

Learning at work: Researching personal development and competence building in work integration companies

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Abstract

The context of our research is Work Integration Enterprises. These hire people who are emerging from processes of social exclusion for a period of between 6 months and three years. In these companies, people work while learning a trade and learning to work, in order to facilitate their entry into the ordinary labour market.

Of the different academic approaches to processes of learning at work and training, we have chosen Michael Eraut's notion of learning trajectories to apply to our research. We have chosen it for its potential: it provides a longitudinal approach to learning, it takes into account technical, social and personal dimensions of learning, and it also develops a particular focus on the learning of newcomers in a working context.

In the article, I explain how we have applied Eraut's model to devise our research strategy, which is still under the process of implementation. I also explain the challenges we face and the decisions we have taken in order to apply a methodology that is capable of covering learning, training, assessment and the interactions among these processes. I conclude with reflections upon several areas that emerge from our methodological design.

Keywords: vocational training; work experience; transition into work; learning trajectories; social inclusion; identity formation

Resum. *Aprenentatge en el lloc de treball: investigar el desenvolupament personal i l'adquisició de competències en empreses d'inserció*

El context de la nostra investigació són les empreses d'inserció, que contracten entre sis mesos i tres anys personal que està aconseguint sortir de processos d'exclusió social, amb la idea que treballin i alhora aprenguin un ofici que els faciliti l'entrada al mercat de treball ordinari.

Hem triat la noció de trajectòries d'aprenentatge de Michael Eraut per tal d'emprar-la en la nostra recerca, entre els diferents corrents acadèmics que tenen com a objecte d'estudi l'aprenentatge en el lloc de treball així com la formació que li dona suport. Ho hem fet tant pel seu potencial en termes de proporcionar-nos un enfocament longitudinal d'estudi sobre l'aprenentatge com per la seva integralitat en abordar les seves dimensions tècnica, social i personal, i també per la seva particular atenció sobre les persones que s'acaben d'incorporar al lloc de treball.

En l'article expliquem com hem aplicat el model d'Eraut per dissenyar la nostra estratègia metodològica, que ara comencem a emprar. També expliquem els reptes als quals ens enfrontem, així com les decisions que ha calgut prendre per aplicar una metodologia capaç de mostrar l'aprenentatge, la formació i l'avaluació, així com la relació entre aquests tres processos. Finalitzem exposant els diferents temes que han anat sorgint durant la investigació des del punt de vista del disseny metodològic.

Paraules clau: formació professional; formació en pràctiques; transicions al treball; trajectòries d'aprenentatge; inclusió social; formació de la identitat

Resumen. *Aprendizaje en el puesto de trabajo: investigar el desarrollo personal y la adquisición de competencias en empresas de inserción*

El contexto de la investigación son las empresas de inserción, que contratan entre seis meses y tres años a personas que están saliendo exitosamente de procesos de exclusión social, con el propósito de que trabajen y aprendan un oficio que les permita incorporarse al mercado de trabajo ordinario.

Hemos optado por la noción de trayectorias de aprendizaje de Michael Eraut entre las distintas aproximaciones académicas al estudio de los procesos de aprendizaje en el puesto de trabajo y de la formación que lo promueve, a fin de aplicarla a nuestra investigación. Nuestra elección se basa en su potencial en tanto que proporciona una visión longitudinal del aprendizaje, también por su integralidad, al abarcar sus dimensiones técnica, personal y social, así como por su particular empeño en indagar en los procesos de aprendizaje de personas que se acaban de incorporar a un puesto de trabajo.

En el artículo explicamos cómo hemos adaptado el modelo de Eraut al diseño de nuestra estrategia metodológica, que estamos empezando a aplicar en la actualidad. También explicamos los retos a los que nos estamos enfrentando en términos de decisiones para que la metodología nos permita dar cuenta de los procesos de aprendizaje, formación y evaluación y de las relaciones entre estos tres procesos. Finalmente, exponemos los asuntos que han ido surgiendo en el curso de la investigación desde el punto de vista del diseño metodológico.

Palabras clave: formación profesional; formación en prácticas; transiciones al trabajo; trayectorias de aprendizaje; inclusió social; formació de la identitat

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1. Introduction

Work integration social enterprises (WISEs hereafter) are intended to promote purposeful educational processes, formal and informal, with people who are emerging from processes of social exclusion. In our recent research, we have studied educational practices that take place in the workplace as well as their effects upon the personal and professional development processes of workers in their transition into the ordinary labour market. Supported contracts last up to three years.

