Journeying from college to work: the changing identity of early-career police

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the experience of police recruits as they move from the classroom experience to learning on the job. The research presented forms part of a larger study of newcomers to the policing profession. The study is contextualized within the NSW Police Force where recruits undertake university education with the final year of their university study coinciding with their role as a probationary constable in the field of policing. During the period in the field the recruits are developing their professional practice and identity through a process of socialization and situated learning. This paper will present findings, using case studies, of the initial experience of new recruits in the policing world to better understand the effectiveness of university–industry partnerships and pedagogical practices in the development of early-career professionals. (Journal of Cooperative Education & Internships, 2009, 43(1), 55-63).

KEYWORDS: Policing, professional practice, situated learning, socialization, workplace transition.

Coming into any community requires the newcomer to adapt to new circumstances, build relationships and access new learning opportunities. Students emerging from university studies into the world of work are often underprepared for this negotiation of the social and cultural dimensions of the new work environment; this is especially true in policing. This paper, through the comparison of two recruits' experiences, describes one part of a larger longitudinal study of early-career police, which aims to capture the experience of recruits as they emerge from the College environment into the field of policing. Such a transition can be understood within a theoretical framework of a community of practice with the recruits moving from being legitimate peripheral participants towards full members of a policing community of practice.

University study as a part of the initial professional development in the field of policing is a relatively recent development within the Australian context (Chan, Devery & Doran, 2003). University-based courses in policing have been present in this country for a little over a decade. Few studies have looked at the long-term impact of academy training on police recruits and at the specific impact of university education as opposed to 'in-house' training programs. Chan et al. (2003, p. 42) claimed that beyond their study, there existed only a few other substantial studies namely Van Maanen in the US (1973, 1975), and Fielding in the UK (1988) that have attempted to do this. A transition away from practice-based learning to university education is not unique to policing and can also be seen in changes to teacher education programs and nursing education, to identify just two other fields. Such a movement tends to coincide with the changing professional nature of these occupations.

Within policing this movement primarily followed the recommendations of the Wood Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service (1997), which recommended the provision of police education and training be delivered by providers external to the service itself. Such a recommendation intended to counteract the domination of police culture and entrenched socialization of recruits through a training program dominated by 'old-school' police. Police culture is a significant feature of the policing workplace with new recruits needing to successfully navigate their way through the dominant views that coalesce into this concept. It is often argued that within police culture, there exists a strong bond among members with significant camaraderie and trust (Reiner, 2000; Reuss-Ianni, 1984; Wood, 1997). Reiner (2000) identified in police culture the characteristics of a sense of mission, cynicism,

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isolation, solidarity, conservatism, machismo and racial prejudice. These traits emerged as a result of the nature of police work, which involved high levels of stress, exposure to dangerous situations and the necessity to deal with aspects of humanity that most others can ignore. However, "police culture – like any other culture – is not monolithic" (Reiner, 2000, p. 85). Even at a local level, it is argued that there exists many varied groups of police that are separated by culture, for example the differences between detectives, highway patrol and general duties police (Chan, 1997), additionally the contexts of each command has its unique characteristics which can influence the trajectory of individual learners. Police culture permeates all functions of policing as tacit knowledge amongst the experts in the field. Furthermore, the practice of policing is embedded in this culture and a newcomer to the community is required to negotiate and navigate its social and cultural layers while accessing professional knowledge (Gherardi, Nicolini & Odella, 1998).

