

RWL 2009

Symposium abstracts

Professions and professionalization

Bioinformatics: challenges of training and practice in an emerging field

Author: Janet Atkinson-Grosjean, University of British Columbia,
janetat@interchange.ubc.ca

Bioinformatics is classically understood as the use of computational and mathematical methods to solve issues in molecular biology. A broader definition recognizes bioinformatics as a property of the convergence of large-scale biosciences and ICTs in the post-genomic era. The accelerated production of raw biological data has increased the need for computational techniques and systems that can manage, collect, store, analyze, manipulate, and interpret vast datasets of genomic information and molecular pathways. Harnessed together in bioinformatics, new tools make it possible to generate new scientific insights from raw data. In order to arrive at such insights, however, those who practice bioinformatics must constantly negotiate the challenges of disciplinary heterogeneity and jurisdictional expansion. By heterogeneity we mean the disciplinary and cultural diversity characteristic of large-scale research teams; such teams need to forge common goals which transcend these boundaries. By jurisdictional expansion we refer to the boundary-work through which bioinformatics competes with biology and computer science for control of knowledge stocks.

The case of bioinformatics drives home the reality that intellectual niches or ecosystems are not permanent but evolve alongside the scientific projects in which agents are embedded. Bioinformatics has become such an essential component of scientific work that this hybrid of biological and computational knowledge stocks has emerged as its own skill set. Thus, a struggle ensues to demarcate the territory of bioinformatics and capture the rights to regulate this knowledge base. Examination of the ways in which new bioinformaticians are trained and certified may help define whether the skill-set is deemed academic, professional, or technical. This social process of occupation creation occurs through the establishment of qualifications, enactment of governing bodies, and a system of qualifying amateurs giving prestige and position to individuals with this knowledge stock. As bioinformatics continues to be an essential aspect of biological research, we begin to recognize the unique migration of agents whose career development trajectories function at the crossroads of multiple institutional and intellectual intersections.

This paper describes our study of the training and practice of bioinformaticians within a large-scale research network. We argue that the processes through which bioinformatics informs biological research signals a change, first, in approaches to biological research (e.g. from "wet" to "dry") and second, in the skill-sets that future researchers must develop to frame and answer biological questions. We argue that examining the impact of emerging fields and professions, such as bioinformatics, may challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about scientific training and careers.

Conceptions of the Work and Roles of the Accounting Profession in the 21st Century from the Experiences of Practitioners

Author: Samantha Sin, Macquarie University, ssin@efs.mq.edu.au

Co-authors: Anna Reid, Macquarie University, anna.reid@mq.edu.au
Lars Owe Dahlgren, Linköping University, larda@ibv.liu.se

This study investigates the conceptions of accounting work from the perspective of practitioners by exploring their experiences of practice. The purpose of the study is to provide an inclusive description of the scope and aspects of accounting work from the most relevant source – practitioners.

The findings can be utilised by employers for human resource management, mentoring and professional development programs. The findings also complement the findings of another study that investigates student conceptions of accounting work. The combined findings can be used as direct inputs for developing a curriculum whose learning objective is to change and align students' conceptions of accounting work with the scope of work and expectations in professional practice.

The scope of work in the accounting profession has been expanding. This has motivated the competency movement which essentially is the response of employers to encourage curriculum developers to move towards a skill-based curriculum. A typical accounting curriculum now consists of both content and generic skills components. However, the literature has critiqued the limitation of focusing on skill development to prepare students for a complex and uncertain future of work.

Sandberg (2000) found that competence at work is not constituted by knowledge and skills but by the conception of the work. Brown and McCartney (1995) argued that actions require knowledge, skills and a developed understanding of the essential functions of accounting. Competency thus extends beyond knowledge and skills. In accounting, a developed understanding of the extent and functions of accounting work have been identified as relevant. Thus this study asks the following question:

What are practitioners' conceptions of accounting work in practice?

Accounting work is complex. Practitioners' conceptions are expected to vary depending on: their field, expertise and training levels, years in the profession, position level and their personal experiences. The phenomenographic method is chosen because it is able to uncover variations of conception by exploring people's experiences and then interpreting conceptions.

The 18 participants comprise: male and female at different position levels and have various years of experience. They were chosen from auditing, business/investment consulting services, public accounting, public sector, corporate accounting, management accounting, financial services and tax. The findings will be used in a curriculum that aims at developing student conceptions of work that are more inclusive and in alignment with the expectations and realities of work in the profession.

Brown, R., and S. McCartney. 1995. Competence is not enough: Meta-competence and accounting education. *Accounting Education* 4 (1):43-53.

Sandberg, J. 2000. Understanding human competence at work: an interpretative approach. *Academy of Management Journal* 43 (1):9-25.

