Creating spaces of learning in academia: Fostering niches for professional learning practice

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Abstract

This paper analyses the move by a faculty in an Australian university to a new building featuring open plan and alternative workspaces. Employing a narrative approach and applying the lens of the theory of practice architectures, the paper examines how the new built spaces both enabled and constrained the professional learning practices of academics. Drawing on a case study of the transition, the paper explores the ways in which the move to the new building disrupted existing ecologies of practices around professional learning, and how academics subsequently sought to establish new 'niches' to foster professional learning practices. The six study participants, who are also the authors and represent a range of career stages, made efforts to establish conditions for professional learning practices and a praxis of 'becoming an academic'. They did so by working with, around, and against the pre-figuring arrangements of the new built environment. The paper contributes to knowledge about how workspaces can disrupt and reconfigure the professional learning practices of educators. It addresses a gap in the literature on academics' professional learning in relation to changes in physical workspaces, making visible the ways in which academic practices are shaped by and shape new arrangements for professional learning in response to the built environment.

Key words: Continuing professional learning, early career researchers, practice architectures, open plan workspace

Introduction

Flexibility and innovation have been increasingly driving office workspace design. With a focus on increasing collaboration and productivity while decreasing costs, open plan (OP), innovative and alternative workspace arrangements have become common features of corporate strategy (Van Marrewijk & Van den Ende, 2017; Wilhoit et al., 2016). University campuses are not immune to this trend. Driven by visions of innovative practice to secure new enrolments, the construction or re-design of appealing OP buildings realigns modern universities as corporate gladiators in a global arena (Baldry & Barnes, 2012; Van Marrewijk & Van Den Ende, 2018; Wilhoit et al., 2016). The resultant workspace arrangements influence the physical experiences of individuals and moderate social relations (Baldry & Barnes, 2012).

This paper focuses on how the practices of academics are pre-figured and negotiated within such built spaces. Academic work is complex and varied with characteristics of both professional autonomy and collaborative intellectual interactions shaping professional growth and productive work. Moves to alternative spaces alter the social, labour, identity and learning practices of academics working in modern faculties (Van Marrewijk & Van den Ende, 2018; Wilhoit et al. 2016). In this paper we use narrative research to consider how changes to the built environment of academic work instigated disruptions to, and the reassembling of, practices of academic labour and professional learning. The paper explores the experiences of the authors, six female academics at various career stages within a faculty, as we made the transition from a traditional building to a new OP environment. Employing the theory of practice architectures and ecologies of practices (Kemmis et al. 2012; Kemmis et al. 2014), we address the following research question:

How did the new built spaces enable and constrain the continuing professional learning practices of academics?

The paper surveys the literature pertaining to changing workspaces and built environments and academic work, explicates the conceptual framework of practice architectures and ecologies of practices and outlines the narrative approach adopted in the study. Our personal narratives as academics representing both early career researchers (ECRs[1]) to more senior staff reflect on the changes from the old to the new building. Analysis of the narratives presents key findings on how the new built environment transformed the *sayings, doings* and *relatings* (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) of academic practice and explores the implications for continued learning of academics, and in particular, ECRs. The findings highlight how existing ecologies of practice around professional learning were disrupted leading to our attempts to enact new 'niches' to enable and sustain our continuing professional learning as academics.

Space, place and academic work

Office and workspace design reflect organisational culture (McElroy & Morrow, 2010). The built environment symbolises and 'narrates explicit and implicit ideology' (Heraud et al., 2018, p. 475), but because it is 'both everywhere and nowhere… we may not invest personally in it and may often overlook its significance entirely' (Temple, 2018, p. 133). The significance of the built environment is typically only revealed when a physical move occurs, as in this instance, the shift for academics from a traditional corridor/office configuration to an OP office.

[1] In Australia the ECR career stage is understood as being the five year period from the conferral of a PhD (www.arc.gov.au).

Open plan offices have been widely used in large public and corporate offices since the beginning of the twentieth century. They have increasingly become the norm since the 1970s. The business arguments for their design are underpinned by neoliberal ideologies (e.g., leveraging economic efficiencies) and increasing opportunities for communication amongst employees. However, subsequent research has identified a range of negative impacts on staff in these spaces, affecting either their productivity, or their wellbeing (McElroy & Morrow, 2010). Hedge's (1982) foundational systematic review of 650 employees found that impacts on productivity include the lack of privacy, work interruptions by colleagues and ambient sound. These impacts are scalable as the complexity of work increases, and are highly relevant to the kinds of knowledge work in which academics typically engage in university workspaces. Subsequent qualitative and quantitative research has found that OP spaces can also have a negative impact on employee wellbeing including job satisfaction, motivation and autonomy (Bergström, Miller, & Horneij, 2015; Danielsson and Bodin, 2008; McElroy & Morrow, 2010). More recent research suggests that in OP workspaces there are unequal consequences for women resulting from the implicit assumption that the employee is male (Hirst and Schwabenland, 2018), an extension of the observation that the human default is male (Kern, 2020; Perez, 2019). For example, women in OP workspaces have experienced their constant visibility as constraining, dictating their appearance and patterns of movement (Hirst & Schwabenland, 2018).