Learning in the workplace involves the acquisition of tacit knowledge, which is situated in the activity that is occurring (Steadman, 2005). Through trajectories of participation, "individuals develop personal identities that are shaped by and are formative of their activities in the various communities in which they participate" (Greeno, 1997, p. 7). Learning success is judged to be achieved, therefore, through the ability to learn from others, operate in the given environment, and be accepted in the community. Such a conceptualization though is separate to the notions of socialization and internalization (Billett, 1998). Although there is significant exposure to the socio-cultural aspects of a community through interactions with experts, this does not directly correspond to the fundamental changing of the novice and their world-view as implied through the use of the term 'socialization'. Billett (1996) conceded that, given the power differential between expert and novice, the dominant values of the expert may influence the behaviors and attitudes of the novice, but the novice is complicit in the selection of learning opportunities and is a critical agent in the learning process. As Billett (2002) argues, there is a place for considering learner dispositions as being instrumental in shaping experiences. Such a view of the active and critical role of the learner sits contrary to that of Chan et al. (2003) who concluded that within policing the new recruit is socialized into the dominant police culture as an act of survival. Formal education and informal experience, it is argued, combine to develop in a person, new to a social group such as a police command, adaptations that ensure their social survival (Chan, 1996; Chan et al., 2003). These aspects often coexist and interact within an organizational setting. Schein (2004) views such a process as leading to the internalization of espoused organizational values and beliefs. Such a process, though, is not completely absent of the individual in selecting and responding to learning opportunities (Billett, 2002). It can be argued that the active learner has reciprocal impacts on the learning context; therefore it is not merely an uncritical process of socialization.

The formal and informal learning within the workplace cannot be separated neatly to the academy and the field, but work together throughout the experience of the student and early-career police officer (Soeters, 2000). Chan et al. (2003) asserted that success within the policing world was determined by the capacity of the newcomer to accumulate social and cultural capital. To acquire social capital it is necessary for police to cultivate supportive networks of relationships, for example relationships developed with their supervisors and team members through informal social interactions (Chan et al., 2003; Fielding, 1988; van Maanen, 1978). Eraut (2004) concluded that informal learning within the workplace was constituted of three learning (challenge and value of work, feedback and support, confidence and commitment) and three context factors (allocation and structuring of work, expectations of roles, encounters and relationships) that interact and shape the informal learning experience. It could therefore be argued that informal learning is more complex and unpredictable than formal structured learning experiences. However, a wiser view is to see formality, and informality, of learning encounters to be at varying levels depending of the context and setting, and the interplay between the planned and situation-generated learning experiences as being the point at which true knowledge is gained. Such interplay is evident in the concept of a community of practice that builds on a pedagogical tradition of viewing learning as a socially and culturally mediated activity (Daniels, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998), and forms the conceptual framework in which this study is grounded.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH AIMS

The participants in this study emerged from a police-recruit training program that provided them with a base level of skills into a learning environment where they engaged with more capable peers, in the form of more experienced and senior police. They brought to this situation "functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of

maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic stage" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In this environment, the novice and expert engaged in learning interactions that moved both beyond their individual capabilities. A dominant theme through a framework of communities of practice is that of the expert-novice relationship and the consequential trajectories of learning of the newcomer as the move towards the core of the community. As argued by Wenger (1998), these trajectories of learning are shaped by changes in the identity of the newcomer to the community as well as the development of their knowledge of practice. It is the nexus between the evolving identity of the recruit, both as they see themselves within the community and as a police officer, and their development of knowledge of both policing practice and the social and cultural environment of the community, that this paper focuses upon.

The methodology employed in this study is a qualitative case study (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003) providing for deep analysis of and insight into an individual's encounter with the phenomenon being studied. Data were collected through a series of one-to-one semi-structured interviews and observations of participants in the field during a normal shift, with the period of data collection spanning the first two years of service. The individual interviews provided for an exploration of phenomenological ideas, but also for clarity and triangulation of field-based observations (cf. Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The interview, combined with field observations, helped the researcher understand the meaning that everyday activities held for individuals and provided a more substantial perspective of the phenomenon. Van Maanen (1978) argued that observation of the policing field provided the best source of data for understanding the relationships and culture of policing, both important foci of this study, especially with regard to the community of practice. In the observations of practice, the primary researcher was defined as a 'peripheral member-researcher' (Adler & Adler, 1987), as the researcher was engaged in the education of police at the Police College, but was not an officer themselves.

