Professional and Practice-based Learning

Volume 13

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Professional and practice-based learning brings together international research on the individual development of professionals and the organisation of professional life and educational experiences. It complements the Springer journal *Vocations and Learning: Studies in vocational and professional education.*

Professional learning, and the practice-based processes that often support it, are the subject of increased interest and attention in the fields of educational, psychological, sociological, and business management research, and also by governments, employer organisations and unions. This professional learning goes beyond, what is often termed professional education, as it includes learning processes and experiences outside of educational institutions in both the initial and ongoing learning for the professional practice. Changes in these workplaces requirements usually manifest themselves in the everyday work tasks, professional development provisions in educational institution decrease in their salience, and learning and development during professional activities increase in their salience.

There are a range of scientific challenges and important foci within the field of professional learning. These include:

- understanding and making explicit the complex and massive knowledge that is required for professional practice and identifying ways in which this knowledge can best be initially learnt and developed further throughout professional life.
- analytical explications of those processes that support learning at an individual and an organisational level.
- understanding how learning experiences and educational processes might best be aligned or integrated to support professional learning.

The series integrates research from different disciplines: education, sociology, psychology, amongst others. The series is comprehensive in scope as it not only focusses on professional learning of teachers and those in schools, colleges and universities, but all professional development within organisations.

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Integrating Practice-based Experiences into Higher Education

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This book is dedicated to Alison Lee Jackson, whose support, companionship and warmth has sustained the completion of this publication.

Series Editors' Introduction

A central focus for this book series is on the learning of the capacities required for effective professional practice, and the role experiences in workplace settings contribute to that development. Consequently, a volume that focuses on both the processes of students' learning professional knowledge and how experiences in practice-based settings and their contributions can be utilised and integrated into that learning is quite central to the scope and ambitions of this series. As such this volume makes a welcome contribution. In the author notes, there has been a considerable increase in the interest in higher education programmes that prepare graduates for specific forms of occupational practice. Once reserved for just a few occupations, such as medicine, legal studies, teaching and more recently other healthcare occupations, the demand now is that not only are increasing numbers of higher education programmes focusing specifically on occupations but that these programmes need to include students having periods of experience in the kinds of settings where those occupations are practised. Yet, these changes set within others, such as the increase in the scale of higher education and broader participation. These make the challenge of providing and utilising experiences in workplace settings demanding and, are in some ways, at odds with preferred approaches to the mass teaching of higher education students.

All this interest and emphasis lead to central questions about how quality higher education experiences that include interludes in practice settings can be best managed. Part of the issues to be addressed is the way in which higher education is conceptualised and delivered and the orthodoxies of how students' learning should progress. However, student placements in workplaces, their organisation and ordering and how those experiences might be augmented become new and important challenges for higher education institutions and those teaching within them. Yet, in addressing these questions, existing and emerging insights from educational and learning theory offer some ways forward, particularly when the focus is placed upon the provision of experiences and their experiencing by students. Indeed, such a consideration of higher education provisions cannot rely upon the projection and transmission of content alone. In particular, a strong focus is placed on students'

processes of learning and how they come to engage with the variety of experiences that comprise their programmes and also how they reconcile their experiences and the learning that arises from them.

Hence, this volume is both timely and welcomed. It draws upon to teaching fellowships that engaged a large number of individuals teaching in higher education, their projects and the particular issues they were seeking to resolve through their participation in these studies. So, in many ways, the contents of this book are particularly well grounded in the contemporary experience of higher education practice, albeit within one country. Drawing upon experiences and outcomes from a total of 25 projects across two major teaching fellowships, it engages with well-understood and accepted educational concepts and then utilises these to advance a view about how higher education students' practice-based experiences might be organised and enacted, and then students experiencing of them might be optimised to achieve the kinds of learning outcomes which those activities are directed towards. To do this, it requires a reconsideration of what constitutes the goals for higher education and how these kinds of goals are manifested when the concerns are about the provision and integration of experiences in practice settings within the students' programmes. Hence, the chapters that discuss these purposes are important in setting up considerations for what is an intentional process: higher education. Moreover, given that the concept of students having experiences and then integrating those experiences into their educational programmes is one characterised by complexity, it is helpful that one chapter seeks to understand and elaborate what constitutes such integrations. Here, the author proposes these as means by which students come to reconcile the particular experiences they have had and direct those towards the intended educational goals. In this way, the focus is very much upon the learners and permits re-engagement with important precepts about individual learning and development.