We rely upon Michael Eraut's notion of learning trajectories. We are trying to adapt it as both a descriptive and analytical methodological tool, in order to describe and explain educational practices within WISEs. In my paper, I will debate the possibilities and cautions in the process of adapting Eraut's methodology. While Michael Eraut has applied his model to university graduates, WISEs offer low qualified positions, most of which lack any proper recognized qualification.

This discussion will consist of theoretical issues as well as illustrations of how we are working with learning trajectories as an analytical tool, able to show variations within the pedagogical relation during the training process, from the moment of entry into the WISE until the process is finished and workers seek a position in the ordinary labour market. It will also deal with the connections between employability and personal and social competences in Eraut's learning trajectories, and how these are assessed and handled within WISEs.

We are currently developing a research project coordinated by the *Universitat de València* in which 6 other universities and one employment federation also take part. Our research studies how WISEs deliver appropriate training and how they are organized in order to provide the right circumstances to facilitate learning in technical, social and personal domains (ID: EDU2013-45919-R). Our study is based upon previous research work in which we already tested that Eraut's model proved to be suitable for the analysis of learning processes in low qualified jobs.

2. Context of research

Work integration companies hire three different types of workers. First, production workers (PW hereafter), those who have the technical competence to perform work efficiently and successfully. Second, accompanying workers (AW hereafter), whose main responsibility is to support the development of personal and social skills among the third type of workers: integration workers (IW hereafter). Integration workers are adults who have experienced severe processes of social exclusion such as addiction, imprisonment, homelessness, illegal migration and status or mental illness among others; and who have already received social support. When they try to enter the ordinary labour market, however, their background makes it difficult for them to compete with other workers.

The purpose of WISEs is to hire integration workers in order to guarantee them access to a relatively stable contract for up to three years. During that period, they can acquire and improve technical skills that make them as productive and competitive as other people; and develop personal and social skills. They may have lost such competencies or they may have adapted those skills to the contexts of exclusion they have experienced (González and Marhuenda, 2008; Marhuenda, 2009).

Therefore, we approach a production context with the very clear aim of helping people to develop in both an occupational and social and personal way. WISEs are companies aimed at educating people. This is why they employ people responsible for training and educating others. These are workers with roles sometimes similar to those of coaches, others to those of mentors; workers who occasionally act as trainers and sometimes as true educators. They are qualified to work with adults who have been out of formal educational systems for a long time, who probably lack vocational qualifications, who have been involved for relatively long periods of time in intense re-educational, therapeutic, disciplinary or moralizing practices in order to move on from their past of exclusion: integration workers are adults who have developed resilience.

WISEs offer long-term contracts and this is very rare in the current Spanish economy. However, it is also a necessary condition to accomplish their educational aims. Their purpose, formalized in written form in an annex to their contract, is to help IW workers to develop a personal development plan that contains knowledge, competence and social and personal skills. This is the objective of the contract, to which the entrepreneurial activity of the company must contribute. For this reason, much informal education is expected to take place with a view to developing self-education, self-evaluation, self-esteem and self-control.

This means the expectation of evolution and transformation in the pedagogic relation and the variation in the learning processes that make up the productive activity (AERESS and FAEDEI, 2014). This process is one of achieving autonomy. There should be an increase in self-direction by the end of the process; if that were not the case, we would be dealing with failed integration processes. Therefore, employer-promoted training should be available, since WISEs do not only provide employment. Their purpose is not just to provide the opportunity to work; they are purposefully devised as transition pathways into ordinary life for people at the end of processes of social inclusion. We could expect WISEs to entail a majority of the features of expansive learning environments (Evans, Hodkinson, Rainbird and Unwin, 2006) or transition platforms. In fact, they are located at the end of the re-integration processes. We also expect WISEs to be appropriate contexts of informal learning (García-Peñalvo, Johnson, Ribeiro Alves, Minovic and Conde-González, 2014; García-Peñalvo, Colomo-Palacios and Lytras, 2012) even if they have not yet explored the possibilities of information technologies for informal processes of learning.