Danish student teachers' identity processes

Author: Marete Asmussen, Roskilde University, smma@ruc.dk

This paper outlines and discuss the methodological design of a Phd project focussing on Danish student teachers and their experiences of their professional development during their education. The purpose of the Phd project is to explore the interplay of Danish student teachers' perceptions of the role of the teacher, their experiences of the classes and the training in general, and their subjective identification/orientation towards the teacher profession. The paper presents some theoretical considerations on learning and identity and subjectivity and discuss the methodical implications for a empirical research design combining observations on two teachers' colleges and narrative life historical interviews with student teachers. Finally, the paper introduces some preliminary thoughts of analysis on a narrative life historical interview with a student teacher and her experiences of theory and practice in the education and the influences on her future orientation towards becoming a teacher. The project was initiated in April 2008 and is at the moment in the phase of conducting the interviews at the first teachers' college. Observations and interviews at the second college will be started up by August 2009, based on a preliminary analysis of observations and interviews at the first college and based on the discussion of strengths and weaknesses of the empirical design in this symposium. The discussion about the empirical design presented in this paper can therefore be viewed as an invitation to engage in discussion of how to explore student teachers learning processes during their education.

Does education foster professional commitment?

Author: Kåre Heggen, Volda university college and Oslo university college,
khe@hivolda.no

Co-authors: Lars Inge Terum, Oslo University college, LarsInge.Terum@hio.no

Two different views run through the literature of professional education. The tradition from Parsons sees professional education as qualification, where higher education is understood as an important arena for preparation for professional practice. In contrast with this it is possible to identify a tradition from Weber, which has emphasized certification as the main purpose of professional education (Collins 1990, Lave and Wenger 1991). The starting point of this paper is based on the assumption that professional education is not only a question of certification, but also qualification. In this view fostering of motivation, dedication and commitment seems to become essential elements of professional training.

In this paper we want to study how professional education could be organized to foster professional commitment, and how it could support students' development of motivation for professional work and identifying with working fields and other professionals (Salling Olesen 2004). The paper intends to examine and outline some important conditions for the development of professional commitment:

Practical synthesis deals with the content of the professional education and whether students experience a relation between the theoretical content of education and the working field and practical challenges (Grimen 2008). Student/peer interaction deals with the organisation of the education and whether students' cooperation and support in the qualifying process is experienced as important conditions. Teacher-student interaction has to do with the teachers' competence, but also how students experience their support and engagement through the study. Supervising interaction deals with the element and volume of systematic supervision from experienced professionals through the qualifying process and how supervision is experienced of newly educated persons in order to build professionals (Rønnestad and Orlinsky 2005).

To examine the connections between these factors about qualities of the professional education and professional commitment, we will analyse data from a big survey (StudData) organized by Centre for the study of professions (CSP) at Oslo University College since 2000. It is a survey following students and professionals in different professional educations and from different colleges in Norway from they are novice students until several years after they finished their education. In the paper we will compare students from three programmes: primary school teachers, nurses and social workers. Correlation and regression analysis will be used in this comparison.

The paper will be proposed by:

Professor Kåre Heggen and professor Lars Inge Terum, both of them connected to Centre for the study of professions, Oslo University College and Volda University College

Learning about professional self among vocational teachers

Author: Katja Vähäsantanen, University of Jyväskylä, katja.vahasantanen@jyu.fi

This paper focuses on analysing and discussing learning about professional self among vocational teachers. Recent studies in the area of workplace learning have suggested that learning is not solely as a matter of acquiring knowledge, developing professional competency or accumulating abilities and skills; it is also seen as related to individuals' professional identities, subjectivities and sense of self (Billett, Fenwick & Somerville, 2006; Billett, Harteis & Eteläpelto, 2008). Nevertheless, we still have only a limited understanding of workers' learning about their professional selves. The present study therefore aims to investigate vocational teachers' learning about professional selves within the constraints and opportunities of work practices. Learning at work is seen as the process and outcome of a relational interdependence between individuals and the social practices that comprise their workplace (Billett & Smith, 2006). The data were obtained by interviewing sixteen Finnish vocational teachers in 2006 and re-interviewing fourteen of them in 2007. The interviews were analysed via narrative approaches.

The findings showed that among the vocational teachers, learning about professional self was intertwined with both daily work activities and major events during their careers, such as career changes into teaching, burn out situations, educational reforms, and organisational changes. The learning processes about professional self were individually and emotionally imbued. These learning processes involved that the teachers perceived their professional identities, agencies, competencies, and personal resources in relation to constraints and opportunities of work practices. Based on their perceptions, the teachers decided how to engage with work practices and to commit to work. On the one hand, this kind of learning seemed to lead to a less involved approach to work, to leaving from organisation, or to the decision to take sabbatical leave, when there was a tension between individual requirements and social affordances. On the other hand, the teachers were strongly committed to their work and enthusiastically engaged with their work practices, when they perceived a balance between the individual and the social. Based on these findings, the paper discusses how individuals' engagement with and commitment to their work can be supported. Furthermore, the paper thematises the nature of workplace learning.