In addition and importantly for guiding the higher educational project, other chapters outlined the overall findings of these two fellowships and then set out considerations about curriculum, pedagogies and also students' personal epistemologies and how these might be engaged with and developed further. In this way, the book seeks to offer a conceptually founded account that is ultimately shaped by the findings of the 25 projects undertaken across and through a range of disciplines across a number of Australian universities. However, the findings here are not wholly restricted to those projects, institutions or programmes. There are a range of discussions, propositions and sets of practices and principles that will hopefully be helpful in guiding the use of practice-based experiences within higher education far more widely.

Regensburg, Germany — Hans Gruber
Paderborn, Germany — Christian Harteis
Queensland, Australia — Stephen Billett
April 2015

Preface

Put plainly, this book is about how higher education students' experiences in practice settings (i.e. workplaces) can be most effectively utilised and integrated with those in educational settings to assist these students most effectively learn the kind of occupational capacities they will need to be competent in their selected occupations upon graduation. Experiences in practice settings are now essential for those programmes preparing students for specific occupational outcomes. This book seeks to advise about those experiences and how they might be most effectively utilised and integrated.

Provision and Integration of Work Experiences

There is a growing trend for higher educational provisions to be more closely aligned with practice-based experiences to secure the kinds of knowledge required for employment in specific occupations. In doing so, these educational provisions are expected to meet national goals of supporting employability and a skilled workforce, workplace requirements for effective employees and also students' personal goals associated with occupational outcomes, including securing and sustaining employment and achieving advancement. These imperatives are usually manifested in higher educational programmes now increasingly being focused on outcomes that are related to students' employability upon graduation, i.e. enjoying a smooth transition to work, being effective in their selected occupation and having the kinds of capacities and interests to sustain that employment and secure advancement in working life. To address these expectations educationally, it is necessary to provide students with experiences through which they can generate the capacities needed to secure employment, be effective within it and also adapt to the changing work requirements and, possibly, new occupations across working lives. In doing so, not only are individuals' needs being addressed but also those of their workplaces, and through being employed productively, those individuals make contributions to national well-being.

Although not always wholly aligned, these three sets of interrelated imperatives have broadly similar emphases. Whilst broadly economic in focus, that is, serving goals of efficiency and effectiveness within paid employment, and developing and sustaining effective occupational capacities, such goals also have social and societal implications. That is, much of these capacities are enacted in providing services which humans either need or want. So beyond personal benefits and enterprise sustainability, these capacities also serve a range of societal and human needs. We want competent nurses, doctors, bakers, engineers, etc. Consequently, the development of these capacities goes beyond the immediate employability of graduates, and sustaining workplace viability, they also can meet the needs of those whom their skills serve. So, these educational goals extend to outcomes that many would agree are broadly worthwhile and socially productive.

Perhaps this has always been the case. That is, what is taught in schools, colleges and universities has long been directly or indirectly focussed on occupational purposes. However, at this time, it seems that realising these purposes has become a greater and urgent imperative in ways that are directing and focusing the provisions of schooling and tertiary education across a range of countries. The provisions are increasingly focussed on specific occupations, and their educational processes and outcomes are directed to those purposes. These imperatives likely arise in countries across the world, particularly those with advanced industrial economies, as they respond to changing requirements for productivity and effective work practices in the face of constant changes to occupations and work requirements and the globalisation of economic activities and the press for greater efficiencies that are impacting both the public and the private sector enterprises. Added to this is the massification of higher education, which is being seen increasingly as being the sector that can fulfil the expectations of securing good, secure and worthwhile employment for its graduates. Consequently, the kinds of direct pressure, expectation and mandates that have long been demanded of vocational education systems in many countries are now being applied to provisions of higher education.

It follows that, across most advanced industrial economies, programmes in higher education institutions are now sometimes viewed as being providers of ‘higher vocational education’. With this change have come expectations that students will come to possess the range and kinds of experiences that can secure them employment. Included here is a growing educational emphasis on providing students with access to and engagement in authentic instances of practice (i.e. workplaces) and consideration for how these experiences and what is learnt from them can be effectively integrated with those provided in the university-based components of their higher education programmes and directed towards the outcomes outlined above. Accordingly, university teachers and higher education institutions across a widening range of disciplines and fields of study are being asked to organise experiences in practice-based settings for their students and also to find ways of integrating students’ experiences and learning in both settings into the overall curriculum of their university courses. The interest in providing these practice-based experiences appears to have arisen, in part, from the realisation that the kinds

of experiences that can be provided in the academy alone will be insufficient for developing the kind and range of capacities students need to realise the goal of moving smoothly into practice upon graduation.