WISEs have existed in Spain since the late 1970s, yet they have been regulated and recognized by the law, and received certain economic support, since 2007. Despite the severe financial crisis that Spain has suffered, and that is still ongoing, WISEs are proving able to resist the crisis and some of them have even been able to expand their market. There are approximately 200 WISEs, employing over 4000 workers, of which more than 2000 are Integration Workers.

We have approached WISEs and have been working with the Spanish Federation of the Associations of Work Integration Companies, FAEDEI, as well as with the Spanish Association of Recycling and Social Economy Companies, AERESS, where we have taken part in a technical group on accompanying processes.

In this context, our work is based upon previous research results, regarding methodology and content, as well as on research work conducted in similar contexts: training for the employment of young people at risk of social exclusion, the study of transition processes of young dropouts, as well as the orientation processes of unemployed adults (Molpeceres, 2004; Zacarés and Llinares, 2006; Marhuenda, Navas and Bernad, 2010; Córdoba and Martínez, 2011). Our study now focuses on individual learning plans developed for the purpose of integration, even if both WISEs and we are aware that most learning at work is informal (Sangrà and Wheeler, 2013; Griffiths and García-Peñalvo, 2016).

3. Research approach and strategy

In past and recent research, we have looked at how people build their competence in relation to work. The following is part of our background: VET literature as well as literature on transitions into employment, apprenticeship or dual systems as mechanisms to facilitate learning; coaching and mentoring and supervision as methods to support learning, experiential learning or learning in the workplace (Abietar, Marhuenda and Navas 2013; Córdoba and Martínez, 2011; Malloch, Cairns, Evans and O'Connor, 2011; Marhuenda and Navas, 2011; Evans and Waite, 2010; Stenström and Tynälä, 2009; Miller and Blackman, 2005; Steadman, 2005; Evans and Niemeyer, 2004; Rainbird, Fuller and Munro, 2004; Mutch, 2002). Of all these, however, we have chosen Michael Eraut's approach of learning trajectories. Why Eraut?

In Eraut's approach, we see the potential to describe how workers may become more productive through learning and by improving the quality of their knowledge. We find the potential to help workers become more human, more sociable and fully autonomous, in a way that suits the purpose of WISEs perfectly: accompanying workers are there to foster and enhance such processes, and managers have to provide working conditions for this to happen, hence providing support in a continuous although not stable manner, while managing the organization in order to provide scaffolding and mentoring when needed, something that will happen during the three years of duration of the contracts.

Eraut's work moved from studying mid-career learning processes to early career learning processes, in different professional fields such as health, teaching, engineering, accountancy and social work, among others. Given the expectation of progress during the contract duration, the longitudinal angle of Eraut's approach is particularly relevant for our purposes: we study how adults learn the early stages of a new occupation at a moment of reorientation in their lives. WISEs work on the assumption of the will to improve. Hence, we monitor these newcomers from when they enter the insertion company, throughout the duration of their contract and once they join the ordinary labour market, since we also want to examine how they manage the transition process to the latter.

In Eraut's work (2009, 2007, 2005, 2004) we find, among others, the following possibilities that have been explored over time and that prove useful for the aim of our research:

- An attempt to elicit tacit knowledge.
- Individual learning trajectories as the focus of study.
- Tacit knowledge and skills that are made explicit. This, in the case of WISEs, means that feedback and assessment of one's own individual learning plan is provided by PW and AW in order to support IW's learning.
- A focus on working contexts and conditions, and knowledge and skills needed to perform at work. Educational settings, be they formal or informal, are relegated to a secondary role: it is workers we are talking about, not apprentices.
- Factors affecting learning processes and activities conducive to learning: instead of focusing on the loose definition of formal and informal, Eraut differentiates between learning processes according to whether their principal intention is working or learning. Learning is acknowledged as a collateral effect of working (table 1).
- We are aware that within a WISE this may not be the case, for there are AW and PW that are there to provide explicit support and, hence, to make decisions that are clearly oriented towards learning processes. In the context of WISEs we might expect work to be on certain occasions almost an excuse or by-product.
- A proposal of how people learn at work, which differentiates between activities and processes. While the main focus is on processes, be they work or learning ones, activities happen that can be conducive to learning depending on how they are dealt with.
- Differentiation between personal and contextual factors that affect learning, also allowing the interaction between each of these to be considered.
- People, individuals, are at the core of research. They are important as persons, workers and learners. They are seen under processes of development, they are considered as subject to learning and improvement, as *happening* while at the same time as *hope*, to paraphrase Lundgren (1984). This is an acknowledgement of individual agency and personal dispositions that can evolve through authentic educational relations.