The application of OP and alternative workspaces for academic work is a more recent phenomenon (Baldry & Barnes, 2012). It is a response to a range of factors such as increased staff and student numbers, declining public spending on universities, technological changes and concerns about environmental sustainability (Baldry & Barnes, 2012; Kinman & Garfled, 2015; Van Marrewijk & Van Den Ende, 2018). The shift has also coincided with major

changes in academic management practices, influenced by neoliberal managerialism, with a perceived synergy between the goals of the ‘enterprise university’ (Baldry & Barnes, 2012; Davies, 2020; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Smyth, 2017) and new workspace arrangements (Baldry & Barnes, 2012). These changes have implications for the ways in which academic identity is constructed (Smyth, 2017), given the link between the signalling of new ‘innovative’ built environments and the marketisation, competition and new managerialism of universities (Connell, 2019; Smyth, 2017).

While *space* can be considered the ‘result of the decisions and actions of designers, users, those who manage it and tend it in various ways’ (Temple, 2014, p. 4), the making of *place* occurs when people inhabit it (Temple, 2014, 2018; Wilhoit Larson, 2018; Wood, 2020). Place is ‘space which has meaning for its users’ (Temple, 2018, p. 136). There is nascent research on the interaction of OP and flexible workspaces with academic professional learning and work practices (Baldry & Barnes, 2012; Van Marrewijk & Van Den Ende, 2018; Wilhoit Larson, 2018). These existing qualitative and ethnographic studies reveal that changes to academic workspaces instigate changes to the social, labour, identity, and learning practices of faculty, and that these represent significant departures from traditional university workspaces and the practices that they support (Baldry & Barnes, 2012; Van Marrewijk & Van Den Ende, 2018; Wilhoit Larson, 2018).

Consistent with research in business settings, there is an indirect cost to shifting knowledge workers into OP spaces, including wellbeing, performance and retention of staff, as well as the difficulties posed in terms of privacy and noise in meeting with students and colleagues (Baldry & Barnes, 2012; Kinman & Garfled, 2015). In particular, academics place a high

value on autonomy in their work (Connell, 2019) and OP workspaces challenge this autonomy (Van Marrewijk & Van Den Ende, 2018).

Changes in the built environment of workspaces trigger adaptive responses from employees (Becker, Gield, Gaylin, & Sayer, 1983; Van Marrewijk & Van Den Ende, 2018; Zukas & Malcolm, 2019). In this paper, we explore the interaction between these burgeoning new workspaces and academic professional learning and work practices. Clegg (2003) argued that continuing professional development (CPD) in academic workplaces does not reflect the dualities of academic work practices built around research and teaching. Clegg (2003) contends that the learning and development of practices supporting research and scholarship have tended not to be the focus of CPD despite these practices' centrality to academic work. This 'bifurcation' remains an ongoing tension, with inadequate attention paid to the development of research practices of new academics (Lander & Nicholson, 2020, p. 236). In the context of new managerialism, competition and the business of 'enterprise universities' who are also accountable to government, a formal CPD focus on teaching quality may be understandable (Clegg, 2003; Knight, Tait, & Yorke, 2006), notwithstanding the 'pernicious ideology of [seeing] teaching and research as separate activities' (Clegg, 2003, p. 46).

In this paper, we investigate how academic practices are shaped through a shift into a new built environment. We understand these changes as part of continuing professional learning for they are a form of situated social learning that occurs as part of the everydayness of the 'interplay between individuals and their environments' (Knight, et al., 2006, p. 320). In particular, we are interested in the informal development of academic practice (Clegg, 2003), particularly that of ECRs. The academic development of ECRs has emerged as a field of research over the last two decades (McAlpine, Pyhältö, & Castelló, 2018). As they navigate a

transition from ‘apprentice’ to independent researcher, ECRs are highly vulnerable, be they postdoctoral researchers or research and teaching academics (Laudel & Gläser, 2008; McAlpine, et al., 2018; Willson & Given, 2020). Their transition to independence requires acculturation and socialisation into the academy and the development of academic identity (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2018; Willson & Given, 2020). Kemmis and colleagues (2014, pp. 58-60) argue that the learning associated with this transition is an initiation into practice, i.e., being ‘stirred into’ the practices of academia and ‘learning how to go on’ in these practices. Hence, learning, professional or otherwise, is ‘a co-production that occurs through co-participation with others and the world in the course of the practice’ (Kemmis, et al., 2014, p. 59).

In academic work, this informal professional learning is enabled by: sufficient time and space for creativity; autonomy and flexibility; developing positive, productive and trusting relationships; engaging in rigorous critical dialogues and reflexive conversations; and having opportunities for engagement in scholarly activities in a higher education community (Mahon, Heikkinen, & Huttunen, 2018). Supporting ECRs in learning how to ‘go on’ in academia is enabled through participation in formal professional learning practices, such as mentor programs and informal practices, such as the development of networks. These practices are critical in developing ECR’s sense of agency and success (Matthews, Lodge, & Bosanquet, 2014; McAlpine, et al., 2018). Given nascent research suggesting that changes to academic workspaces may also lead to transformations in social, labour, identity, and learning practices, as outlined above, there is a need for research on how the emergence of OP workspaces, which are relatively new to academic contexts, intersects with changing patterns of career stage, academic work and professional learning practices.