The data was analyzed using the data analysis spiral (Creswell, 2007) within a framework grounded in notions of situated learning. This perspective presents knowledge as not being something that is a self-sufficient substance but as something that is intrinsically linked to the situation, that is, the social, cultural and physical world, in which the learning occurs (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). Communities of practice, which drawn on conceptualizations of situated learning, allow the study of learning situated within a particular practice and organization (Cox, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). A perspective of communities of practice highlights the expert-novice relationship and its contextualization within a broader social network that shapes practice, knowledge and identity, *in situ* (Brown et al., 1989; Brown & Duguid, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991). A framework of analysis was developed from the literature around communities of practice, articulated in Figure 1, with a focus on the interplay between the individual and social, identity and knowledge, with each axis interacting and being understood with respect to the other. As such, what emerges are the four areas of identity in community culture, identity in policing, knowledge of the community culture and knowledge of policing practice. It is the negotiation and navigation through these fields that shape the trajectory of learning for the newcomer to the community of policing, and it is this framework that has been employed to analyze the experiences of the participants in this study and shape the aim of the research as being to understand how development in these areas shapes the trajectory of learning for a newcomer to a community of practice of policing.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The following is a comparative discussion of two of the participants in this study. Both participants were female and voluntarily agreed to participate in line with expectations of the accepted ethics approval for this research. One participant (Emily) was 50 years old and the other (Sophie) 21 years of age. Emily was located at an inner city command, small in geographical size, with a large percentage of the population being of low socio-economic status, including a large Aboriginal population. This command area will be referred to as 'West Side'. Sophie was located at a suburban Local Area Command in a wealthy area, which was moderate in geographical size, with significant representation of people from Anglo and Asian backgrounds – in this paper referred to as 'Uptown'. The details of the participants are summarized in Table 1.

FIGURE 1
Conceptual framework used for the study of the changing identity of early career police

TABLE 1
Demographic data for the research participants involved in the study of the changing identity of early career police

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Location	Previous work experience
Emily	50	Female	Inner city	Nursing unit manager
			Busy but small LAC	Midwife with significant managerial
			West Side	experience
Sophie	21	Female	Suburban area	Limited work experience
			Quiet but moderately sized areaAttended a wealthy private school	
			command	Worked previously in the family
			Uptown	business

Individual Identity

As Billett (1996, 2002) suggests, learning within the workplace is driven often by the individual's disposition to the effortful tasks of learning, therefore to begin to understand the trajectories of learning one must first consider and unpack some underlying dispositions. The motivation of the participants to join the police varied. Emily, who is older and has had a successful career previously, spoke about being motivated by the challenge of the job and seeking out something different. She knew police already with her sister and friends having previously been a police officer. She was not naïve about policing and the repetitive nature of the work but saw the opportunity as something that could advance herself and address some of the frustrations that she was experiencing in her previous occupations; in particular she spoke of her frustration of dealing with drug addicts and not being able to solve the overall problem as she believed police would.

Sophie, however, came to choose policing for very different reasons. Policing was something that came to be of interest when other possibilities did not eventuate. Sophie's parents ran a successful business that she worked at for a while, but did not enjoy the field. Before that her parents had hoped that she would pursue a career in the law, but her final school results were not enough to gain entry. Policing was a "fall-back" position and a compromise that Sophie identified as partially fulfilling the "law thing," but also providing for her the level of excitement she desired in a job.

