

RWL 2009

Symposium abstracts

Education and Work - What are the common spaces?

A 'BProf' for negotiated work-based learning: the case for a new, 'signature' award

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This paper argues that an appropriate 'signature' award which reflects and recognises the growth, status and importance of negotiated work-based learning at undergraduate level is now needed and proposes a BProf, or Professional Bachelor's award. It attempts to define the principles and 'signifiers' of the BProf award whilst drawing parallels with those of generic, trans-disciplinary Professional Doctorates.

Of essential importance to the debate is the rise of the so-called third generation of professional doctorates (Stephenson et al, 2004) in which control of content, research method, context, assessment, and partnership between university and the profession lies with the participant as the 'principal agent of control of a programme' within a generic framework of procedures and support offered by the University. It is proposed that this approach is also reserved for the BProf.

The current UK debate over the need for employer-demand-led programmes and for increasing levels of co-funding has culminated in the recent announcement in the UK of the establishment of the Confederation of British Industry's Higher Education Task Force and has already caused apprehension over the extent of potential business intervention in HE. The BProf will provide a means by which employers can become actively engaged in the development of an individual's programme, without loss of autonomy to the individual or the academy.

The calls for the national development (Leitch 2006) of higher level skills seem to be equated with the development of so-called 'vocational' programmes. The BProf would signify an acknowledgement of the development of skills arising from the work-based learning process itself rather than through a pre-determined, content-driven, orientation to programme design. Many of these skills are those that research suggests employers most value, including for example: the ability to see opportunities and to set and achieve goals; the ability to handle change and adapt to new situations; and having energy and enthusiasm in pursuing projects.

In essence, the proposed BProf is intended to signify a 'coming of age' of work-based learning at undergraduate level, and will hopefully signal the importance of the agency of the learner working with the employer and the academy in undertaking transformational work-based learning.

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Assessing knowledge claims through RPL - how big is the "divide" between learning in higher education and the workplace learning really?

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Research to be presented is part of a MEd study in Education. The research focuses on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process in a specific qualification offered at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)(Cape Town) namely the BTech in Project Management. Firstly the research analyses the interpretation of knowledge about project management as part of the RPL application by the individual before becoming a student. Secondly the interpretation of project management knowledge once the applicant is a student.

RPL theories and especially the Credit Exchange model (as it is used at CPUT) is analysed as part of the RPL assessment and interpretation of knowledge. This analysis gives insight on how the RPL assessment is done and how the individuals' knowledge is evaluated and used to facilitate access to the University.

The theory framework for this study comprises of two perspectives: the work of Basil Bernstein and his analysis of knowledge structures is used to analyse the structure management theory. The work of Kolb, Barnett and Michelson is used to analyse learning in the workplace. The work of Barnett is helpful to identify differences, similarities and interaction between learning in Higher Education and learning the workplace.

The first part of the paper will look at the RPL assessment of the knowledge the individual claims that they have of Project Management prior to entering the University. The RPL assessment method used in this process consists of a case study based-test and followed by an interview. Some of the questions do require an awareness of project management theory and the origin of this knowledge is analysed. The implications on the RPL applicant are also discussed.

The second part of the paper deals with the successful RPL applicant as a student. Interviews are conducted six months after classes had commenced with the individuals.

The work of Barnett is used to guide the interviews. Topics include aspects such as the use of the steps in project management and identification of those they use in the workplace. The answers given are then compared to the topics and theory dealt with as a student. The nature of the project management work that the individual does is also analysed and compared to the theory done in class to establish whether the individual is exposed in the workplace to the full project management cycle or not.

In conclusion an analysis is made of what the individuals already knew and what they learnt in Higher Education giving a basis for analysis into the similarities and differences between learning in the workplace and learning in Higher Education – attempting in the process to answer the question of this paper namely: is it really that different?

Becoming an IT graduate worker: understanding dispositions, tasks and culture

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How can we understand the transition from education to work in the case of IT graduates? The relationship between university study and graduate work is not straightforward. For example, while some IT graduates are recruited into 'IT firms' such as IBM and Microsoft, others find work in firms, including banks, chemical manufacturers, etc., that would not typically be considered as part of an 'IT industry'. Similarly, IT graduates employed by consultancy firms, such as Accenture, may find themselves in roles that involve working on a client firm's premises.