Conceptual framework

In this paper we adopt a site ontological approach (Schatzki, 2002) in order to make visible the practices associated with being and becoming an academic. We explore how a move to a new building rendered visible the normally ‘take-for-granted’ arrangements that prefigure such practices. We also examine how an entry into an OP workspace instigated changes to the academics’ practices of working and professional learning. Specifically, we employ the theory of practice architectures - a theory of the composition of practices (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis et al., 2014). This theory includes the concept of *ecologies of practices* - how practices connect up to one another in specific sites of practice, such as a classroom, a school or an academic faculty (Kemmis et al., 2012).

The theory of practice architectures posits that social practices of educating such as teaching, researching or professional learning are interactionally secured in individuals’ *sayings, doings and relatings.* By *sayings* we refer to ways of speaking, thinking about and understanding the world, the cognitive domain, in the dimension of semantic space. By *doings* we refer to participants’ actions, evidenced in their skills and capabilities, the psychomotor, in the dimension of physical-space time. By *relatings* we refer to ways of relating to one another and the non-human world, evidenced in participants’ values, feelings and emotions, i.e., the affective domain, in the dimension of social space (Kemmis et al., 2014). Although for analytical reasons we tease out these various components of a practice, the sayings, doings and relatings always ‘hang together’ in the *project* or underlying purpose/telos of a practice (Kemmis et al., 2014).

However, ‘practices do not spring forth fully formed’ into the social world (Kemmis et al., 2017, p. 245). Practice architectures are the conditions that render practices possible and are

composed of arrangements that enable and constrain action and interaction between participants in a practice (Kemmis et al., 2014). These practice architectures may already exist in sites or be brought into them. For example, the practice architectures of performance metrics that now constitute the 'common sense' of neoliberal governance in Australian universities travelled to these sites via varied processes of policy borrowing from the USA and the UK. This process was neither seamless nor uncontested. They now form an integral part of the conditions that prefigure the sayings, doings and relatings of researching practices in contemporary Australian universities. The arrangements that compose practice architectures comprise: cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements. *Cultural-discursive* arrangements, include the language, discourses and ideas found in or brought into a site of practice such as neoliberal discourses undergirded by notions of competitiveness and the corporatisation of the public good embodied in performance metrics. Material-economic arrangements include objects, set-ups, and spatial and temporal arrangements. Examples of material-economic arrangements in the university context are the funding of grants, and academic promotion on the basis of individual academics' performance measured against often narrowly-defined assessments of academic metrics. Finally, they include social-political arrangements such as system roles, 'organizational functions' and 'rules'. These arrangements are evident in the role of Deans, and in lifeworld relationships, e.g., "inclusive and exclusive lifeworld relationships inhabited by people in a site", such as that between colleagues working on an article together (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 32). In Australian universities, metrics of performance often colonise lifeworld relationships between ECRs as part of a brutal struggle to perform and survive one's early years. These arrangements in turn, "hang together" (Schatzki, 2002) and enable and constrain the sayings, doings and relatings of participants in sites such as universities. In so doing, they compose the site of, or *niche* (Kemmis et al., 2012) for practice.

A crucial aspect of practice architectures theory is to do with change and transformation. In order to change practices, one needs to understand the specific practice architectures or conditions that enable and constrain sayings, doings and relatings in varied sites, and which render specific actions more or less possible. The process of analysing how change occurs is twofold. Firstly, there is the process of understanding the conditions of possibility for practices in a specific site. Secondly, there is the examination of how particular practices connect up with one another in *ecologies of practices* (Kemmis et al., 2012). Only if such connections occur can new practices be fostered and sustained over time. As such, the theory of practice architectures provides a critical lens through which to analyse the fostering of new practices of academic continuing professional learning engendered by a move to a new building with very different practice architectures.

The study

The case study in this article analyses the continuing professional learning practices adopted by six academics (the authors) working in a research-intensive Australian university after a move into a new OP, purpose-built building. Featuring state-of-the-art teaching spaces and architecturally designed workspaces, the new accommodation for academic and professional staff comprised a mixture of OP, partitioned 'focus pods' allocated to some academic staff, and an OP floor of 'hot desk' arrangements for doctoral students. Academic offices consisted of thin dividers that did not reach the ceiling, thus allowing noise to travel. Each pod had two small bookshelves and enough space for a desk, a chair and room for perhaps one other person to sit. Professional staff were clustered in OP teams outside groups of pods. The faculty office accommodation, composed of academic and professional staff, was only accessible via electronic swipe card. Casual staff and HDR students were clustered together

on one level and due to security arrangements, these students and anyone who did not possess a requisite security pass, could not access the other floors where academic and professional staff were based. These new arrangements marked a significant change from the former building where academics and students mingled in lunch rooms and corridors.

