

RWL 2009

Symposium abstracts

Re-thinking workplace learning

A vocational calling: exploring how students learn to be citizens in vocational education

Author: Andreas Fejes, Linköping University, andreas.fejes@liu.se

Co-authors: Katherine Nicoll, University of Stirling, katherine.nicoll@stir.ac.uk
Gert Biesta, University of Stirling, gert.biesta@stir.ac.uk

Citizenship has emerged as a significant and central concern within the European and UK policy context in recent years; that is, citizenship as enacted responsibilities rather than rights (cf. Biesta 2005). A central policy focus is to create a citizen who feels responsible for others and a sense of belonging to a common European and national space. Educational sites are identified as key in fostering such identities. In this paper we outline a framework to explore how learning to be responsible for others and belong to the vocational group is part of what happens through vocational learning in schools and further education colleges. We know that such learning does happen, but there has not been research done to explore what happens and how in quite the detail that we want to attempt here.

Our framework is inspired by a poststructuralist discourse theorization. Key concepts are discourse, subjectivity, technology, power/knowledge and regime (Foucault 1982). But we also use the idea of 'calling' to help us to think about what happens. The idea of being called to a vocation is of course not new. The word has religious connotations and has been used in relation to the caring professions in for example nursing and education, with an implication of doing good work for other people (cf. Scott 2007). However, research has suggested that students tend to develop a calling through their initial training within all the vocations (Colley et al. 2003, 2007). Here then we use calling to help consider what happens for students in terms of their senses of relationship with others within the vocation and outside - to identify and explore the forms of citizen that are realized by students and the processes and practices involved in this.

References

- Biesta G.J.J. (2005) The learning democracy? Adult learning and the condition of democratic citizenship (Review article). *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 26(5): 693-709.
- Colley, H., James D., Tedder M. & Diment K. (2003) Learning as becoming in vocational education and training: class, gender and the role of vocational habitus, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 55(4): 471-98.
- Colley, H., James D & Diment K. (2007) Unbecoming teachers: towards a more dynamic notion of professional participation, *Journal of Education Policy*, 22(2): 173 – 93.
- Foucault M. (1982) The subject and power, in. H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, London: HarvesterWeatsheaf.
- Scott J. A. (2007) Our Callings, Our Selves: Repositioning religious and entrepreneurial discourse in career theory and practice, *Communication Studies*, 58(3): 261 – 79.

Employability – whose responsibility?

Author: Andreas Fejes, Linköping University, andreas.fejes@liu.se

Employability has become a central policy concept for transnational organizations such as the EU and OECD and for national governments during the last decade. Instead of dividing the workforce between the employed/unemployed as was previously the case, the workforce is now divided between the employable/non employable citizens. Such shift indicates an individualisation of the responsibility of your status on the labour market – you are made responsible for keeping yourself employable (cf. Garsten and Jacobsson 2004; Serrano 2000). However, such transnational discourse needs to be more closely scrutinized as away to gain a better understanding of the differences and affordances between discourses as they are shaped and operate in different practices. Discourses on employability will most likely be mobilized in a slightly different way in national or local practices compared to the transnational one.

In this paper, the focus is therefore on how a transnational discourse on employability is shaped in a national and local practice. More specifically, I'm interested in analyzing what relations are constructed between the 'state', the employer and the individual in terms of who is made responsible for the employability of the citizens. By comparing the discourses operating in the three practices, it is possible to illustrate the discursive translations (cf. Rose 1999) of discourse and how such translation have different power effects in terms of subject positioning, i.e. who is positioned as responsible for the employability of the citizen?

The case analyzed is elderly care in Sweden where I have focused on an in-service training programme for health care assistants (HCA) who wished to become licensed practiced nurses (LPN). The programme was a state funded initiative aimed at making the workforce more employable in relation to the elderly care sector. I have conducted 26 semi-structured interviews with HCA, LPN, teachers and managers. One aspect in the interviews concerned how the interview persons perceived what the aim of the programme was, why they have chosen to participate and what kind of output they expected from their participation.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's (2003) notion of governmentality, and Nikolas Rose's (1999) notion of the enabling state I will conduct a discourse analysis of three different kinds of materials: Transnational policy texts produced by the OECD and the EU; national policy texts concerning elderly care work produced by the Swedish government; and interviews with 14 of the participants in the in-service training programme (all of whom were HCA). By analysing these three kinds of materials separately, I can map out and co-construct the discourses operating within these three different practices with a focus on the subject-positioning in terms of responsibility. I will then be able to analyze the process of translation and thus compare the (different) positionings within the different discourses.

