

Valuing Work-based Learning Pedagogical Expertise

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PhD research emerging findings

- Qualitative research project in my 3rd year of study exploring the pedagogies of Work-based learning (WBL) within Higher Education (HE)
 - a range of WBL(HE) perspectives and pedagogies operate in UK (English) HE
 - discipline-based, learner-centred and employer-centred
 - practitioners have used a great deal of personal experience to inform the development of specialist practice in WBL(HE)
 - WBL(HE) pedagogies could provide innovative expertise across the HE curriculum
 - practitioners have observed that the mainstream popularity of WBL research has been accelerated by government policy

The context of WBL within HE

- *WBL does not require the involvement of HE*
 - the learning process can be developed throughout life (Jarvis 2006)
 - social and individual learning, workplace affordances (Billet et al. 2005)
 - professional learning in the workplace (Evans et al. 2006) (Eraut 2007) can focus on post-university learning
- there are associated WBL(HE) discourses in HE
 - work-related learning - placements, courses that use content from the workplace
 - workforce development - employer engagement (demand led)
 - employability, graduateness, accreditation, higher skills

Identifying elements in WBL(HE) discourse(s)

- 'students' are 'working' in some capacity - in the workplace, as volunteers or in the home
- some perspectives of WBL(HE) question the familiar frameworks within which HE operates
 - i.e. in the learner-centred perspective, knowledge can be considered transdisciplinary with a Mode 2 (Gibbons et al. 1994) knowledge exchange
- structuring and assessing experience-based learning requires evidencing the use of theory and reflection for work-based activity
- Approved Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) allows for workplace experience and learning to be accredited

WBL(HE) in a policy context

How is it being used lately?

- WBL(HE) can engage 'non-traditional' students, often in part-time study, who remain in the workplace as employees, volunteers, or are working at home.
 - as a part of widening participation to increase the number of students or as a progression route for vocational learners (Lifelong Learning Networks).
 - sponsored learning from Employers actively being sought, through 50% student numbers and workforce development
- WBL(HE) is now explicitly required as a part of the Foundation Degree provision
- WBL(HE) can be used for the Leitch agenda by delivering higher skills and employer engagement

Work-based learning in a policy context

Benchmarking practice and expanding horizons

- Section 9: Work-based and placement learning code of practice, Quality Assurance Agency (2007) gives guidelines for WBL and work placements
 - the degree to which these two practices are similar may be contested within particular WBL(HE) discourses
- Foundation Degree Forward now supports workforce development
- employer engagement relates to business development and Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) operations such as continued professional development (CPD)
 - Pathfinder project work and strategic development funds from the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE)

Making use of the theories and models

- WBL(HE) practice might be used to enrich related learning for the workplace
 - personal development planning - self-managed and inquiry-based learning with reflection (Argyris and Schön 1974)
 - enriching student experience - extending HE communities of practice (Wenger 1998)
 - engaging workplace mentors - use the tripartite approach from WBL(HE) (learner, institutional facilitator, organisation)
 - personalising learning through emphasis on tutor/peer exchange and the use of 'emancipatory knowledge' (Costley 2007)

Valuing expertise

- WBL(HE) still has active first and second generation practitioners
 - WBL(HE) practitioners might be found in centralised university units, education or management disciplines, in more traditional practice disciplines, or in 'third stream' practice
- expertise is related to practical application as opposed to establishing expertise by 'testing' expertise out of context, it relates to the ability to work in the dynamic environment of HE
- the realities of the WBL(HE) landscape (Nixon et al. 2006) may require WBL(HE) practitioners to adapt pedagogies to a 'best fit' within their autonomous institutions and/or prepare a wider group of professionals to obtain specialist knowledge for delivering this type of learning.
- *the creative elements of the practice could be explored further*

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Sources of Information

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- http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/EmployerEngagement/work_based_learning_publications
- http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/Employability/proceedings_from_the_work-based_learning_futures_conference
- <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/employability/workbasedlearning>
- <http://www.mdx.ac.uk/wbl/index.asp>