Our case study examines how these new arrangements orchestrated new sayings, doings and relatings in relation to academic labour and continuing professional learning. We concentrate on the impact of the move on continuing professional learning practices and on efforts to create new *niches* or conditions hospitable to sustaining practices of continuing learning (Kemmis et al., 2012; Mahon, Heikkinen & Huttunen, 2019). Given the practice lens adopted in this paper, the case study focuses on the new and continuing *practices* of professional learning adopted by the participants in the study, rather than on the participants themselves.

The participants, who are also the authors, are five female ECRs[2] and one female senior academic. We elected to be part of this study as we shared a joint desire to inquire into the practices of learning to become an academic in the changed conditions of the new building. The inquiry examined how changes to the physical arrangements of the sites instigated changes in our work and learning practices. We examined the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements in place at the sites of academics' practices, and how changes to these arrangements enabled and constrained particular practices of learning *how to go on* as an academic.

[2] The ECRs were located at different stages of the five year ECR spectrum. For the purposes of confidentiality, we have not specified the career stage of each participant.

Narrative research was employed to generate data about these experiences of change. It begins from the premise that 'people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives' (Connolly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Narrative research is intensely relational; it functions as 'an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted' (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2012, p. 42).

Over the course of seventeen meetings during 2019 and 2020, we engaged in an iterative process whereby reflections about practices sited in the new building were shared. During the coronavirus pandemic, these meetings were moved online. Detailed notes were taken at these meetings and one of the meetings was video recorded, providing significant data about navigating the changes to the physical environment of work and learning.

Narrative 'cases' were generated (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), exploring how changes to the built environment of academic work instigated changes in practices. These narratives were analysed for aspects of the built environment, and adaptations of practices to that environment, that re-occurred across the data (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). *Meeting rooms, focus pods* and *doctoral spaces* emerged as key sites of transformed practices. The narratives were then tabulated and excerpted under the headings of features of the new building. This allowed for analysis of changes in practices in response to changes to the physical set ups of the work environment. We now turn to brief narratives from each participant, reflecting on the changes to work and learning practices that unfolded as part of this move.

The Narratives

ECR 1

In my supervisor's office one entire wall was taken up by a bookshelf; one of the chief pleasures of conversing in this room was allowing my eyes to wander along the shelves, noting the authors and titles. Our conversation was referenced to the larger conversations across space and time that the books represented. Debates. Key ideas. Landmark studies.

We now have meeting rooms that belong to everyone and are booked by the hour. When we convene in these spaces, they are neutral and impersonal. With only the allotted time allowed, we devote ourselves to getting the agenda items done, with less diversion into the intricate connectedness between the matter at hand and larger research questions. We are like atoms in a gas, rather than a liquid, occasionally occupying the same glass jar, before floating back into space. We are more nomadic in our style now. Project-based teams assemble, unfold practices that they carry with them, before bundling them back up to move on to the next space, the next team.

When it came time for me to induct a newcomer to the faculty, a practising teacher who was to occupy the same 'co-teaching' role where I began, I found myself trying to create times and places where we could converse in the exploratory way that I had experienced when I was starting out. We used the common meeting rooms for planning teaching, but we also sought out other places. After we team taught each workshop, we would want to debrief and reflect. We found that the downstairs café, amid clattering crockery and the hiss of the espresso machine, was the place where we would be least rushed. For the year that we taught together I consciously used the practices that my supervisor had used to induct me. The difference was that sense of carrying our practices with us, in the bags where we stored our books and computers, rather than having them on display in bookshelves, in the sense of durability conveyed by a personal office.

ECR 2

As a new employee, it took time and effort to find my way and make connections in the faculty. The huge building, over four levels, with dozens of teaching spaces, offices and meeting rooms, and grandiose staircases, didn't have a clear logic to me compared to prior workplaces. Over my first weeks I tentatively navigated the maze of open-plan spaces, temporary walls and frosted-glass meeting rooms. Although I had a few prior relationships with people who were welcoming and generous, I found the spaces, combined with the minimal induction process, strange compared to the welcome morning teas, buddy programs and team-based work that supports new staff in more traditionally designed schools.

There were two specific things that have been important in meeting my need to collaborate. The first is a site-based research group which has provided a regular, relaxed way to work with and learn from others. Through this group I have strengthened my relationships and broadened the number of colleagues that I can call on for advice or to share reflections with.

The other is that at times, with a couple of colleagues, I began to work in the kitchen area. Here we were able to work alongside each other, developing deeper relationships and connections. I also found it provided opportunities to interact with a wider range of colleagues as they used the area.

ECR 3

As a PhD student who was isolated on a regional campus, visits to the main campus for supervision, research seminars and courses offered valuable opportunities to meet fellow students and academics. The new building was a stunning architectural addition to the campus and I looked forward to the opportunity to use the shared doctoral space, a large open plan space that came to be known by doctoral students colloquially as ‘the (PhD) farm’. The idea of ‘the farm’ containing rows of hotdesks was a significant shift from the old building where students had personal space in smaller shared offices. This drove some students to work from home to escape the noise from the open kitchen in the study space, or to claim hotdesks as their own, leaving belongings on them permanently.

