

# Learner as worker, worker as learner: new challenges for education and training

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# Overview

- Changes in organisations, work practices and worker identities
- Understanding workplaces to be important sites of learning
- Lifelong learning and employability discourses
- Changes within education and changes in its relationship with industry sector
- Research on relationship between work and learning
- Pedagogical challenges for the explosives curriculum

# Changing work environments

- A new kind of workforce is needed for work environments in a new economy
- Different kinds of organisations (both larger multinational and smaller companies proliferating)
- Work practices differ with increased responsibilities spread across levels and types of occupations
- Workplaces require new kinds of people with new knowledge, skills and dispositions
- Workers are asked to bring more of themselves to work and invest more of themselves in work (du Gay 1996).

# Changing workforce

- Changing employment patterns (eg only half the Australian workforce is in permanent full-time work)
- Aging population – declining birthrate and later retirement age
- Workers are more mobile, traditional career pathways are breaking down, with job & career changes within and across countries an increasing aspect of working lives

# Changing place of learning

- Learning is understood to be central to ability to increase productivity, innovation and competitiveness in complex social & economic environments (Ellstrom 2001)
- Through learning, issues of social equity, cohesion, citizenship and cultural development can be addressed in complex globalising world (Larsen and Istance 2001)
- Government policies take these up and **lifelong learning** has become a rationale and integrating goal for education and training sectors (UNESCO 2002)

# Changing education systems

- Engagement with employers re course content, site of learning, cost of learning
- Authenticity and Relevance
- Employment and employability skills
- Not just prepared for work but work-ready
- Most FE and HE students (even full-time ones) are also workers

# Employability

- *Employability* skills (generic skills, key skills), include:  
*communication skills, problem solving skills, self-initiation skills, flexibility, team work, ongoing learning skills, critical thinking, enterprising*
- Driven by a keen interest in connecting FE/HE with 'real' employment skills, and thus connecting with knowledge economy agendas
- Rises above subject/context specificity, and relates to processes/actions for gaining employment, for career planning and for getting work things done
- Involves discrete curriculum and pedagogic attention, such as in e-portfolios
- Invites employability connections with subject areas?

# Employability as identity work

- OECD report (2003) 'education places more emphasis on the complete transformation of individuals....and.....focus(es) more directly on ways of transforming professional and social identities.'
- This focus on transformation and identity promotes the view that contemporary education should concentrate as much upon constructing the characteristics, identity and orientations of the person as on work skills and knowledge as more traditionally understood.
- This shift from skills to personal characteristics, attributes and attitudes suggests focus on worker/student identity
- Pressure on HE to provide employers with evidence that the students are acquiring the right social and personal skills.

# Work-based & Work-related learning

- Again driven by relationship between education and work, and need for FE/HE to be intimately linked to organisational and work practices
- Works with (rather than rises above) context specificity, and located within situated learning theories

# Consequences

- Significant changes in education re its role and practices
- Pedagogy is more learner-centred, work-centred and attribute focused (Chappell et al 2003)
- A rethinking of 'what is a learning context' in order to capture various learning sites and learning technologies

# Researching work and learning

- Uncovering Everyday Learning at Work  
*In-between spaces, naming of worker as learner*  
*Organisational competence (systems and communication) as well as individual competence*
- Changing Work, Changing Workers, Changing Selves: a study of pedagogies in the new vocationalism  
*Work pedagogies, Minding the gap, Reality bites*
- Personalisation of learning using digital artefacts *Given learning and learners are becoming more mobile as people move across boundaries, we need an understanding of context and learning that engages with activities and the relationships of people, of people and their artefacts, and of people and places*

# Progression through stages of knowledge and learning

## **Complexity of knowing**

Descriptive → Functional → Explanatory → Critical knowledge  
(knowing that) → (knowing how) → (knowing why) → (knowing differently/reflexively)

## **Degree of specificity**

Context-specific → transferable/generalisable  
Concrete → abstract

## **Complexity of learning**

Single to multiple sources of knowledge  
Single to multiple approaches of problem solving  
Individual work to collaborative work

## **Complexity of textual product**

Description → Report → Instruction → Explanation → Discussion → Exposition

## **Complexity of being**

Student → Worker  
**Learner-Worker → Worker-learner-researcher (lifelong)**

# Education and training for the explosive sector

- Relationship of workplaces with educators and curriculum
- Working knowledge
- Changing work practices are a knowledge/skills and learning issue
- But what is critical is that workplaces have systems in place that not only support ongoing learning but also provide safeguards for human and communication errors/failings