Table 1. Eraut's typology of early career learning

Work processes with learning as a by-product	Learning activities located within work or learning processes	Recognized learning processes at or near the workplace
Participation in group processes	Asking questions	Being supervised
Working alongside others	Getting information	Being coached
Consultation	Locating resource people	Being mentored
Tackling challenging tasks	Listening and observing	Shadowing
and roles	Reflecting	Visiting other sites
Problem solving	Learning from mistakes	Conferences
Trying things out	Giving and receiving feedback	Short courses
Consolidating, extending	Use of mediating artefacts	Working for a qualification
and refining skills		Independent study
Working with clients		

Source: Eraut (2007: 6).

- Furthermore, Eraut's typology is here considered as a useful tool that needs adaptation, as it is the fruit of his study with professionals. Quite differently, WISEs employ people in occupations that entail low or very low qualifications, occupations rather than professions. Chances for adaptation have already been explored in the past (Marhuenda and Bonavía, 2011; Marhuenda and Navas, 2013) and such efforts have proved fruitful, as AERESS and FAEDEI (2014) have also acknowledged.

Therefore, we have adapted and recontextualized Eraut's work to the context of WISEs. And we have also related it to the notion of employability as it is used in contexts of training for employment with vulnerable people and, as it is used in many European policy documents. Moreover, most Third Sector organizations aim at the improvement of employability as one factor conducive to social inclusion (Córdoba, Llinares and Zacarés, 2013; Belt and Richardson, 2005).

Dimensions of employability considered by WISEs in an open, flexible and instrumental way, are able to appropriately merge a selection of Eraut's learning trajectories, as we show in table 2. Employability is composed of a mix of competence areas (technical, social and personal) as well as of wider contextual issues: social support, family and legal assistance, housing and health issues among others. WISEs try to foster employability in a wide sense and they are well aware that external elements and contextual factors have an impact on one's chances of finding a job: although both the insertion companies and the Third Sector organizations promoting them work with individuals, their intervention has a greater reach if they put the organizational and contextual factors at the service of these individuals. Employability is not an individual quality; rather, it is relational, between the subject and the setting in which they find themselves. By doing so, they develop a relational notion of employability rather than the dominant individual restrictive and harmful one.

Table 2. Learning trajectories in relation to employability

Eraut's learning trajectories	Llinares, Córdoba and Zacarés (2013) employability dimensions (individual factors)
Task performance: Rhythm and speed, complexity of tasks and situations, variety of skills that are required, communication with other people	Punctuality, looking after tools and machinery, knowledge and respect towards safety norms, qualification for specific work, specific skills
Awareness and understanding: of other people (colleagues, customers, supervisors), of contexts and situations, of one's own organization, of priorities and strategic issues	Understanding demands of situations, understanding actions and their consequences, developing criteria
Personal development: Self-evaluation, self-direction, handling emotions, social skills, openness to other perspectives, readiness to work with others, readiness to learn from experience, ability to obtain relevant knowledge, ability to learn from experience	Personal features, ability for verbal and written communication, assertiveness, acceptance of criticism, positive management of conflict, learning to learn
Working with others: facilitating social relations, solving problems and jointly planning, promoting mutual learning	Working in teams
Role performance: Prioritisation, range of responsibility, supporting other people's learning, leadership, supervision, accountability, delegation, handling ethical aspects, facing unexpected problems, keeping up-to-date	Diligence, self-discipline, autonomy, perseverance, self-organization, leadership

Source: compiled by the author, based on Eraut (2009) and Llinares, Córdoba and Zacarés (2013).

In the context of the account given above, our research approach needs to address certain decisions:

- Choice of companies rather than choice of sectors.
- Permission access: we are handling sensitive data and information. Confidentiality and anonymity are crucial issues in our research.
- Negotiating feedback: we prepare executive reports for each company; second and further visits, observation and interviews, are based on previous ones as well as new documentation that becomes available.
- Providing collective feedback: in both regional and national meetings, where information is shared and disseminated for discussion and corroboration with accompanying and production workers, as well as with managers in some cases.
- Access to integration workers in their first weeks/months: this is the period when they are expected to learn relevant issues swiftly, particularly as the occupational skills are considered to be pretty simple in some trades. They may also have the chance to apply the knowledge they may have acquired in training provision prior to access to the WISE, for instance in gardening and hotel and catering, where skills are more complex.