For me, the draw was contact and conversations, offering me connections that had been lacking in my previous years of study. However, it quickly became clear that these new arrangements blocked access to staff. Where I had agency in catching up with my supervisors in the old building, I now, like a child, had to wait outside the locked door for access if meetings were scheduled in rooms behind the gates. This seemed infantilising, an undermining and devaluing of the contribution of doctoral students to the faculty. There were no longer fortuitous meetings with other academics, where discussions might challenge or extend my thinking, and the chances of making connections with other researchers was greatly limited. These new arrangements meant that as someone who was in the final stages

of their PhD and keen on an academic career, I had no vision of what academic work in contemporary universities looked like. The physical separation of the students from the staff rendered this work invisible: turning out PhD students who are unprepared for academic labour. So while the building offered new social opportunities and practices (discussed above) that were really important for my doctoral experience, in contrast to the isolation of the regional campus, it also suggested a lack of value of doctoral students in keeping us separated from staff in 'the farm' isolated on the top floor.

ECR 4

I left the university that is the subject of this paper two years ago. I remember what the new building sounds like, what it smells like, and what the carpet feels like under my feet (I might have walked without my shoes on, because I do remember that). I left to go 'home' on the other side of the globe, but did so with bitter-sweet feelings. In my memories now, the new building is a marker of all of that. It was not special because of its cool architecture, funky colours or because it would have worked perfectly for academics – we know it doesn't – but because of its people. In my view, the people were a community despite the architectural barriers (restricted access, fish-bowl lunch room, people driven to work from homes) built for them/us. I miss the company, friends and meetings that didn't feel like a waste of time.

Luckily, the move overseas hasn't been all that bad. I can still read, write, and analyse data with some of the same friends, although from a distance. In turn, physical changes have been obvious and not all bad either: my new office has walls that reach the ceiling and my door opens to an old-fashioned and straightforward corridor. So boring, but it works! I have my noise-cancelling headphones as a memory from my past university, but I mostly use a closed door to gain silence. Open doors mean that people invite you to go in and say hi, closed doors mean people need to work alone.

ECR 5

Being a PhD student in the old building didn't provide the same kind of work space for all students. Some had permanent and individual offices, while others shared in a 'hot-desk' fashion. Fast forward to the New Year and we arrived on the third floor of the new building. Amazing panoramic views. Blue skies and tree tops. Enough furniture and seating for everybody. It really was a spectacular space. It felt like an investment in students. Someone cared about us. The third floor was open plan but we used meeting rooms for collaboration. We spent whole days huddled in a room, setting goals and explaining our ideas to each other, because discussions in the open layout of the third floor were disruptive to the focus of other students.

My move into a new academic role within the faculty also moved me to a new workspace in the building - the corridor. Real academics worked in cubicles around us. We were baby academics - seated at the kinder tables. We worked suspended in the corridor - in transition between doctoral student and academic. As we settled into the new building, it became a habit to constantly check my calendar. There were several reasons for this - most of it stemming from an inability to have impromptu conversations in corridors. We now found ourselves needing to book into available meeting rooms. The process involves a back and forth to agree dates and times, check availability, possibly execute several online polls to find a time. This is followed by finding rooms which might be free at that time. In the new building, the need to find a room, fill a room, execute the conversation, meet the task and empty the room is so automated as to be devoid of our living experiences.

Senior academic

Our old building was worn out and shabby looking, a relic from the 70s. Yet somehow the private offices allowed me to get to know a range of different staff and students and to chat to

them in a comradely way. People would stand in the doorway and gossip. I learned who was who in the zoo and why.

And then came the move. To a new and splendid building. One where I did not feel I needed to apologise to our international students or visiting staff about what was a dear but rather scruffy, unkempt aunty who was now locked away. Out came the shiny new surfaces, the space and the light. It was and is splendid. We held an international research network meeting there and it was marvellous. A wonderful backdrop that the visitors admired and oohed and aahed over. I felt proud of the new building and proud to be in it to host this meeting.

But things have changed. I no longer bump into people along an old scruffy corridor. Students cannot enter. I cannot talk in my pod as I am acutely conscious I will disturb others so I must roam the open spaces like the ancient mariner, seeking a quiet room I can enter. I must anticipate that phone calls be conducted in a booked meeting room. I do not want to disturb my open plan comrades with anything longer than a two minute chat.

I don’t see our PhD students anymore. I do see a lot of other students outside our security zone and they are everywhere and apparently loving the building. But I worry about the experience the PhD students are having, locked away from the staff and isolated in their eyrie. Yet that physical proximity is all part of learning and being initiated into, learning how to go on in the practices of academia.

New space and academic practices - analysis

In the following sections we analyse changing practices identified in the preceding narratives. The analysis is organised via the material set-ups most identified as enmeshed with changing practices in the new building, namely academic offices (‘pods’), the doctoral space and meeting rooms.