Knowledge as a question of knowing at work: implications for learning to become professional

Author: Cathrine Filstad, Norwegian School of Management, cathrine.filstad@bi.no

Co-authors: Dr. Jacqueline McManus, University of New South Wales, Australia,
j.mcmanus@unsw.edu.au

The concept of knowledge is unsettled; it suffers from too much fragmentation, different notions and unrelated practical evidence in a multitude of niches (Schneider, 2007). We tend to grapple with the concept of knowledge and redefine it as necessary to suit different purposes without recognizing its complexity. This is especially evident with varying interpretations of knowledge demands and what it takes to be professional (Filstad, 2007, McManus, 2008). We understand knowledge as a question of knowing integrated in learning processes, whereas knowing and learning is two sides of the same coin (Chiva and Alegre, 2005). Accordingly, recent discussions around knowledge in professional life at work (Schneider, 2007; Tsoukas, 2005) has considered the concept of knowledge differently and seeks to reframe it in a way that avoids the problematic "fuzziness" and changeability of its definition to a concept that enables an holistic approach to work and learning. For example, Jong and Ferguson-Hessler (1996) talks about knowledge-in-use, Beckett and Hager of know-how, Billett (2001) of knowing in practice, and several contributions find that knowledge for work can be best recognized as knowing through practice (Tsoukas, 2005; Nicolini, Gherardi, and Yanow, 2003). Two case studies were conducted, relying on in-depth interviews with both novices and established colleagues in professional life. The first study was on novices entering professional life in a Norwegian ambulance service. The second represents several organizations, focusing on newly educated students from the Norwegian School of Management. Thus, the two cases differ when it comes to emotional stress and emotional mastery related to the development of necessary knowing in professional life. Similarities are however, mostly related to applying theoretical and educational knowledge in professional life. We explore what professionals need to know. But rather than answering this question directly, we analyze why and how they know professional work in a holistic way, considering as many aspects of the experience as possible, including the emotional part, sense of being and belonging, awareness of ability to perform a job and awareness and impact of the unspoken and cultural aspects of the job as knowing how to perform. Our analysis recognizes social and cultural approaches to workplace learning, but goes beyond the usual segregation of issues and theories and eclectically borrows and is guided by a range of ideas in an integrated way to help achieve the holistic perspective we seek. As a result, our analysis and interpretations incorporate recognitions of the complexity of the reality and the wholeness embodied in a person. In this way we capture and incorporate the epistemological and ontological aspects, when integrating knowing and learning as situated and embedded in social practice at work in order to understand what it takes to become professional.

Rethinking workplace learning research: utility of analytics of governmentality and assemblages

Author: Ann Reich, UTS, ann.reich@uts.edu.au

In the past few years there has been a burgeoning of scholarship in education and workplace learning using a governmentality approach, based on the later work of Foucault (1991, 2007a) and other work on governmentality (Donzelot 2008; Lemke 2001; Rose, O'Malley & Valverde 2006; Valverde 2007). This includes a recent focus on lifelong learning (Fejes & Nicoll 2008).

In this paper I argue for the utility of assemblages, within an analytics of governmentality, as an approach to researching workplace learning. In particular this approach assists the researcher in foregrounding the political rationality underpinning the technologies of power, such as neoliberalism and advanced liberalism (Rose 1999). I suggest that Dean and Hindess' (1998) concept of assemblages as five inter-related domains is very useful for investigating complex "assemblages of government". These domains are: forms of problematisations; techniques and technologies; modes of reasoning; the shaping of identities and agencies; and the ethos of these governmental practices.

The paper commences with a clarification of the key concepts used in the paper – analytics of governmentality, assemblages and neoliberalism and advanced liberalism. It then illustrates this approach to researching workplace learning by analysing each of these five domains of assemblages in relation to a research site (training and development practices in child protection agencies in NSW, Australia in late 1990s) and the emergence of the worker as learner in vocational education and training reform programmes.

The paper concludes with exploring the implications of this approach for researching workplace learning today.

Spaces of learning: the challenges of policy frameworks for the personal and professional identities of adult educators in England; thoughts from a field in transition.

Author: teresa cairns, university of Brighton, s1syphus@ntlworld.com

In 2004, regulations for the reform of the post compulsory sector workforce in England led to changes in the professional qualification framework for those teaching in both Further Education colleges and in the broader learning and skills sector (adult and community learning, work-based learning and training in the voluntary sector), and set out, for the first time, a mandatory requirement for staff to have a teaching qualification and introduced a 'licence to teach'. This was a major part of the Skill for Life (SfL) strategy introduced in England in 2001 to improve the literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) skills of adult learners by 2010. The major focus of research in England into the impact of the SfL strategy has been into the translation of the new teacher qualifications and extensive professional development programmes into changes in practice and outcomes in the classroom, particularly the delivery of diagnostic and summative learner assessments and achievements within the new learner qualification framework. However, while the Teacher Study (Cara et al, 2008) of SfL practitioners is an important development in the interrogation of the effect of major policy shifts upon interlinked communities of practice in the sector, 'the significance of individual dispositions and biography' (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003) has been relatively neglected. This paper will interrogate the implications of the SfL strategy for LLN practitioners' professional identities and the achievement of a required professional profile. I will draw upon the subjective experiences of practitioners, managers and trainers through their working life histories, to explore the creation and maintenance of personal and professional identities within policy discourses that have problematised the skills and knowledge base of the workforce and radically altered workplace practices.