Given the diversity of reasons for joining there was natural variation in the expectations of the job. Being younger, Sophie, saw policing as a long-term occupation and one in which she sought diversity in experience and the ability to undertake many different roles. Such an expectation presented as a frustration while she was required to fulfill her tenure at Uptown, which is a relatively quiet station with obvious hierarchy and a larger percentage of experienced police officers, thus restricting her experience to solely that mandated for probationary constables. This frustration

was further exacerbated by Sophie being given the opportunity to work at a nearby station, that is busier and less 'top heavy', for one shift in which she spoke of being more engaged and active and encouraged to challenge herself. Emily had a clear view of policing as not being a long-term career, with her set to retire from the workforce in the coming 10 years she has limited intent to advance for promotion and leadership roles; so her focus was far more upon the individual challenge of the day-to-day tasks and learning new skills; a significant factor in leaving a career of which she had been succeeding in for a nearly two decades. The motivation of Emily was far more intrinsic than Sophie, which can be seen in later interviews where Sophie's original optimism to stay in the police for a long time is replaced by an attitude that she will move on in about five years as she is not feeling rewarded for her hard work. Alternativly, Emily maintained her motivation being able to focus more on what she was achieving rather than explicit feedback, and this.

Knowledge of Community

Further to difference between individuals context shapes the opportunity for learning through the ability of the individual to navigate the social and cultural layers of the community, whilst still attempting to acquire professional knowledge (Gherardi et al., 1998). Emily's command was more active and staffed by a larger percentage of junior staff, affording her the opportunity to demonstrate her skills and test boundaries in a more friendly and supportive workplace. The composition of junior staff provided for Emily a level of similarity to others which grew easily into familiarity and therefore opened avenues for learning. She states of the junior officers that:

They're there themselves, they know what it is like, it has not been that long. The ones that aren't probies [i.e., probationary constables], they have just got their stripe [i.e., they have moved to the rank of constable] so they can put themselves back into what it was like. So everyone is helpful and willing to go out of their way for you.

Sophie was more distant from her fellow officers as they were significantly different from herself; however, she found a similar pull to that of Emily towards associating with others of similar rank. This is reflective of the hierarchical nature of the policing workplace and the cultural expectation of senior officers being respected and therefore personally distant, as well as an expressed fear and lack of confidence to be seen to not know. Other probationers were able to provide a safe space of familiar experiences in which Sophie was confident to challenge her knowledge. She spoke at one point of when she had difficulties she would be more willing to approach other probationers, or recently 'striped' constables, as they would not think her question to be silly. Even though she spoke warmly of her sergeants, there was still a clear protocol about asking them for help:

It is just like they're [senior officers] very busy and they have no time for stupid probationary constable's questions who want to know how to do stuff. They expect you to go the next probie, and then the one next up from there, and then maybe a constable and then senior constable. (Sophie)

For most issues she sought help from other probationary constables, who were of the same rank but had more experience. She would then move through the ranks depending on the difficulty and nature of the question. This pattern of behavior highlights the influence that individual dispositions have on the selection of learning opportunities and identification with 'experts'. Despite the different motivations both were hungry to learn this new thing of policing and came to their new workplace with an image of what they expected from their Field Training Officers (FTOs); a senior officer assigned to work with the new probationer in an on-the-job training/coaching role, and other staff. Emily liked the challenge of the learning experience and navigating her way in a new world, but, in her own words: "I am up for the challenge and I like the challenge, but sometimes I need a bit of a shove to get in there." Her image, therefore, of the FTO was for them to be a driver of her learning and as the one who could identify the opportunities of challenge. Her first FTO proved as such, with Emily stating that: "He's terrific. He has been pushing me. He was the one who pushed me into doing the assault. He just got me out the front and said what are you going to do? What are the main things you are going to have to do?"

The difficulty of the FTO arrangement was the uncertainty of working with the same FTO for the entire period as they were often senior officers and would fill vacant sergeant and supervisory roles. Both Sophie and Emily experienced this frustration. Such frustration was founded in the necessity to negotiate a range of learning relationships with varied people who were naturally inconsistent in their approach to policing and also not fully appreciative of the newcomers' previous knowledge and experience. The FTO played a significant role in the participants accessing learning experiences and therefore there was a desire expressed for the FTO to be keen, active and willing to share responsibility. In Sophie's case she was more often assigned to custody rather than being on-the-road for the first period of her probation because her assigned FTO was the only custody trained officer on the shift. She was annoyed at this as she had anticipated her role as a police officer as being actively out on the streets