Academic offices/pods

In terms of the new offices/pods, key sayings, doings and relatings in the preceding narratives emphasised a shift in ***practices of collegiality.*** Collegial practices in the new building were enabled and constrained by specific material-economic arrangements. These included a quasi-OP design of the pods that meant that formal or informal meetings could not be held in academic offices because of the noise disturbance for other staff. The senior academic, for example, argued, "I cannot talk in my pod as I am acutely conscious I will disturb others … I must anticipate that phone calls be conducted in a booked meeting room'. As a result, the pod design intensified academic labour, with academics having to formally book meeting rooms or find more convivial spaces to meet.

The quasi-OP design led to a shift in cultural-discursive arrangements, despite the purported intent of OP design to facilitate more collegial conversations (McElroy & Morrow, 2010). For example, ECR 1 describes meeting with her supervisor in his office in the old building, her sayings focussed on his book shelves where her 'eyes could wander' and be invited into key 'debates … key ideas … larger conversations'. The inability to meet in pods because of disturbance to colleagues along with limited bookshelves meant that the implicit invitation to take part in 'larger conversations across space and time' (ECR 1) symbolised in books was removed. In terms of relatings, ECR 1's sayings and doings about the old building suggest she was being socialised into the lifeworld of being an academic, through her informal exposure to the 'key ideas … debates' of her field. Similarly, the supply of noise cancelling headphones to all academic staff suggested that the increase in noise (senior academic) led to a change in academic doings, with some academics preferring to work from home, thus limiting the opportunities for informal and fortuitous collegial conversations (ECR 3, ECR 2, ECR 4). ECR 4 notes that in her new university, a traditional office/corridor design enabled

silence, and thus a greater concentration and focus on academic labour such as writing and thinking, ‘walls that reach the ceiling, and … an old-fashioned and straightforward corridor … Open doors mean that people invite you to go in and say hi, closed doors mean people need to work alone’.

With regard to social-political arrangements, the focus pods appeared to make the relationships between different groups of staff more formal, hierarchical, and atomised. Unplanned corridor talk was a common feature of relatings in the previous building as the senior academic describes, ‘somehow the private offices allowed me to get to know a range of different staff and students and to chat to them in a comradely way. People would stand in the doorway and gossip’. The new workspace arrangements meant that people’s casual relatings were constrained or moved elsewhere. For the senior academic, there is a distinct emphasis on the 'camaraderie' that the old building seemed to invite, where hierarchies between professional and academic staff were less acute. As she commented, “I do not want to disturb my open plan comrades with anything longer than a two minute chat.” Another indication of the strengthened hierarchies was that some staff had pods, while others did not, for ‘real academics on different contracts were in cubicles around us. We were baby academics- seated at the kinder tables’ (ECR 5). This is of course not unlike the situation in traditional buildings, but it sends a clear message about how the time and space of different staff was valued.

Doctoral spaces

In the new building, specific material-economic arrangements prefigured the sayings, doings and relatings of collegial practices within the newly allocated floor space for doctoral research students. The space was an expansive OP space centred around an open kitchen/dining area, with large blocks of clustered hotdesks for use on a ‘first-come-best-

dressed' basis. Scattered in between were a series of small bookable meeting rooms intended for supervision meetings and collaborative work. While arguably the best real estate in the building, offering superb views of the surrounding suburbs, the space was physically separated from staff who worked on lower levels of the building, sequestered behind swipe-card doors. Doctoral students did not have access to these staff areas.

This new workspace was promoted to students as a means of collaborative thinking, trouble-shooting and enjoying the shared experiences of the doctoral journey: a physical construction of an emotional camaraderie. Such cultural-discursive arrangements appeared to invite all doctoral students into a shared space of collegiality, extracting individual students from a multitude of hidden and tucked away offices in the old building. However the desires for this space have been subverted in some ways. Some students worked from home, due to the noise and distraction of the OP space and some claimed hot desks as their own, leaving a small library on their claimed desks (ECR 3).

Key sayings emerging in these new spaces emphasised a shift in ***doctoral supervisory practices***. The building presented a beautiful space, but with a working reality that appears contradictory to continuing professional learning. ECR 5 used language such as 'spectacular' and 'an investment in students', which was consistent with the intentions communicated to students as part of the move. At the same time, as ECR 3 notes, these new arrangements 'blocked access to staff' and 'like a child [I] had to wait outside the locked door to access my supervisor'. This indicates a shift in doings resulting from changes in the material-economic arrangements. Supervisory practices, likewise, shifted from organic doings that enabled informal sayings around corridors and staffrooms of the old building, to closed and formal arrangements in the new building. Whereas ECR 3 had felt 'agency in catching up with

supervisors in the old building', this had shifted to doings based on 'waiting behind the gates… infantilising and undermining the value of doctoral students'. Both the sayings and doings point to the dichotomy between feeling valued and being disconnected from the relatings established in the old building for ECR 3.

These social-political arrangements in turn engendered experiences of separation and atomisation when working with academic staff. Relatings with supervisors and other academics now required an increase in labour, i.e., negotiations for time, venues and agendas. A possible deterioration in relatings between academics and students was prefigured as doctoral students were 'locked away … isolated in their eyrie' (senior academic), thus suggesting ‘a lack of value of [doctoral] students’ via this physical separation (ECR 3). Isolation has a detrimental effect on how ECRs learn to become academics (Willson & Given, 2020) and this is hinted at when ECR 3 noted, 'I had no vision of what academic work in contemporary universities looked like'. Asymmetrical relations of power were suggested in the separation of doctoral students from staff via securitised doors. This separation marked doctoral students as novices and ‘other’ to the academy. From her perspective as a supervisor, the senior academic argued 'that physical proximity is all part of learning and being initiated into, learning how to go on in the practices of academia'.