In addition to this variety of workplaces, IT graduates undertake a wide range of work tasks. At least twelve different roles have been identified and 'different jobs have very different skills requirements'. It is, therefore, difficult to construct a clear pathway between IT degrees and the workplaces and job roles to which graduates progress.

In the absence of such a pathway it is difficult to construe an IT degree as an 'apprenticeship' (Patterson et al, 2008). Similarly, it is difficult to understand the transition into IT graduate work solely in terms of the capital acquired through university (Leitch, 2006) or in terms of structural and positional advantages that explain the move into higher education and thence into work (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). Rather, we propose that an understanding of the transition from IT degree to graduate IT employment lies in the interaction of individual dispositions, the work tasks associated with a particular graduate role, and the culture of the particular workplace.

We are studying 17 IT graduates during their transitions from university to work. We interviewed them during their final year of undergraduate study and again in each of the first two years of work. We are currently undertaking a systematic thematic analysis of the data to explore how IT graduates become workers and this paper is derived from three interesting cases. Drawing on Bourdieu's theoretical perspective, we argue that the process of becoming an IT worker may be understood in terms of the interaction of habitus (dispositions), field and capital. Because of the amorphous employment sector, within the three cases, we look particularly closely at the field – specifically the 'task' (the nature of the work itself) and culture of the field, as well as the process of recruiting to the field.

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Connecting: Finnish research on world of work and vocational education

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Vocational education has a fundamental relationship with the world of work. Postmodern changes in work and in life have been testing this relationship. One important question could be what the role of formal vocational education is in the ever complex and fluid (Bauman 2000) fields of work and labor market. Lately, the Finnish world of work has been under investigation. We are interested in how the Finnish research on the world of work has positioned, what kind of space it has given, to vocational education.

On a general level one can even pose the question whether the postmodern world of work, labor market and society needs according to the Finnish research of world of work vocational education. Or has the institutionalized and social weathering led also vocational education to the same development as the concept of 'work'? Anyway, the research on world of work is an enigma from the perspective of vocational education, and this kind of comparative analysis has not been carried out earlier from this standpoint.

Our starting point is the simple question of how the vocational education is written by Finnish research of world of work. What kind of space does it provide to vocational education? If it happens that it does not provide any space, does it give any clues of how do vocational competences gain their form and place in the research on world of work. Does this research offer any connections to the vocational education by defining concepts such as qualifications, competences, partnerships and collaboration with organizations?

The data is collected from the newest Finnish research. Two factors have influenced on the selection of the data: the participation of the research to the general discussion on the world of work in Finland, publicity, and the possible potential of the research to entail some qualitative remarks on competences and education. We read the data by addressing the following questions

- to whom is the research on the world of work written to?
- what kind of relationship does it construct to vocational education?
- what kind of place does it offer to vocational education?
- what kind of conclusions does it draw based on its description of vocational education?
- how does it argue the conclusions it draws

Although we have set some general working hypothesis the method of analysis is based on grounded theory. The results will be provided in a structural format so to provide some general comparative overview. Together with the answers provided by the material in this research we face the real challenge to reflect these results and the position of vocational education seen from the research on the world of work.

Discovering tempo-rhythm within the common spaces of education and work: Unpacking the tempo of learning

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This paper is the first of two exploratory discussions on the notion of learning in the coinciding contexts (co-contexts) of education and work using a creative arts metaphor of tempo-rhythm. The notion of 'co-context' learning recognises that novice practitioners in particular, are embedded within the common and often bewildering spaces of education and work. To learn, they seek to generate relevant repetitive actions (measurable beats as in a tempo) that can be recognised by others as patterned and novel connections that invite engagement of a learning kind (rhythmic energy and meaning).

In this paper, I draw upon philosophical and postmodern concepts of time and space to suggest that change is better conceptualised as indeterminate and lived through connections that exhibit tempo and rhythm, rather than conceptualised as a series of boundary-crossing activities that connect past, present and future. I illustrate how musicians learn by searching for a tempo or beat while working together during a rehearsal. These musician understandings draw organically from multiple coinciding contexts of experience in ways that reconfigure their ongoing relative positions in reconstructive yet provisional ways. I conclude with previewing how rhythm can complement the tempo of learning by introducing additional patterned ways that invite participants to make music together within the shared spaces life.

Keywords: Tempo, temporality, rhythm, dynamics of learning, workplace learning, organisational change.