undertaking patrols, arrests and other such practice. She recognized the importance of custody functions to policing, but given her length of service and restrictions, due to rank, on what she could undertake, most of this time was wasted and she could see others from year class moving forward with their learning. Emily was also in a similar situation with her FTO often acting as sergeant, but given her history, having worked in a highly hierarchical environment, she was able to more easily negotiate rank and be assigned to another partner and therefore given the opportunity to work on the streets. Furthermore, given Emily's age others perceive her as having experience and being more reliable; as she stated: "I am coming part of it quickly, more quickly than I probably thought it should be, because, I think people have expectations of people, like my age."

The above reflects further how the existing identity and dispositions of the newcomer shapes opportunities for learning. It is reasonable to therefore assert that the more easily an individual can shape their identity to the suit the new community the more easily they are able to learn the practice of the community. The difference between Emily and Sophie is significantly impacted on by their knowledge of working within hierarchies and being selective in how they engage the members of the community, especially those senior in rank.

Identity in Community

The FTO was the most significant point of access to the community of practice and the situated curriculum, especially where, such as in the case of Sophie, there was a gap in the knowledge of the social and cultural aspects of the community. Sophie worked at a station where she was allocated one FTO for each of the six-week training periods. Her FTOs, both of who were senior constables, provided openings for her to access the core of the community at the station and to be included within the general social norms of the community. However, through this process it took Sophie most of the first 12 weeks to become fully accepted as although being given access she was not accepted as she had not personally proved herself through her work and it was only through the FTOs that she was accepted as a member of the community.

On the other hand, Emily had a very different experience, where Emily's FTO had been appointed to higher duties and was unable to work with her she had no choice but to work with other staff, affording her the opportunity to prove her worth to the community by successfully completing practice-related tasks, such as being involved in subduing of a mentally-ill person, finding a deceased person in a stair-well and not hesitating to become engaged in a rather physical arrest. Given her age and previous experience, Emily was able to negotiate access to knowledge, the community and learning opportunities rather than relying upon others to create these for her. However, at times it proved frustrating for Emily.

The consequence of an inconsistent FTO was a failure to access a range of opportunities, such as working with specialist units, which others in her cohort had made available to them as she had not built a strong enough relationship with any one person, but had good working relationships with many. Despite the use of checklist manuals and an overall expectation by the policing organization that recruits will develop with a core set of competencies that are transferable to other stations and commands, the reality is that there is significant variation in the skill and behaviors of police officers. This variation is dependent upon the context of the learning, that is, the type of command, the training and experience of the FTO, the willingness of the new recruit to seek out learning opportunities, and the presentation of points of access to the situated curriculum of policing. This is noticeable in a direct comparison between Sophie and Emily.

Further to this early negotiation of meaning the police training and reporting structure requires that each probationary constable have at least two FTOs in the first 12-week session. The differences between any two FTOs create a situation whereby the newcomer has to re-negotiate their position, role and identity when this change over occurs. Such a consideration of re-negotiation is evident in comments from Sophie about her second FTO, who she knows of through him being present on shift with her, but she has not yet worked with as a partner:

Emily: I don't have a problem with him. I wouldn't get on as well with him, because I am going to do all the work, though there isn't that much. He will be like, you do this, you do that.
Interviewer: Do you think this is because they want you to learn?
Emily: No, this guy is just lazy. … he is nice, but he is … he won't copy jobs he will just wait for someone else to copy it and say don't worry about that one.

Copying a job is when a car crew indicates their intent to attend. Police expect that all car crews in a team would equally share the jobs throughout the night, but experienced police also know that a job cannot remain outstanding.

By not copying jobs an officer is able to reduce their workload, especially paperwork, very easily. Most police disapprove of such a practice, and the blame is often attributed to the crew as a whole despite the obvious power differentials. Sophie's anticipated frustration is therefore two-fold. One she feels that she will be 'punished' socially for something that is out of her control and, two, she is missing out on learning opportunities. Further to these, she is also expressing the difficulty of having to adapt and change to working with a new person whose expectations can be vastly different to that which was previous, such as the expectation of her to do everything as opposed the first FTO who was more willing to share the taskings and jobs, and therefore requiring her to re-negotiate her identity within the community.