- Our research team brings expertise from different fields and traditions (Quintana, Tugores and Salvà, 2013; Martínez et al, 2012; De Miguel et al., 2012; Galarreta et al, 2007; Rubio, Millan, Cabrera, Navío and Pineda, 2011; Gallastegi and Martínez, 2011; Martínez and Carmona, 2010; Navío, 2005); it is a new team that gathers researchers from different regions: this entails a further challenge.

We have addressed these decisions and have therefore devised the following research design, where table 3 takes into account the context of WISEs; table 4 focuses on the object of research and draws our research hypothesis and, finally, table 5 articulates and applies the methodological strategy based upon observation of training, learning and assessment processes after our choice of Eraut's framework.

Table 3 shows the relation between the three stages of development established in WISEs and the duration of each stage as set out under *Ley 44/2007, de 13 de diciembre, para la regulación del régimen de las empresas de inserción* (Spanish Law 44/2007, of 13 December, concerning the Regulation of the Regime of Insertion Enterprises). As can be seen, there is a probation period of up to 6 months, a developmental period that may last up to 24 months, and a transition period into the non-protected labour market that may last up to 6 months within the WISE. In addition, there are another 6 months once the person has left the WISE but is still under its follow-up procedures, be it as employed in another company or as an unemployed person looking for a new job.

In table 4, we address the relation between the same three phases and the curriculum that has to be provided by WISEs to their IW workers, which will consist of a specification of practical knowledge in terms of occupational, social and personal skills. The achievement of these competencies will evolve from the external control that PW and AW have over the IW in the recruitment phase, therefore in the first six months. We expect a development from external dependency towards increasing autonomy and, finally, self-control. Such a development would show the adequate development of the IW in order to leave the WISE and enter the ordinary labour market in proper conditions to compete with other job-seekers. This is shown in the second file in the table. This development in terms of autonomy also provides evidence of the successful process towards the termination of the social exclusion that made the person dependent enough to need a device such as a WISE in order to facilitate social inclusion.

Table 3. Personal development and competence building in work integration companies

Recruitment and employability assessment	Work performance and improvement of employability	Transition into the ordinary labour market
0-6 months	6 to 30 months	3-6 months in WISEs and up to 6 months in the ordinary labour market

Source: compiled by the author.

Table 4. Competence development and accompanying processes

	Recruitment	Work	Performance	Transition
Competencies: Occupational, social and work-related, personal	External control	Less dependency	More autonomy	Self-control
Competency specifications				
Rhythm of progression and control and demands upon work and learning				
Evaluation criteria and transition during phases				

Source: compiled by the author.

The first column in table 4 also indicates the three domains in the work that AW and PW have to accomplish respectively and in coordination with each other: they have to agree, together with the IW, on the content of the competencies to specify and prioritise them in each of the phases and for allocated periods of time. Once agreed, both AW and PW have to consider the appropriate rhythm of progression of the IW, and this will also be translated in terms of evaluation situations, in and outside work. These correspond to PW and AW respectively.

Furthermore, the specifications of competencies have to be translated in terms of evaluation criteria that are known to the IW so that they can be aware of the progress that they are making, whether this progress is appropriate or not in their own terms and also in relation to progress made by their colleagues.

It is through the combination of specification of competencies, expected rhythm and evaluation criteria that this informal process is turned into a curriculum specification that is written in the individual learning plan of the IW.

We refer once again to the three phases in order to prepare our research device, which will consist, following Eraut, of a series of on-site observations of work performance followed by interviews with IW, PW and AW. Because of our particular emphasis on employability, we also ask employees to fill in employability questionnaires that will provide further measures of their progress in terms of personal and social features.

Our interviews address questions related to the circumstances observed in each of the learning trajectories that we have selected (table 2), but also evaluation procedures that are being conducted, either formally or informally, by both PW and AW, whether communicated or not to the IW. These interviews are planned for approximately half an hour and are prepared specifically for each of the phases in which the IW finds him/herself.