Meeting Rooms

The move to the new building required a change in the ways that academics interacted, e.g., through the need to book meeting rooms. The rooms were a range of sizes and bookable through an online system. Most had frosted glass walls and a tablet sized screen outside the door to indicate their availability. This change in the material set ups for gathering with other academic colleagues illustrated a shift in the **practices of academic collegiality that had**

become more intentional and episodic. Connections with colleagues, mentors and mentees needed to be specifically organised and planned. In terms of cultural-discursive arrangements, the language used in relation to meetings indicated changed practices associated with more strictly task-focussed academic meetings in rooms booked by the hour. This is illustrated by ECR 5 who related, 'the need to find a room, fill a room, execute the conversation, meet the task and empty the room is so automated'. Formerly meetings were a source of engagement with the deeper, often incidental, issues that supported learning to become an academic. However now, ECR 1 observed, 'With only the allotted time, we devote ourselves to getting the agenda items done, with less diversion into the intricate connectedness between the matter at hand and larger research questions'.

The changes prompted adaptations in the doings of academic work. The anchor of offices in the old buildings where everything was in place and where others could gather together for learning purposes was no longer available. The material-economic arrangements in the new building prefigured new practices where academics carried artefacts (books, computers, etc.) from space to space and on schedule. As ECR 1 observes, 'We are more nomadic in our style now. Project-based teams assemble, unfold practices that they carry with them, before bundling them back up to move on to the next space, the next team.'

In terms of social-political arrangements, as with the pods, the use of meeting rooms highlighted academic hierarchies. Not all academics could book meeting rooms, with doctoral students and sessional staff having differing and inferior access to the booking system. This change to the social-political arrangements prefigured relatings between different staff in terms of who was empowered to set meetings and initiate interactions. Furthermore, opportunities were curtailed for informal professional learning such as serendipitous encounters via informal observation and interactions with other academics.

Rather, learning needs had to be intentionally identified and assistance requested from busy colleagues.

Discussion

Mahon and colleagues (2018) contend, ‘What we can and need to do as academics is create conditions of possibility which together constitute an ecological niche for critical educational praxis’ (p. 2-3). Evident in the narratives are both enablers and constraints for fostering continuing professional learning practices as academics - a praxis of being and becoming an academic. While analysis highlights disruptions to the ecologies of academic practice in the move to the new building, there are also hints at how new sayings, doings and relatings for sociality and informal learning were gradually enabled by new arrangements and how these connected up in new ecologies of practices of academic learning, particularly for ECRs.

This is evident in ECR sayings (doings and relatings) pertaining to efforts to create collegial spaces for meeting in the new building. For example, in the old building, the physical arrangements of the offices (e.g., the ability to shut the door and work in silence) prefigured a particular set of practices around researching and writing premised on intellectual labour as a solitary, individual pursuit. This is not to suggest that collegial writing could not occur in these old offices, but that the practices of collegiality were less visible. In contrast, in the new building, because of the carriage of noise in the pods, academics were forced to create new conditions for writing and working together. For example, ECR 2 and her colleagues deliberately relocated to the lunch room (an open space with floor to ceiling glass walls and small tables and chairs arranged throughout) as a means of building new, more serendipitous connections with peers. She comments, 'a couple of my colleagues and I began to work in the kitchen area alongside each other and found it provided opportunities to interact with others’.

Participants sought, found and developed niches in the spatial arrangements of the new building to foster alternative practices of developing as an academic. For example, in terms of mentoring practices, ECR 1 welcomed a newcomer to the faculty, consciously using a variety of spaces in the building to nurture different ways of relating and working together. While meeting rooms were used to plan their team teaching (formal professional learning practice), a cafe proved more hospitable for stirring the newcomer into the practice of academia, through dialogue and reflection, 'we would want to debrief and reflect, and found that the downstairs café, amid clattering crockery and the hiss of the espresso machine, was the place where we would be least rushed'. In this sense, mentoring as an informal practice modelled by ECR 1's supervisor in the old building, 'travelled' into a new site (Wilkinson et al., 2013) and began to take root. Instances such as these reveal how conditions for more collegial mentoring and learning to grow were enabled via the creation of these new academic niches.

An additional site for continuing professional learning for the academics in this study was a local research group to which all participants belonged. Meeting regularly in cafes, with set readings to discuss, the group offered an opportunity to collaborate across disciplinary boundaries, mitigating the atomising effects of the new building. As ECR 2 observes, 'a site-based research group … provided a regular, relaxed way to work with and learn from others. Through this group I have strengthened my relationships and broadened the number of colleagues that I can call on for advice or to share reflections with'. This research group represented efforts to regenerate ecologies of researching practices in the faculty.