Knowledge of Practice

Both Emily and Sophie saw value in the formal education at the College and how it supplemented their experiential learning in the field, but the education at the College was often sidelined as "best practice" versus the "real thing" in the field. As Emily indicated:

At the College everyone said this is what you get taught this is not what will happen, which is true to a certain extent, but I can't see how they would teach it differently, how they could teach it the way it would happen. They have to teach best practice down there, and if you find shortcuts work better, you come across your shortcuts … one of the things I have always got others to do is listen to what everyone says, and then work out what is best for you.

The last part of this quote is often repeated throughout the training 'mantra' in policing, having been particularly witnessed during observations. An indication that a new officer has to critically assess all practice and determine 'what is best for them' indicates two aspects to policing practice. Firstly, there is a diverse array of practice within the field of policing with similar situations, such as attending domestic violence, requiring very different responses based on the needs, responsiveness and attitudes of victims and offenders, and how that relates to the personality of the individual officer. Secondly, this notion of 'what is best' grows from an interpretation of police powers under common law that provides for each officer the discretion to apply the law as they see fit, and that no other officer or person has the right to influence this decision. Some may contend that such a position gives consent to unethical conduct; however, this is not necessarily the case. The more relevant interpretation of this is that policing practice is heavily reliant upon the characteristics and features of the individual officer and therefore cannot be easily understood as a step-by-step skill. For the novice learner this means that they have to build, through relationships with the expert, an identity as a police officer that is an interpretation of the socially desirable personality through the lens of the personal disposition and histories.

This variation is more clearly evident during one observation of Sophie, who is physically quite small and very feminine, working alongside a rough masculine partner who was physically larger. Their response to jobs was tempered by how they believed 'the public' perceived them, namely Sophie relied more heavily on reason and conversation to move through a situation whilst the other officer was more willing to be engaged physically. For Sophie this meant that she had to develop both a sense of her own practice, how she is seen by the wider community, and what works best for her, as well as how this compliments or challenges the style of policing of her partners. Understanding how the public perceive you as a police officer was an interesting shift in the identity of both Emily and Sophie. Emily captured this particularly well when she was talking about her first day in uniform. For lunch her and her colleagues 'kitted-up' and made their way to lunch passing by shop windows in which she was able to see her reflection. Her response was 'wow, there are a lot of police here ', before realizing that it was in-fact her.

Often how the two styles of policing, that of the probationer and their partner, operated together was a determinant of acceptance into the community of police. Acceptance was a key theme evident in the data of each participant. Sophie noted: "Everyone wants to fit in. You don't want to be the one that everyone talks about behind your back … I don't want to be on shift for 12 hours talking to myself."

Signs of acceptance come in many forms. Things such as inclusion in the gossip of the station, gaining a nickname and having this used on the allocations board, being asked about dinner or lunch and the freedom of other police to make, as Emily indicated, "Rudey-nudey comments" around the new recruit. The time this took was dependent on various factors, but it was often mostly associated with the shared experience of having completed some jobs together successfully, as indicated previously. Such a value base is evident in a comment made by Emily speaking of another officer who is openly gay where she said:

The boys, the boy-boys, the sexual, macho men … treat him really nicely; include him in things and don't ostracize him or anything to a degree. I don't think I can explain to the degree that I should. But he is a really good cop anyway, so I think that goes to the respect they have for him.