Yet, all of these expectations and requirements are difficult to respond to comprehensively and to fulfil. They are tough educational goals. Indeed, it is difficult to identify a time or circumstance in which the higher education provision has been asked to address these kinds of goals. Consequently, it is certainly necessary to identify and understand the kinds of educational purposes that are now being requested and how these might be achieved through the use of practice-based experiences and how they can best be integrated into the overall sets of student experiences in the university programmes and also in the scope and extent of mass provisions of higher education. Certainly, the achievement of these kinds of goals likely requires a range of changes in (i) understandings about and practices within higher education learning experiences, (ii) the reappraisal of the worth of work settings as circumstances for learning, (iii) the kinds of knowledge that can be learnt and (iv) also the emphasis on learning over teaching. These requirements extend to how students engage in higher education provisions and how teachers offer experiences, universities' provisions and ordering of experiences. Understanding and implementing experiences for their students in both university and practice settings are central to achieving these kinds of purposes.

This book is, in part, a response to all these emerging demands by drawing upon the scholarship of learning and teaching. Specifically, also it draws upon the processes and outcomes of twenty-five teaching and learning projects that were enacted across a total of seven Australian universities undertaken within two teaching and learning fellowships (Billett 2009, 2011). These fellowships sought to identify principles and practices associated with the effective implementation of work-based learning experiences for students across a range of academic areas and how these experiences could be effectively integrated into the students' programmes to achieve the desired kinds of outcomes set out above. A key concern for these fellowships was to identify the worth of these educational purposes and processes for realising the effective integration of these work experiences. A guiding purpose for these fellowships, and the project work they comprised, was to identify sets of curriculum and pedagogic practices that could be enacted by busy university teachers and would not require significant infrastructure and high levels of continuing investment to provide and sustain such experiences.

Yet, and in addition, the particular emphasis on learning in and across these two settings necessarily means that, beyond a consideration of curriculum and pedagogic practices, it is essential to also account for how students need to engage in activities when engaging in practice-based experiences and integrating what they have learnt so that it is directed towards their educational purposes. Hence, a consideration of students' epistemological actions in terms of how they engage in learning in these practice settings and then reconcile and integrate their experiences within higher education programmes became necessary. In short, the case made within and across the contents of this book is essentially directed towards these sets of educational

purposes, processes and outcomes, that is, arguing a case for what constitutes the goals for the integration of these experiences; how best they might be enacted before, during and after students engage in practice settings; for the development of both curriculum and pedagogic practices that can support these kinds of educational activities; and what kind of epistemological practices students need to possess and enact to realise an effective reconciliation of their experiences across the university programmes.

It follows, therefore, that set out across this book are the considerations for the educational worth of these kinds of activities, what they constitute and how best they might be enacted and appraised. Although the practical enquiries which underpin this book took place in one country (i.e. Australia) and its higher education system, it is anticipated that the discussions within it and the proposed approaches will be applicable to higher education audiences across the world. Certainly, the conceptual issues and bases for understanding these learning and teaching processes seem unlikely to be restricted to this country.

Queensland, Australia Stephen Billett
May 2015

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The first of these two fellowships was an Associate Fellowship entitled *Developing agentic professionals through practice-based pedagogies*, which was auspiced by the ALTC after the closure of the Carrick Institute. It comprised five subprojects, and the participants worked effectively individually and collectively to make possible the fellowship activities and outcomes. This included the trialling and evaluating of an approach to academic professional development (i.e. nondirective guidance) and the identification of tentative practices associated with developing students as agentic learners. These participants were Liz Molloy, Jenny Newton, Brian Jolly and Jenny Keating (Monash University), Pauline Glover and Linda Sweet (Flinders University) and Jennifer Cartmel, Jane Thomson, Marie Cook and Marion Mitchell (Griffith University). The three universities that supported the fellowship activities (Monash University, Flinders University and Griffith University) directly contributed to the success of this fellowship. Fourthly, Griffith University's direct support of the activities of the fellowship was instrumental in realising its outcomes. Professor Amanda Henderson (Queensland Health) provided support as an independent evaluator of the fellowship activities.

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