BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE

The role of the educator in Work-Integrated Learning

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THE CHALLENGE FOR WIL

• Experience-based learning can be a powerful educational tool – *if it is done right*

• Too often – at least in the States – it is *not* done right

• Our challenge: to *add value* to the learning process
THE PERFECT STORM OF MEDIOCRITY

• The student wants a foot in the door of a career, contacts leading toward a possible job

• The employer wants a source of cheap labor, and a reliable recruitment mechanism

• The school wants to look progressive and to accommodate families’ concerns about employment

• Who is concerned about education and learning?
PROBLEMATIZING INTEGRATION

• Example:
  • Student taking Organizational Sociology, reading Weber on bureaucracy
  • Same student doing internship at NYC Department of Education
  • Issue: How do the two experiences intersect?

• Assumption: that knowledge in school maps neatly onto knowledge in the workplace, that the two forms of knowing complement one another

• Argument: that the relationship is more complex than that

• Unpacking the *rhetoric of application*
RESPONSIBILITIES OF EDUCATORS: OVERVIEW

• Understand situated curriculum and pedagogy
• Build effective curriculum and pedagogy back at school
• Promote change in higher education
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

• Not Platonic idealism, Cartesian rationalism, or behaviorism
• Pragmatism: Peirce, James, Dewey
• Constructivism: Piaget, Bruner
• Sociocultural studies and activity theory: Vygotsky, Engestrom
• Social practice theory
  • Situated cognition: JS Brown, Cole, Scribner, Resnick
  • Distributed cognition: Salamon, Perkins
  • Situated learning: Lave and Wenger
• Critical theory: Freire, Frankfurt School, Giroux
THEORETICAL PREMISES

• Learning is an active process of constructing meaning
• Knowing and thinking are embedded in social and cultural contexts
• Learning depends on getting access to the use of knowledge
• Teaching is not a matter of telling people something, but of engaging them in activities that demand knowledge of that thing
RESPONSIBILITY 1: UNDERSTANDING SITUATED LEARNING

• Situated curriculum: the knowledge-in-use in a particular context (e.g., a workplace)
  • May be about facts, processes, relationships, language, power, ethics, worldviews, etc.: socio-cognitive task demands
  • Structured in logic and use

• Situated pedagogy: the social organization of the process by which people encounter and engage situated knowledge
  • How tasks get established, accomplished, and processed
  • Access features of the context
OBSERVATIONS ABOUT WORKPLACES AS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

• Situated curriculum is not always what you think it will be
  • Intern’s position may be marginal, knowledge-use constrained
  • Much of the knowledge-use is distributed across members and technologies
  • Access to knowledge is driven by production needs rather than by pedagogical reason

• Situated pedagogy varies unpredictably across contexts
  • Variety of strategies and tactics: sink-or-swim, front-loaded instruction, etc
  • No regular, logical relationship between curriculum and pedagogy: newcomers don’t always get what the task or role requires
FACTORS IN SITUATED LEARNING

• Features of the individuals
  • Personality, learning style, background, previous knowledge

• Features of the organizational context
  • Division of labor, workplace culture, access characteristics

• Features of the larger environment
  • Regulations and labor laws, market conditions, technology changes
UTILITY OF KNOWING FEATURES OF THE SITUATED LEARNING

• Placement
  • Locating, developing, rejecting sites
  • Matching students with placements
• Planning the curriculum and pedagogy back at school
  • Knowing where the onsite strengths and gaps are
  • Integrating the field and the classroom
RESPONSIBILITY 2: DESIGNING EFFECTIVE PROGRAM BACK AT SCHOOL

- Resisting easy assumptions about the relationship between workplace knowledge and academic knowledge
  - Where they are complementary, synergistic; where they are different, contradictory
  - Understanding different modes of thought
    - Bruner: propositional/linear/scientific; actional; narrative

- Examining content and sequence
  - Does the work experience “cover” all the relevant knowledge?
  - Does the student encounter knowledge in an effective sequence?

- Considering *transfer of learning* problem
OPPORTUNITIES IN WORK/SCHOOL DIFFERENCE

• Exploiting the paradox of the student-worker role
  • Asking “stupid questions”

• Promoting reflection – before, during, and after action
  • Thinking hard, but more than that
  • Interrogating experience in relation to academic ideas
  • Critiquing experience, situations, larger processes and forces

• Helping students become *reflective practitioners*
PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS: EXAMPLES

• Learning contract
• Journal
• Guided assignment
• Final paper
• Concurrent seminar
POLITICS OF WIL: A SPECTRUM OF CHOICES

- **Vocational education**: teach students knowledge they need to perform existing jobs
- **Liberal education**: teach students that knowledge *plus* its connection to academic theories, ethics, etc.
- **Critical pedagogy**: teach students those things *plus* how to critique social and political institutions they work in, larger patterns of power and privilege, race, class, gender
RESPONSIBILITY 3: PROMOTING CHANGE IN THE ACADEMY

• Foster more expansive conceptions of “knowledge”
  • Not just abstract, theoretical, produced by “authorities” (epistemé)
  • Not just technical, practical, generated by “experts” (techné)
  • Also understanding of ethics, politics, practical reason (phronesis,
  
• Promote more collaborative relations between students and faculty

• Create a new relationship between the academy and the wider community and world
  • Reject university’s monopoly on knowledge production
  • Become a forum for collaborative inquiry and action across sectors

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THANK YOU!

• For this opportunity to share my ideas with you
• For sharing your ideas with me

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