We have chosen eleven companies in seven different regions in Spain. We have followed all confidentiality procedures required by law and by our university, in order to assure anonymity as well as due ethical handling of the data, once each individual employee had agreed to participate in the research. After this, we planned a series of four visits to each site. We expect to observe and

Table 5. Combined design to gather information

	Recruitment	Work performance, consolidation and follow up		Transition	
Field work during project length	First 3 months in WISE	Once the personal development plan is approved	When approaching the transition phase	Last 6 months in WISEs	Entry into the ordinary labour market
Month 12	Group 1 30 IW/AW/ PW: Full longitudinal analysis IW between 1-3 months	Group 2 30 IW/AW/PW Transversal study IW between 10-12 months	Group 3 30 IW/AW/ PW Transversal study IW between 19-21 months	Group 4 30 IW/AW/ PW Transversal study IW between 28-30 months	Group 5 30 IW/AW/PW Transversal study 3-6 months out of WISE
Month 21	Group 6 30 IW/AW/PW Transversal study IW between 1-3 months	Group 1 30 IW/AW/PW Full longitudinal analysis IW between 10-12 months	Group 2 30 IW/AW/ PW Transversal study IW between 19-21 months	Group 3 30 IW/AW/ PW Transversal study IW between 28-30 months	Group 4 30 IW/AW/PW Transversal study 3-6 months out of WISE
Month 30	Group 7 30 IW/AW/PW Transversal study IW between 1-3 months	Group 6 30 IW/AW/PW Transversal study IW between 10-12 months	Group 1 30 IW/AW/ PW Full longitudinal analysis IW between 19-21 months	Group 2 30 IW/AW/ PW Transversal study IW between 28-30 months	Group 3 30 IW/AW/PW Transversal study 3-6 months out of WISE
Month 42	Group 8 30 IW/AW/PW Transversal study IW between 1-3 months	Group 7 30 IW/AW/PW Transversal study IW between 10-12 months	Group 6 30 IW/AW/ PW Transversal study IW between 19-21 months	Group 1 30 IW/AW/ PW Full longitudinal analysis IW between 28-30 months	Group 2 30 IW/AW/PW Transversal study 3-6 months out of WISE

Source: compiled by the author.

interview four different IW during each visit, and we expect to be able to observe one of these workers throughout the lifetime of the project. Each employee in visit 1 (file three of table 5) therefore corresponds to one of the groups (1 to 4) of that file, and they will be part of the same group but in a different stage of the lifetime of the research. We expect to reach approximately 100 IW, while also interviewing their corresponding PW and AW on each of the visits.

This research strategy will enable us to perform both a transversal and longitudinal analysis of the data within each company and between different

companies. The transversal analysis within companies will allow us to see whether the AW and PW relate to the IW in different ways according to the stage in which the IW finds him/herself. The longitudinal analysis will allow us to appreciate the evolution of this relation with the same IW over time.

4. Adapting Eraut's model to the context of WISEs

We expect this model to allow us to gain access to those situations that purposefully elicit tacit knowledge, as is the official purpose of WISEs. We also expect it to show evidence of personal and social competencies as they evolve and their link to occupational competencies that are at the core of work performance. In WISEs, occupational fields have low demands of qualifications, often not required or aimed at. We must also consider the size and structure of companies, as well as address the phasing and rhythm of the transition process during the integration contract.

Contrary to Eraut, even if we focus upon positive learning, we do not want to avoid the chance of addressing uncomfortable issues with both the IW and the AW/PW, in the belief that it is mostly the responsibility of the latter to help the IW to foster learning processes. We want to address those areas in which the trainees (IW) need more improvement, need more support or are more delicate to handle in a work situation; particularly those related to social and personal development.

WISEs, as small companies, have to make decisions about the structure and allocation of work tasks in order to foster learning processes. Eraut clearly addresses these issues. Which of the typologies should we expect to find in the different occupations, organizations and routine work when it comes to issues like consultation and collaboration within the working group, consultation outside the group and the challenge of work itself?

We have already shown in table 1 content in terms of training and learning embedded in different work and training activities on the job. Among the first processes, observation and discussion, seeking advice, increasing motivation and confidence through challenging tasks, all happen in WISEs. All of these are pursued in WISEs, perhaps except reflection and discussion.

