- Supervision – informal & formal - relationship
- Environmental cues to conform (Bruner 1961)
- Environmental rewards or punishment influence motivation for learning and the feelings associated with getting something “wrong” creating **cues to conform**
- Example – learning to play a musical instrumenta right way and a wrong way
- Work of Jerome Bruner (1961)
- Discovery approach to learning
- Not guiding the learner on a linear journey to the “right” way to do things (avoiding the wrong) – similar principle of not simply teaching learners to pass an exam which is a surface method of learning.
- Sense of developing “autonomous and self-propelled” learners able to apply knowledge to different contexts (Bruner 1961, pg22)
- Exploring, hypothesising, curiosity (how might you approach this / what are the ways we could approach this?) Guidance, shaping, evaluating
- Using the meso space to develop emotional literacy and language around emotions / feelings / senses

The wider team and organisation



3. Team / organisation (EXO)

- Pressure, stress, volume
- Differing values from practitioner to strategic and managerial objectives
- Impact of change in workplace post-covid

MESO and EXO SYSTEMS

Growth environment

- Mistake safe – not knowing is ok
- Evaluating outcomes as neutral information.
- Seeing the context and more broadly considering factors which shape the outcome
- Checking the learner has the necessarily skills to undertake the task
- Strengths-based feedback and evaluation – what went well.....even better if.....
- Checking the learner isn't taking on too much new stuff at once – “load shedding” (Reason 1990) – e.g. doing an assessment

Hostile environment

- Mistake hostile
- Perceived as careless
- Blame / fault – someone is responsible
- Narrow focus – without considering context
- Perceived judgement of team / PE / supervisor / manager
- Fear of ownership / accountability
- How are mistakes perceived and handled?
- Giving the learner multiple new tasks to manage
- Expectation of capability rather than a realistic pacing of learning

Meet Jack (Practice Educator)

“She (the student) had done the direct observation and she went in and she...when the service user was trying to tell her something ...she was trying to move on really quickly to the next subject. Um...rather than actually listen to what was going onand also when she came out um...there was ...there was like big...a big pile of pills built up....the place was a right state and she didn't ask about that

....so I did go back and we need to go and explore that ...but I will do that because she seemed like she was struggling ...I think she was struggling in the environment ...how he wasand stuff ...she sounded like she just wanted to get out of there um....so.... um ...with the student I um...I didn't make a massive....thing ...with the student, I didn't make it out like it was a massive mistake ...I didn't catastrophise it even though it was quite a biggieshe missed a lot of things ...so I just sort of sat down in the car with her afterwards say I was having a de-brief ...she was like...her head was like (gestures – like head is blown)

...So I sat down with her and I basically said to her um ...what's going on... with you?...You know....what's happening for you? How do you think that went?

...she told me first how she was feeling ...cos I don't want to say 'how do you feel' cos that's such a cliché (laughs) ..You know....I felt with that she was awkward and...she came out and said she was distressed...because I was the first time (observer) and she wasn't in my teamshe had a work based supervisor... and I was the overarching and she told me all what was happening in the team, how she didn't feel supported in the team.....how she felt that there was not a lot of people to go to for shadow opportunities or that sort of thing and I was like ok then....how do you think we could make this better ...um and she told me how she thinks she could do it... from the student I was getting one information....and from the work based supervisor I was....I was getting a different information you see....”

AND EXO SYSTEMS?

Growth environment

Hostile environment

What are the characteristics of our organisational cultures?

- Response when outcomes not as planned? Blame?
- Genuine learning culture / values?
- Multi-disciplinary?
- Political influence?
- Risk averse or risk tolerant?

Messages from research?

“So I mean COVID has made it really very unstable. So I just, I, I don't know.... I think that the kind of culture of not seeing people and not having those relationships doesn't help foster a kind of like a culture of... when we, were still in the teams before you were sat next to.....other people there, So when I was ...in that safeguarding team..... there were people.

We've been social workers for 30-40 years and you know, I could just go 'how do I do this'..... so 'I don't know what this is' and they would answer. And even if you're just frustrated and just expressing frustrations over a coffee in the kitchen in one of the offices, you don't have that. We don't have that culture anymore because we're working at home still..... and although there is some movement back towards the office is it's not to the same extent.” (Becky,P4)

- Changing workplace post covid – impact on learning environments – connections / networks and psychological safety. Not just hotdesks (Pulman & Fenge 2025)
- Potentially hostile environment for PE & PS – organisations not valuing the time needed for practice education and the emotional role and conflicts within the role (Finch et al. 2025)
- Differential experiences of the learning environment for students from global majority backgrounds (Finch & Tadam 2024)
- Polarity – the “joy” and “sadness” in the role of social worker (Sicora & Frost 2025)

Bringing it together

- Learning environments are multi-dimensional and interact
- Being aware of your student's legacy of learning and how this may impact their interaction with the practice environment
- The learning environment has changed and continues to evolve...
- How do / does your student(s) experience your team as a learning environment
- Think about what creates a growth environment or hostility in the learning environment
- The physical environment, the digital environment (use of AI)

- And now.....

Over to you...

Questions for reflection in groups

1. Evaluate the learning environment you have created for a student you have supported / assessed. What worked? What didn't work? What did you learn along the way?
2. How do you shape the learning environment for your student? Think about the physical and psychological environments e.g. supervision relationship, spaces to reflect, networks, communication.
3. Put yourself in the shoes of a new student joining you on placement – what are the areas you need to consider to create a welcoming and growth orientated space in the team?
4. What might create hostile or challenging conditions and how could you mitigate this?
5. What one thing are you going to do to shape a better learning environment going forward?

Padlet link:

<https://padlet.com/bu/pelp-connect-reflect-learn-cpd-series-evaluation-and-reflect-t4y20ho814myp9x6>



Plenary

- Sharing reflections
- What one thing are you going to do to shape a better learning environment going forward?

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Future PELP event dates

- 19th March 2026 – 10-11.30 (online) – Shaping the Learning Environment. Hosted by BU
- 21st May 2026 – 10-11.30 (online) – SMART planning. Hosted by BCP Council
- 8th July 2026 – 10-4.30 approx. (in person). The Social Work Toolkit
- 24th September 2026 – 10-11.30 (online). Theme tbc. Hosted by Dorset Council ASC
- 19th November 2026 – 10-11.30 (online). Theme tbc. Hosted by Dorset Council CSC

Thank you for attending!

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