Bibliography:

- Cara, O., Litster, J., Swain, J., and Vorhaus, J. (2008) *The Teacher Study: The Impact of the Skills for Life Strategy on Teachers*, NRDC; Institute of Education, London.
- Hodkinson, Phil and Hodkinson, Heather (2003) 'Individuals, Communities of Practice and the Policy Context: school teachers' learning in their workplace', *Studies in Continuing Education*, 25: 1,3-21.

The contribution of a Foucauldian approach to theorising everyday learning at work

Author: Kerry Harman, Northumbria University, kerry.harman@northumbria.ac.uk

There is a growing body of literature in the fields of workplace learning and organisational learning that uses identity as a lens for conceptualising the learning that takes place in and through everyday practices in the workplace (Fenwick, 2006). This literature directs attention to knowledge production as situated and learning as a social rather than an individual activity. While a community of practice conceptualisation of learning and identity has become a dominant discourse in this literature (Wenger, 1998), there are other ways of conceiving the shaping of worker identities and everyday learning at work.

This paper examines the contribution of a Foucauldian poststructural approach as a theoretical and analytical tool for examining everyday learning in workplaces. Foucault theorises the shaping of subjectivities as a complex process whereby technologies of power interplay with technologies of the self (Ransom, 1997; Rose, 1996, 1999). In the first part of the paper I introduce these concepts and related themes including: identities are discursively constructed rather than essential; multiple subjectivities rather than one unified self; and identities as always in process (Weedon, 1987).

In the second part of the paper I discuss the implications of thinking about everyday learning in this way. Different understandings of identity and how it is shaped have very different meanings of social reality embedded in them, which in turn has implications in terms of how we are able to know and understand workplaces, workplace learning and the workplace learner subject. I suggest that a Foucauldian conceptualisation of processes of subjectification provides a more nuanced account of the shaping of worker subjectivities than is available in much of the organizational and workplace learning literature. Importantly it enables power to be introduced into accounts of everyday learning but in a way that avoids reproducing a top-down and monolithic view of power. A Foucauldian approach opens up space for re-presenting workplace learners as transgressive subjects, and active in renegotiating relations of power in the workplace, thereby disrupting the view that learning at work is something that can be managed and controlled.

References

- Fenwick, T. (2006). Tidying the territory: questioning terms and purposes in work-learning research. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 18(5), 265-278.
- Ransom, J. (1997). *Foucault's Discipline: The Politics of Subjectivity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Rose, N. (1996). *Inventing Our Selves*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rose, N. (1999). *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (2nd ed.). London: Free Association Books.
- Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

"Revolutionary" changes at work: learning at work and adaptation to work changes

Author: Krista Loogma, Tallinn University, krista.loogma@tlu.ee

Author try to provide answers to the question how does the mid-level employees' work-related learning as part of their adaptation strategies took place as a response to the "revolutionary" changes at work. In the article the principal change processes will be explained with reference to the Estonian transformation context in early 1990s. Work changes in Estonia as in most East and Central European countries have been influenced by the systemic transformation of the society accompanied by extremely fast, conflicting and complex changes in economy, labour market, and in all societal institutions.

The approach to the research question has been constructive, consisting from the analyse of the structural conditions at macro level from one side and meanings, employees attribute to changes and need for learning in their working life, from other side. The methodology used was qualitative, based on empirical data, gathered with method of open individual interviews with employees. The theoretical framework for conceptualising the learning and coping patterns interrelates concepts of learning at work, career, work identity as the most significant factors of adaptation of employees to work changes. The sample consisted of about 50 employees with different personal and organization backgrounds, representing two contrasting industries mentioned before: one of them was "old industry" - timber and furniture industry and the second one "new industry" ICT industry. The transcribed interview texts were subjected to a detailed analysis.

As seen from the employee's individual perspective s/he will have to learn and develop work-related capability and to adapt it to what was necessary in current working environment, at the same time regarding the opportunities of further work-related development and career. According to the empirical findings different learning and coping strategies can be pointed out. The differentiation of these individual strategies is based, on the one hand, on the different meanings attributed to work, directly related to the employees' work identity and motivation (identity based on the creative and interest-centred meaning of work vs work motivation based on working conditions and the economic meaning of work). The meaning of work and connected to them work-related identity (work identity) generally determine the limits, within which the employees' adaptation – learning, the development of work-related capabilities and mobility in the labour market - take place. These limits constructed by the employees themselves in accordance with their meaning of work and work identity display also which patterns of learning and development are "normal" for given professional group and which are transgressive, i.e. break out from the "value space" of this particular professional/vocational group. Three empirical patterns of adaptation can be pointed out: passive adaptation, flexible adaptation and transgressive adaptation.