Direct supervision by line managers should be a frequent learning activity devised and conducted by PW and AW, as they are seeking progression. AW might also be considered as mentors, as they should be regarded as 'helpful others'; while coaching might also be provided by colleagues, IW at later stages of their processes, and of course by PW, at least while IW are in their first months of the contract.

Site visits will rarely be found here, except in those cases where the Trust behind the WISE has several WISEs, or at later stages in the process, when preparing the entry of the IW to the ordinary labour market. In this regard, visits might be planned with partner companies. Participation in further education should be essential in WISEs, trying to direct people towards the achievement of a certification or qualification, though we do not expect to

find much of it. Accreditation, in those occupations in which it is valued, should also be addressed to this purpose, even when it is not directly related to the core activity of the WISE.

We do not expect independent study to take place in WISEs, though there are agreed individual plans and, therefore, there should be independent activities, as well as those related to habits and behaviours out of the WISE but conducive to an ordinary inclusive life.

In WISE there are probably no logbooks, but there will be certain handbooks related to machinery, specifications of procedures where quality processes apply and safety and health regulations are considered... Furthermore, the IW may have her/his own portfolio, or field folder in order to take notes. Information on access to WISE should be taken into account here. It would be useful to identify whether IW seek out such information or whether they ask colleagues who possess that information.

Observing and questioning are the most relevant activities that learners do: learning will depend upon the frequency and type of use. The organization must facilitate a questioning culture. Good questions depend on prior knowledge as well as on good reflection processes. Are IW afraid to ask questions? Do they have a reputation to maintain? Our guess is that this is not the case. In WISEs there is neither prior knowledge nor fear; therefore, should we expect them to ask more questions, instead of not asking any? What questioning culture does the organization promote? Are IW given indications on when, whom and how to ask, and when to stop asking? Questioning is a social skill.

The conditions of the organization and its environment will promote or hinder learning activities through observation and listening. Awareness and understanding are relevant to explore prior knowledge in depth, to discuss it and to reflect upon it. We should attempt to understand the environment, how crowded/silent it is. In this regard, again, we find the help of Eraut's model, through the factors affecting learning in the workplace:

- Confidence is very important in mid-career learning. WISEs have as an aim to develop confidence in the learner in order to become more self-sufficient and autonomous. Confidence has to be taken into account and improved during the phases of the integration process. We may expect IWs to develop confidence at the beginning of their contract, then to lose it as they perform more routine tasks. Confidence may be developed further as they progress through phases and perhaps receive new responsibilities such as being role models for newcomers, even if they may perceive them as those who will potentially push them out of the company.
- What are the sources of confidence? What are they in WISEs? Eraut has found that confidence depends on meeting challenges in one's work as well as feeling supported in working contexts. We may find more of the latter than of the former, unless we understand challenges to be working faster, addressing new clients, having the opportunity to move up positions or pursuing a career and having a certain direction. We must pay considerable

- attention to this, for in a WISE the notion of career is not clear and it may be perceived as a final objective instead of one of transition.
- In his research, Eraut considers confidence as a notion close to that of self-efficacy as defined by Bandura and something that is context-specific rather than a more general attribute, such as, for example, self-esteem. However, WISEs seek to achieve self-esteem as this is key to optimal development of the self.
 - Personal agency is also an aim of WISEs and clearly an issue in workers' identity, the development of their own expectations and freedom. In the case of WISEs, furthermore, employers have no choice but to share these goals with employees, for it is embedded in their business.
 - Agency is also linked to resilience in the case of social inclusion: we might consider the weight of agency in people coming out of processes of social exclusion, surrounded by conditions of exclusion, and how it is acknowledged and fostered. Has it also been an issue in the selection process of IWs? Agency is also strongly linked to commitment, both towards the task and towards the organization, and even to the product itself.
 - Particularly relevant for the case of WISEs is the view that progress depends on the quality of feedback provided by both AWs and PWs as well as colleagues; even if the way in which feedback is delivered might change from one phase to another during the whole process.
 - Is there specific or routine allocation and structuring of work in WISEs? To what extent is work performance a challenge for IWs? Are tasks of an individual or collaborative nature; do they demand social interaction or rather isolation?
 - Interestingly too, the fact that IWs share work not just with AWs and PWs but also with IWs in other stages of their process invites them to observe and compare with co-workers. WISEs, because of their small size, routine tasks, the pressures of production, must take this into account. Is there room for such structuring? What is the input of both AWs and PWs in order to facilitate these?
 - In our work, we focus on contextual factors that are devised and arranged by WISEs in order to facilitate progress, not just work. If we do not find these, we will be able to say that WISEs provide employment rather than learning, that their contribution to processes of social integration is therefore limited. However, we expect to find here some of the features of an expansive learning environment.