As noted above, the new building offered fewer opportunities for serendipitous meetings between colleagues and hence fewer instances of informal conversations that crossed disciplinary boundaries. Hence, fostering niches to enable these kinds of informal professional learning practices to thrive became all the more important. The research group

fostered practices of inquiry and collegiality that were carried by practitioners from the old building into the set-ups of the new building. For example, reading groups were arranged, drawing on Nordic practice traditions of a study circle, which emphasise dialogic, collaborative communicative practices (Rönnerman & Salo, 2012). Academics across a range of career stages would regularly meet to select and then read publications pertinent to the group's guiding philosophies. Practices adopted by the group explicitly modelled the practices of collaborative inquiry while ensuring all participants took an active role. The arrangements of the study circle included the rotation of the chair at each meeting, a clear set of protocols such as turn-taking that gave all academics an opportunity to speak, and a deliberate selection of readings based on broad methodological and diverse disciplinary concerns. The set ups of the group thus afforded academics an opportunity to engage in cross-disciplinary dialogue, still a rarity in the siloes of specialisation that characterise the practice traditions of academe. Hence, the practice architectures of the project of the group enabled a set of sayings, doings and relatings that aimed to foster communicative spaces, characterised by relationships of mutuality and participation. In so doing, it provided an ongoing network of support for ECRs (cf. McAlpine, et al., 2018; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2018; Willson & Given, 2020). ECR 4 observed that relationships matter '... the people were a community despite the architectural barriers'. The importance of building positive, productive and trusting relationships (Mahon et al., 2018), within research groups such as this creates a sense of belonging that is critical to the experience of ECRs transitioning into academia (Willson & Given, 2020).

A final example of practices that created 'conditions of possibility' (Mahon et al., 2018, pp. 2-3) for learning to go on in academia was the community of inquiry that formed to reflect on the changed practice conditions emerging from the move to the new building. Developing from the research study group described above, regular meetings of this group provided a

crucial communicative space in which participants could collaboratively reflect on and interrogate the changes to their practices in a deliberative and uncoerced manner. Importantly, the sociality of the space and the trusting relationships that had formed through the research group provided a hospitable and safe niche through which to explore these changing conditions for academic practice.

The process of dialogic inquiry that the community of inquiry emulated (Kemmis et al., 2014) de-privatised the experience of change and created a hospitable niche for subjecting the changes in practices to close, joint analysis. De-privatisation of practice is commonly discussed in terms of teacher practice and collaboration in professional development, but less so in the practices of becoming an academic. Here, de-privatisation meant that the practices of dialogic inquiry were fostered through reflexive and rigorous critical conversations, enabling conditions of possibility to emerge for critical educational praxis (Mahon et al., 2018). Collaborating in the inquiry also created conditions for solidarity for academics across career stages. This was particularly the case for ECRs who were simultaneously transitioning into academia, whilst also navigating a new built environment whose set ups and layouts prefigured significant departures from traditional university workspaces and practices (Baldry & Barnes, 2012; Van Marrewijk & Van Den Ende, 2018; Wilhoit Larson, 2018).

Our research question was concerned with how the new built spaces impacted the continuing professional learning practices of academics. We have argued they were both constrained and enabled. The practices of collaborative inquiry and the concomitant practices and arrangements that enabled them provided crucial opportunities for participants to compare and analyse how the changed material-economic arrangements of the new site had wrought changes to their practices. The implications of these changes for practices of continuing professional learning and learning how to go on as an academic were also made more explicit

when brought to the group and subjected to critical scrutiny. The dialogic inquiry into the simultaneous transition into academia and into a new built environment fostered a communicative space in which to make explicit the process of learning to become an academic. This practice de-privatised the experience of being a new academic and enabled new relatings of solidarity and belonging to emerge that in turn fostered a niche for informal professional learning practices.

Conclusion

Our study contributes to the burgeoning research on changing built academic workspaces that suggests such changes can transform social, labour, identity, and learning practices of academics (Baldry & Barnes, 2012; Van Marrewijk & Van Den Ende, 2018; Wilhoit Larson, 2018). This work mirrors research on the impact on employees of OP spaces in the corporate world (Bergström, Miller, & Horneij, 2015; Danielsson and Bodin, 2008; Hedge, 1982; McElroy and Morrow, 2010). In universities, these changes have implications for the continuing professional learning of all academics, but in particular, for new academics who are in a process of forming their academic identities. While scholars have noted the multiple aspects of informal professional learning such as time and space, autonomy and trusting relationships (Mahon et al, 2018), the ways in which these aspects may be shaped by built spaces have been made transparent through this paper. Our research suggests that the niche created by a supportive informal research group served to create a communicative space that the new built environment made difficult, exposing the ‘often overlook[ed]’ significance of architecture (Temple, 2018, p. 133). This *significance of architecture* to studies of practice opens up possibilities for future research. The network reported on here created a sense of place for ECRs, a sense of belonging and care that, through dialogic inquiry and the de-

privatised experience of change, constitutes informal continued professional learning. As ECR 4 noted, 'It's the people...the people were a community despite the architectural barriers'.

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