

Living in liminal space: how and what do PhD students learn?

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The liminal space occupied by PhD students is their metaphorical ‘place’ in academia. It is a space in which they don’t know what they need to know to complete their task and leave, and, for much of their candidature, they don’t know how to find out. What they learn in this space is generally unplanned. Without a formal curriculum, this learning happens in virtual spaces, informal spaces such as coffee shops and conference dinners, and in the more formal physical spaces of laboratories, studios, workshops, seminars and conferences. How students learn in the supervision relationship is well-theorised, but there has been very little investigation into other ways that PhD students learn in liminal space of candidature. The virtual space is an especially rich ground for research student learning. *Communitas*, which develops among people in a liminal space, can be demonstrated as a worldwide phenomenon through social media – especially blogs, where more constructed thoughtful exchanges take place, facebook and twitter, where discussions are more immediate and self-focused. This presentation will include examples of how and what PhD students learn in their institutional context outside the supervisory relationship, drawn from my PhD project on the PhD experience and from exchanges in social media.