Her comment highlights two features of police culture. Firstly, the still dominant heterosexual male culture and the value that is assigned to being accepted by this culture, and secondly, the greater importance placed on your success as a police officer rather than personal traits. Both Sophie and Emily admitted that they were 'tested' by the other police to see their commitment and personality. Despite levels of acceptance improving, the participants experienced a strong cultural sense of hierarchy, rank and position, and they were the lowest of all. As one officer put it during an observation, "even police dogs get more respect than a new probationer". Emily came to this realization and indicated that: "I will be doing all the s--- jobs, like checking the truck and doing all that. In my old job I did that, I was good at delegating, but I can't delegate at my level in the police force."

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The participants in this study have made their first step on a long journey from students at the Police College to be fully accepted and serving police officers. Differences in age, experience and the characteristics of the command all contribute to the trajectory of this journey. From the above findings it is apparent that there have been trajectories of learning through the experiences of both participants and that these have been shaped by the learning experiences offered in the field. These individuals have come to redefine themselves within their new field of policing reshaping their identity and practice, with the proposed framework being useful in analyzing and beginning to understand the dimensions of learning that occurs as people move into the workplace. The police setting, although presenting as a unique context, has elements that are evident in other workplaces. The role of culture in shaping and understanding workplaces is not a new realization, but this study suggests that movement into an understanding of that culture and shaping ones identity within the expectations of the organization is not merely a passive process of socialization. Instead there is active engagement by the individual in shaping the social relationships and accessing learning opportunities from which they actively select those aspects that best suit their existing dispositions and histories. Such a finding extends from the work of Billett (1996, 2002), and others, who suggest that there is a need to re-introduce the recognition of the individual into the understanding of social learning.

The trajectories of individuals vary and are influenced by the histories and dispositions of the learner. There inextricably exists variation in the learning opportunities presented at various sites and with different staff. Within the policing context, considering that a junior police officer after a period of time can move anywhere across the state of New South Wales and into a range of specialists fields, there needs to be a greater diversity of learning opportunities with newcomers. They need exposure to a variety of policing environments with a developing consciousness of the variability of policing and the need to be professionally flexible in responding to situations. The learners, though, need support to develop a greater capacity to identify and access these learning opportunities. Such conclusions are not unique to the policing experience and can be transferred to other workplace learning settings, such as nursing and teaching professional experiences. This study argues that strong partner/mentor relationships need to be supported over an extended period of time to enhance the opportunities for learning. Such relationships, though, need to challenge individual learners and be accommodating of individual histories and expectations. There presents a need for more significant conversations around these aspects before students venture from the formal education setting of the university to the informal setting of the workplace.

Within the policing context newcomers join with an enthusiasm to contribute to what they perceive as the ideals of policing, and they desire to 'get out and amongst it'. When working alongside the FTO the newcomer needs to be presented the opportunity to practice what they have been learning and to apply and reform their personal theories of policing. There is a tendency during the early stages for the newcomer to be sidelined with an attitude of 'watch and learn' dominating. To an extent this is a result of the rank position of the newcomer and consequentially a discounting of previous knowledge and experience, but drawing on the experiences of the researchers this is not a policing-specific phenomena. Given the rank structure and hierarchical nature of the policing organization there are implicit expectations for the newcomer to conform to the norms of the community rather than the community being changed and shaped by the experiences that the newcomer brings. However, constantly emerging communities of practice are great sources of innovation (Brown et al., 1989), and by allowing the newcomer to contribute to the shaping of the community can allow for the community to expand and develop. Greater facilitation of the contribution a newcomer, in the form of an emerging student, to the evolution of an organization and workplace is

needed for the full realization of the potential of work-integrated-learning as both that of the student-learner as well as the community-as-learner.

This research forms the first stage of a longitudinal study that has tracked these participants through their early career development. The longer study will address a gap in the current literature around this period of development in police, in particular the absence of substantial research on the immediate post-probation period of professional learning. There is generally a paucity of research on police learning and development and this research should also contribute to a broader understanding of post-university learning, which should better inform practices within higher education institutions. However, this study is limited by its size. Whilst it provides valuable insight into the individual's experience and is able to explore this deeply, challenging and extending some of the earlier research in this area, there is a need to consider these ideas in larger samples and in varied settings.

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