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Integrating work-based learning into academic awards: Challenges and benefits
Integrating WBL into academic awards

• Term Work-Based Learning (WBL) used very broadly to encompass: NVQs, ‘old’ WBL within specific disciplines, ‘new’ WBL which is transdisciplinary etc

• Focus here is ‘new’ WBL:
  Boud (2001): ‘the programme followed derives from the needs of the workplace and the learner rather than being controlled or framed by the disciplinary or professional curriculum: work is the curriculum’
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- Experiential WBL is different in nature to formal abstract learning
- Dominant HE paradigm predicated on cognitive approach – socialisation into academic discipline values abstract theoretical knowledge
- Emphasis in ‘new’ WBL and in current pedagogic discourse is on direct action/experience as basis for learning e.g. Lave and Wenger’s situated learning, Wenger’s communities of practice, Dewey’s experiential learning, Knowles’ andragogy
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- Also discussion of different types of knowledge:
  - Biggs: Declarative, process, conditional, functioning knowledge – latter is performance knowledge
  - Jarvis: practical knowledge is integrated knowledge – it can include knowing that, when, what, how and why

From these perspectives an examination is a decontextualised assessment when what is necessary is ‘performance’ assessment e.g. critical incident analysis, presentations, vivas etc
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- Dewey: experience = basis for all learning but not all experience is educational
- Programme Designer needs to select experiences that ‘live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences’
- Usher: need to counterpose experience with something that is not experience to ensure appropriate learning (= role of academic theory)
- Often a process of theoretically informed critical reflection is used here
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- This fuses a formal approach with an ‘informal’ experience
- Eraut: not possible to distinguish between formal and informal learning clearly (?hidden curriculum)
- Highly unlikely that specific subject content will be found in experiential learning unless it is designed to be there
- Reflection on experience usually focuses partly on thinking about process
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• Challenges for academics?

• In programme design need to decide desired balance between content and process, and identify the role of theory and critical reflection in an experience-driven programme

• Need to be clear that want students to use experiential learning models

• Facilitation of learning requires different skills to those used when lecturing: need to be able to support, guide and challenge (skills commonly used in supervision)
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- Benefits for learners?
  - More appropriate for mature people who are competent professionals – learners working and identify selves as workers
  - More collaborative – learners learn how to know rather than being told precisely what to know
  - Provides a real intellectual challenge that is directly relevant
  - Alerts learners to the social creation of knowledge in the workplace
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• References:

Biggs, J. (2001) Teaching for Quality Learning at University
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References (contd)