Healthcare teamwork: knowing the theory, understanding the practice

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A key goal of contemporary healthcare delivery is multidisciplinary teamwork. Increasingly, multidisciplinary teamwork is seen as desirable to manage the complex, technologically advanced and high-end care required by an increasingly ageing and growing population. Yet there is evidence that cooperative practices structured around patients fall short of the ideal described by policy documents and the literature on effective team-based clinical care.

This paper examines the learning and practice of multidisciplinary healthcare teamwork: to what extent is multidisciplinary team-based care happening, how is it learned and how can Practice Theory (Schatzki, 2006) inform the learning and the doing of this in healthcare settings?

Using ethnographic and language data from a study into linguistic and professional practices in Emergency Departments (EDs) in Australia, the paper presents two case studies of how teams work (or not). The case studies focus specifically on how two clinical teams co-construct team knowledge about patients in EDs and then disseminate this knowledge, through team networks, to other clinicians in the ED. Through these case studies, the paper examines the socio-cultural and professional enablers and barriers to learning and doing teamwork in the clinical context.

Drawing on Practice Theory (Schatzki, 2006) the paper analyses how practitioners learn prefigured practices at work and how nurses and doctors enact and embody the divergent affective teleological structuring of their respective disciplines. It examines the implications of this for learning and doing teamwork in situ, and poses a number of questions: Can Practice Theory (Schatzki, 2006) provide insights into ways that interdisciplinary education might impact on the momentum of practice in EDs, the 'organizational memory' of what clinicians do? If professions continue to privilege different kinds of knowledge in practice (Stein-Parbury and Liaschenko, 2007) and if health care delivery continues to be organisationally managed by nurses, yet bio-medically-controlled by doctors, can Practice Theory and in situ research assist us to better address the barriers to the learning and practice of, team-based interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary care?

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How twenty-first century young people are creating new models of working and learning

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This paper is about the way in which young people are increasingly adopting dual identities – as worker and learner – during the long transition from full-time student to full-time worker. In Australia as in many other countries, most school students are in the formal part-time workforce, many from the age of 14 or 15, and continue in that workforce during their periods of senior secondary and tertiary education (Vickers, Lamb & Hinkley, 2003). This period may last until the mid-twenties or even beyond. While the part-time jobs that are undertaken during this working career may not – but sometimes do – lead to full-time careers in the same industry area, they nevertheless pave the way for transition to full-time work and learning about work. At the same time, those who enter full-time work directly, either at minimum school-leaving age or having completed their senior secondary schooling, are increasingly likely to be doing so through an apprenticeship or traineeship that involves part-time study. In some cases, full-time students have part-time jobs which are apprenticeships or traineeships in areas that are unrelated to their primary field of study, and thus have a 'triple identity'. These complex and often underplanned arrangements may well be redefining how young people think about education and jobs and how they conceptualise their movement into the full-time workforce.

The paper is based on two series of Australian research projects: the first on apprenticeships and traineeships, and the second on student part-time working. These projects, undertaken over a ten-year period (from 1998-2008) by the author, have involved a variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and have been undertaken with national research funding. The paper uses the data gathered during the research projects to construct six hypothetical case studies of young learner/workers that typify the multiple roles that young people play in the working and educational arenas. This representational approach extends the way in which a 'typical' apprentice is described in Harris, Willis Simons & Underwood, (1998). The case studies are used to provide illustration for a conceptual framework which analyses the multiple roles and their interconnections. The framework takes account of the extent to which the roles are mediated by formal vocational education and training including the apprenticeship and traineeship system

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Job Requirements and Workers' Learning: Formal Gaps, Informal Closure, Systemic Limits

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ABSTRACT

There is substantial evidence that formal educational attainments are increasingly exceeding the educational job requirements of the employed labour force in many advanced market economies—a phenomenon variously termed “underemployment”, “underutilization”, “overqualification” or “overeducation”. Conversely, both experiential learning theories and workplace case studies suggest that workers’ individual and group actions continually negotiate such “gaps”. This paper summarizes results of national labour force surveys and workplace case studies in Canada to further assess the relations between workers and their jobs (Livingstone ed. *Education and Jobs: Exploring the Gaps*. University of Toronto Press, 2009). Underemployment is found to be increasing all types of employees but to be greater and more persistent among service and industrial working classes. Underemployment is found to decline with work experience but persists in virtually all categories of employees--most notably working classes and non-white immigrant workers. But case studies of teachers, computer programmers, clerical workers, autoworkers and disabled workers demonstrate how mismatched workers engage in continual learning and try to reshape their jobs. Implications of these findings are identified in terms of the incompatibility of narrow economic market objectives with wider social objectives of democratic education, and of the systemic limits of appeals for still greater formal educational efforts by already highly educated labour forces.

