

## **Knowledge generated from practice changes values embedded in higher education (0253)**

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Most knowledge production is increasingly based on its communities yet there is also a more global approach to knowledge interests, easy access to information and international networks. For these reasons there needs to be an understanding of the kinds and types of knowledge that are recognised and to diversify the criteria by which it is judged. The paper examines how the field of Work Based Learning (WBL) approaches knowledge in professional practice situations and the values that become implicit in this work. It is based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with tutors who facilitate the learning of work-based learners.

WBL acknowledges and works in practice situations by engaging with professional knowledge. Important aspects of this engagement have been exemplified by some authors, for example the value of horizontal learning (Bernstein 1999), soft skills (Eraut 2004), interconnectivity and complexity (Antonacopoulou, 2005), reflexivity, eclecticism and contextualisation (Nowotny et al, 2001) and dispositional and transdisciplinary knowledge (Scott et al, 2004).

The relationship between learning and knowledge that exists in work-based courses, relative to more conventional university courses, features the kinds of knowledge generated in practice. Knowledge production driven by 'real world' imperatives is prioritised differently in these different sites. This practice-based focus involves a new or broader epistemology that draws on both tacit and academic knowledge where may not be particularly relevant to distinguish between types of knowledge but where a more detailed recognition of the relationships between teaching and learning which this engenders can be usefully developed.

Work and learning is conceptualised as taking place in sites where knowledge is shared and created as 'activity' that is part of the 'knowledge society' and so becomes an organic entity capable of learning and adaptation in its own right. Writing, therefore, in WBL is for a range of discourse communities using a variety of inscriptive practices as an alternative to writing essays, dissertations and so on only for the academic community. WBL accredits professional knowledge as well as academic knowledge (Armsby et al 2005), has pedagogies that embrace sites of learning that are outside universities (Boud and Costley 2007) and uses generic criteria to assess the quality of the work (Costley and Armsby 2006).

There is a growing body of both literature on the nature of knowledge and WBL's approach to its accumulation, transformation, fusion and application. Scott et al (2004) analyse the integration of professional and academic knowledge and set out the requirements for knowledge work which leads to a call for universities to widen their epistemological perspectives and embrace new forms of knowledge construction. Boud (2001) addresses the capacity of WBL across the curriculum to be a new way of organising and learning in the academy that does not arise directly from disciplinary frameworks.

Such positioning involves WBL in the whole notion of values because the outcomes of student learning are purposeful and useful to a practice context and concern the more 'social', vocationally oriented knowledge that incorporates utilitarian demands within its focus. This concept has become a cause for concern due to the arrival of new players such as work-based learners with new interests and ideas about knowledge. The balance of academic authority in relation to these different, more professionally focused interests and values varies within different universities' programmes.

The value of 'social ability' that has more purposeful ends can be seen as an alternative or an addition to the 'cultural' value of academic autonomy which is to seek truth for its own sake. New knowledge alliances with differing interests often connected to work therefore have 'values' implications that may change the rank order of established values.

Practitioners (from the student body and sometimes university tutors) form connections through partnerships, personal and professional relationships, economic imperatives and other reasons that are based on common knowledge conceptions. This professional view which is seen to prioritise the question of purpose and consequences of knowledge also involves values because there is always an immediate engagement with the views and needs of others. Bleiklie and Byrkjeflot (2002) use the term 'utility oriented knowledge' and identify that the more conventional scientific approach involves truth and merit whilst a socially responsible approach veers more to ethical and utility principles. So, whilst knowledge production can be argued as being led by a relationship between meaning and truth, the knowledge application that is crucial for WBL programmes centres around ethics and utility. A wider concept of the knowledge sphere as considered in WBL may reflexively engage with academic and socially responsible principles. Some values have been found to be in trust and care (Costley et al 2010) and gratitude (Gibbs 2009).

Challenges have been made to this wider concept of knowledge such as doubts about any knowledge production that does not align itself easily within a subject discipline with the conventional assurances of depth and rigour or how, in the context of Mode-2 society with its breakdown of traditional notions of objectivity and validity, can knowledge be said to have a sound epistemological basis and be reliable. Another concern is that changes in the so called knowledge economy are behind the change to more professionally oriented degrees which are more about enterprise than education (Tennant 2004) resulting in discourses from a business-oriented focus influencing WBL in a way that prioritises entrepreneurial success over more worthy attributes.

The concerns need to be addressed whilst the wider knowledge connections and the values that emerge, in themselves arise from a multiplicity of contexts and approaches. The customary practice of teaching a body of knowledge that is then learned is only a small proportion of the value that can be shared between universities and various communities and individuals. WBL seeks the knowledge of professional contexts informed by a more wide-ranging knowledge of the area. This engagement creates differing sets of values with differing priorities which contribute to knowledge production and application. It enhances rather than reduces social ability and contributes to knowledge from which everyone can benefit.

The findings suggest that the widening concept of knowledge is put into a professional context and that WBL provides a way of addressing knowledge that is to an extent outside of disciplinary cultures and can offer a fresh view of values that has resonance with practice and engages higher education more coherently with learning at work.

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**Key words**

Values, work-based learning, knowledge, practice