

RWL 2009

Symposium abstracts

Practising the co-production of work, knowledges and identities.

Conjuring, unsettling, and folding boundaries: 'Social responsibility' in workplace practice

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How can we consider social responsibility in work, and the project of learning social responsibility in and for work, in more flexible ways that account for its complex enactments in pluralist contexts? This discussion explores this question through dilemmas experienced by people striving to enact practices of social responsibility in work. The discourse of social responsibility (SR) is increasingly pervasive in both workplace and educational practice, disseminating wide-ranging and sometimes contradictory meanings and prescriptions. In workplace contexts SR tends to be defined through universal laws purporting to represent self-evident social goods: Hopkins's (2003) list of corporate SR principles includes cultivating justice, peace, community well-being, global citizenship, and environmental sustainability. However in the everyday, the lived practice of SR in workplace contexts is complicated when such ideals must be negotiated in the market economy, discourses of entrepreneurship and flexibility, diverse stakeholder demands, and contradictory consumer desires.

What are the dynamics at play in these negotiations of social responsibility in work environments? How do people committed to learning SR practice constitute themselves as responsible or responding to diverse moral demands of the 'social' in the different encounters of their work? To whom do they respond and in what forms when they practice SR? These are questions about learning processes but they are also questions about working with boundaries – boundaries that create the locations, identities, and conduct of SR practice. Most critically, boundaries bring into presence the actual relation that constitutes responsibility in commitments of social responsibility (Bowker and Star, 2000). The more closely we examine the forms of learning SR practice, the more clearly these appear to be issues of boundary work: recognising and making boundaries, but also unsettling and unmaking them.

This discussion examines these issues through a completed qualitative study of small enterprises that declare commitment to social responsibility in their operations and purposes (Author 2007). Central conflicts occur between sustainability of a viable small enterprise in globalised markets and the practices of social responsibility. Wide variation of interests, ethical commitments, modes of response and practical constraints shape these owners' engagement with SR. These issues point to wider debates about how to consider 'responsibility' itself, and its associated learnings within notions of social responsibility, and how to approach these considerations more flexibly in diverse ethico-political contexts. The proposed paper will first outline the meanings and practices of social responsibility in work. Then turning to the question of learning SR, the paper will discuss the complexities of enacting 'responsibility' as a matter of boundary practices, through illustrations from the study of small enterprises.

Learning and co-producing organisational and professional practices in hospital emergency departments

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This paper explores ethnographic and language data to discuss how organisational and professional practices are co-produced (or not) in hospital emergency departments (EDs) in NSW, Australia.

Health care is commonly understood as primarily a domain of action where bio-medical activities that promote and produce healthy bodies are the dominant concerns. Health care providers institute organisational and managerial systems, guidelines, professional and clinical protocols to guide practice within, what are usually large, bureaucratic institutions. These systems and guidelines are set out as if it were possible to implement them as coherent and ordered practices. However, in wards, and in our case, EDs 'as they happen' (Schatzki 2006) the socialised practices of health care, rituals and contested professional positions, as well as patient agendas disrupt any sense of organisational and/or managerialist rationality.

While the urgency of the patient's illness is the central concern of the ED, its systems and its clinicians, patients are often positioned, both clinically and communicatively, as fairly passive receivers of treatment and information.

In this paper we present and discuss some of the in situ practices within EDs - 'as they happen' - addressing how the competing priorities of patient-centred care and organisational efficiencies are played out in a complex co-production of health care. We highlight the practice and organisational contradictions and co-production tensions that have emerged from our data as clinicians struggle with finding out what is wrong with the patient, providing treatment and moving patients on quickly. We examine recorded language data and ethnographic data that demonstrate the organisational networks of clinicians, their interdisciplinary bedside practices and their co-construction of team knowledge about (and sometimes with) the patient. We suggest that these practices tend to align with organisational priorities of efficiency and privilege bio-medical approaches to treatment, and in so doing, often limit patients from becoming key players and co-producers in their care team.

We draw on international literature examining how effective team communication, stable team architectures, well-linked clinician networks and interdisciplinary care practices are increasingly recognised as significant to health care outcomes (National Health & Hospitals Reform Commission, 2008; Fairbanks, Bisantz, & Sunm, 2007; Finn, 2008; Finn & Waring, 2006; Woloshynowych, Davis, Brown, & Vincent, 2007). Further, we frame our analysis on what clinicians and patients do through the lens of Practice Theory as it applies to organisations (Schatzki 2006) showing how these practices are learnt and thereby perpetuate the teleological, prefigured ways of doing and being in emergency departments

Scholarly writing as co-production: The writing group experience

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What does it mean to conceptualise scholarly writing as co-production? The idea of co-production has its origins in health services and public sector policy in the late 1970s. Critiquing the ideas underpinning traditional notions of service of production and delivery Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues (Parks, Baker, Kiser, Oakerson, Ostrom et al 1981) argued that the service production process was more accurately represented as a co-produced process, with consumer input being not only desirable but inevitable and necessary.

In this paper our aim is to conceptualise co-production in a more open ended way. We use the context of a writing group, focused on 'scholarship in teaching' in a business faculty to explore the idea of scholarly writing as a co-production - part of a writing exchange network and the ways in which a writing group makes the social relations in such a network explicit and sustainable.

Our focus is on scholarly writing, a core capability for academics that has traditionally been seen as a solo, often lonely, endeavour. We challenge this representation by demonstrating how a writing group can create for early career academics a cooperative space for situated learning within an academic workplace. Building on the work of Lee (1997) we revisit questions such as: How is the knowledge in a field produced? What models of research are available for generating new knowledge? What are productive ways of bringing together theory, practice and research in developing academic writing and publication?

Our discussion looks at co-production on multiple levels. Initially we conceptualise from a macro perspective the informal dense network of voluntary labour that builds a field of knowledge through review, editing and co-editing of scholarly writing – essentially building the discourse through these exchanges. Then, focusing on the local level we examine the way co-productive practice occurs 'on the ground' in a writing group of twelve academics with an interest in writing and publishing about their teaching practice. This writing group makes their social relations explicit and provides a site for genuine co-production work in writing. Members can engage in dialogue with other authors through ongoing peer review and discussion of writing in production. Also of interest is the ways in which this co-production shapes their professional identities as 'academic writers'

We conclude with comments about how the conceptualising of scholarly writing as co-production can inform academic practice at the school and faculty level.

References

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