SKILL FORMATION SYSTEMS AND WORKPLACE LEARNING - seen from above and below

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The classical challenge of linking micro-meso-macro factors in social and human sciences also applies to research on work and learning. Alongside investigating common spaces between entities representing work and learning (e.g. enterprises, schools, professions), there is a need for concepts that can liaise factors at these levels. One such concept is skill formation systems, which above all has been used for classifications and typologies of countries (cf. Ashton et al.2000). In the same vein, Brown et al. (2001) provide a comparative study of skill formation systems across five countries. A recent contribution to this debate (Mayer and Solga, 2008) highlights aspects related to the skills, qualifications and competencies acquired in different learning contexts.

The purpose of our paper is to elaborate on such aspects by summing up research on formal training offered by small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Estonia and Norway. Case studies were carried out in both countries in line with a common template. The comparison of the results will be done while bearing in mind national specificities of the two countries, notably to reflect micro conditions for enterprises of a small and medium size. We will analyse the blend of formal education and in-company training found in SMEs, in particular their propensity to favour in-company training or at least consider it at a pair with formal education.

We will use the term skill formation system to depict how interfaces between the labour market and the education&training system are structured at a national level. Such systems frame the training conditions and patterns in SMEs. Compared with existing research, one implication of our findings is that a further elaboration of the concept in question could introduce the term subsystems of skill formation. This would better enable us to capture skill formation in SMEs, such as it is composed of informal structures, unstructured networks as well as the contribution from branch organisations, training providers and educational institutions to SME training. Moreover, we aim to clarify the concept of skill formation systems based on a multi-country analysis of lifelong learning .

By this means, the paper may contribute to bridging literature on various forms of learning. At a macro level this literature is often exclusively devoted to institutional structures, while at a micro level it hardly escapes from an enterprise or an organisational perspective. A combination of these strands of analysis, as i.a. proposed by Lam (2000), can move the understanding of workplace learning forward.

Skills mismatch and adult learning in a comparative perspective

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Background and purpose

The discourse on lifelong learning has focused on the supply of skills, particularly literacy and numeracy, and consequences of skill deficit on individual workers and the economy as a whole. Consequently the discussion has been on individuals' literacy deficits and the need for training. Much less thought has been given to how a lack in demand for skills restricts large groups from engaging in adult learning (Krahn and Lowe, 1998). However, there is a considerable body of literature that addresses how the structure of work facilitates or constrains individual training opportunities and the dehumanizing effects of routine work (Brown, Green and Lauder, 2001; Illeris, 2004; Livingstone, 2005). Yet little systematic research has been done on how workers actually use their literacy and numeracy skills in their jobs. It is in this context that the study addresses skills mismatches and adult learning in a comparative perspective. In the paper we will address the following questions:

- What is the fit or mismatch between workers literacy skills and their literacy use in the workplace?
- Have there been any changes in mismatch between 1994 and 2003?
- How do these patterns of fit and mismatch vary by educational attainment, industry, occupation and unionization?
- How does mismatch impact on opportunities for adult learning?
- How do patterns of fit and mismatch vary by selected countries?

Methodology

In answering these questions the study analyzes data from two large-scale comparative surveys: the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey and the 2003 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey. Based on availability of data from both surveys the following countries are included, Canada, Norway, Switzerland and the USA.

Theoretical context

Patterns of mismatch and their impact on adult learning are discussed in a neo-institutional perspective (see Meredick, 2008). This approach draws attention to industrial relations and employers' decisions (Vignoles, Galindo-Rueda and, Feinstein, 2004). The idea points to the institutional emergence of norms about employee job rights and benefits and strategies to address skills mismatch. The human resource development practices in those organizations tend to encourage strong organizational ties to employees, inducing their commitment by offering job security, comprehensive benefits, and career opportunities. Differences in patterns of mismatch between the selected countries are discussed in term of welfare state regimes and their impact on industrial relations and government intervention in training as well (Rubenson, 2006).