5. Bringing assessment into learning processes

The mission of PWs and particularly of AWs is to facilitate progress during the integration processes of the different IWs assigned to them, in order to achieve a successful transition into the ordinary labour market. Everything in WISEs is organized around this aim and, for this reason, evaluation plays a major role in the identification, acknowledgement and communication of

information and evidence on progression, advances and improvement of IWs as well as to equip them with relevant hints on how to improve. Participant observation, feedback and communication are inherent tasks to the roles of AWs/PWs.

Feedback is crucial in learning. Different kinds of feedback have been identified: short-term and task-specific, as well as long-term feedback. They focus on a strategic character or on general progress: An AW might provide it with the support of the PW. Are these different types of feedback practiced? At what stage or phase of the transition do we expect to find one or the other? Who is providing feedback and based on what?

Through observation, we expect to determine what are the mediating artefacts of each of the WISEs: audit files, structuring work, sharing information, design specifications, circuit diagrams, handover notes, measurements, diagrams, photographs ... Whilst mid-career learning comprises codified knowledge, skills, knowledge resources, understanding and decision-making or judgement; codified knowledge is probably missing in most WISEs. On the other hand, autonomy is the ability to decide on one's own, to act following one's own directions.

We could expect autonomy in IWs as they enter the ordinary labour market, as it is one of the evidences of social inclusion: autonomy refers to the end of the need to adapt to the person for the person is in a sufficiently good situation so as to adapt him/herself to the circumstances of the context. Is this the case in WISEs?

Furthermore, throughout the process within the WISE we might expect to find continuities and discontinuities in terms of both production and learning. In WISEs, accreditation or qualification do not contribute to rites of passage and to becoming aware of progress achieved.

The availability of clear criteria for assessment and self-assessment should be another issue to take into consideration. Do WISEs have certain rites of passage, for instance between phases? Do they celebrate entry or access to the ordinary labour market? Is positive assessment of progress made public? IWs have their own individual agency but the WISE should provide them all with similar opportunities to learn: there are continuities and discontinuities in the organizational context, even without accreditation/qualification, with scarce capacity to take decisions and with high demands on both personal and social development.

In WISEs there is a need to learn urgent occupational tasks to be productive from the outset. But there are also long-term processes in certain trajectories, particularly in social and personal areas. This long term is particularly relevant and it falls under the scope of AWs, while the short term is mainly a responsibility of PWs. However, both should be reinforced and the long term cannot be left aside on account of not being easily assessable. Aside from assessment practices, we wonder how aware IWs are of their process, of their progress, of their achievements and expectations. The communication of evaluation, the quality of feedback, is undoubtedly a relevant factor affecting learning.

6. Reconsidering our research strategy

We want to focus on two areas when reflecting upon our work and its possibilities. The first area is the content of research: addressing conditions of training and feedback provided, evaluation of progress, learning trajectories that weigh more in the integration process, gender issues, as well as a variation of the learning trajectories defined by Eraut; according to the particular learning conditions that WISEs are able to provide.

However, our main area of reflection is methodology: we have opted for long-term research, observing and interviewing workers at different times and phases, while mentors and coaches (AW/PW) maintain educational relations with several of them. We want to be able to acknowledge these differences as well as move backwards and forwards regarding inclusion processes.

This implies a combination of documentation, observation and interviews to allow for longitudinal and cross-sectional research; producing a great amount of qualitative and sensitive information in terms of ethics and confidentiality.

Therefore, we have to be able to produce a proper system of coding, data handling, reduction and analysis; one that is wide enough to cover different occupations and relevant issues in terms of the development of social and personal skills. Furthermore, we have to adapt observation periods to the moments that the companies find appropriate. To engage in such a long process, we need to establish good confident relations with companies, producing reports that may be fruitful for them in order to improve their work.

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