References

Billett, S., Fenwick, T., & Somerville, M. (2006). (eds.). *Work, subjectivity and learning: Understanding learning through working life*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Billett, S., Harteis, C., & Eteläpelto, A. (2008). (eds.). *Emerging perspectives of workplace learning*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishing.

Billett, S., & Smith, R. (2006). Personal agency and epistemology at work. In S. Billett, T. Fenwick & M. Somerville (eds.) *Work, subjectivity and learning: Understanding learning through working life* (pp. 141-156). Dordrecht: Springer.

Learning in research work: The development of interpersonal communication competence in the work of researchers

Author: Anne Laajalahti, University of Jyväskylä, anne.laajalahti@jyu.fi

Interpersonal communication competence (ICC) is a core competence in contemporary working life (Morreale & Pearson, 2008). It also has an essential role in the work of researchers. In research work ICC is required, for instance, when taking part in scientific discussion, creating knowledge and publishing with other researchers, when giving presentations and establishing a social network, when meeting decision-makers, negotiating with funding bodies, and when popularising science (Laajalahti, 2008).

Overall, researchers encounter a wide variety of interpersonal communication situations in the course of their work. Nevertheless, little research has approached the work of researchers from the perspective of ICC. In addition, research into the development of ICC at work has been neglected, despite a fundamental need to understand how ICC develops and what kinds of learning experiences relate to that development in working life.

The aim of this paper is to explore the development of ICC in the work of researchers by examining researchers' learning experiences. The purpose is to analyse the qualitative dimensions of these experiences and to identify the ways and the circumstances in which ICC develops in research work. The research data consist of written responses collected from researchers (N=311) who were asked to describe their learning experiences related to ICC in their work. The data were collected in Finland from 7 government research institutes and 14 national centres of excellence in research. The free-response data covering these experiences and researchers' understanding of the subject were analysed inductively using qualitative content analysis (see e.g., Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000).

The research results illustrate the diversity of researchers' learning experiences and suggest that researchers' ICC develops at work in various ways (including both informal and formal aspects of learning). The findings show that researchers' ICC develops with many various actors (including other researchers, doctoral students, users of research, etc.) and that the development of ICC takes place in various circumstances (including international and multidisciplinary encounters). In addition, the results throw light on some basic aspects of researchers' learning experiences relating to ICC in their work (e.g., the presence of positive and negative feelings, the duration and location of experiences). In future, this understanding could be utilised in, for instance, developing formal communication education, research environments, and research training.

The paper is based on the preliminary results of the author's doctoral dissertation. The theoretical background is composed of the research traditions of ICC (knowledge, skills, and attitude which can be perceived as effective and appropriate in interaction; e.g., Greene & Burleson, 2003; Hargie, 2006; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002) and learning at work (esp. its informal, social, and experiential aspects; e.g., Boud & Middleton, 2003; Collin, 2005; Malcolm, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2003; Paloniemi, 2006; Wenger, 2000).

learning to be an architect: The office and the studio

Author: Sibyl Coldham, University of Westminster, s.coldham@westminster.ac.uk

In this paper I draw on research from a Department for Universities, Innovation & Skills (DIUS) funded project for development of practice-based learning study routes as a component of the fourth and fifth years of full-time Architecture education in the UK. The aims of the project were to develop curricula that would enable students to keep the benefits of full-time student status while working part-time and gaining some of their academic credit through practice-based learning, drawing on this paid work. Even though practising architects had been consulted as the project proposal developed, focus groups with practitioners as the project developed, revealed some deep concerns with the basis of the project. They saw part-time employees as problematic for the way their practices worked, and were concerned that students would not get valuable learning experiences while in the office on this basis. In addition, both the academics and the practitioners interviewed thought that practice-based learning was likely to compromise the quality of architecture graduates. In this paper I attempt to understand this rather surprising finding.

After setting out the context of the project, and of architecture practice and education in the UK, I use Wenger's (1998) concept of Communities of Practice as an heuristic to explore patterns of interaction and distance between these two groups, and consider the privileged position given to the academic design studio and its role in professional identity formation by these practising and academic architects.

Making Informal Learning Visible: Understanding and Improving Professional Practices of Respiratory Therapists

Author: John Bratton, Thompson Rivers University, jbratton@tru.ca

In recent years there has been a growing interest in examining the relationships between informal learning in organizations and the incidence of creativity and innovation. This paper reports on a study conducted in Canada on the processes of informal learning among a team of respiratory therapists at a hospital. The qualitative data were gathered using model building or the charrette. The method enabled the participants to engage in critical thinking, generate new ideas, and explore new ways of improving the delivery of respiratory care. Using the collaborative inquiry approach and with the help of an artist in residence, the therapists constructed an artefact that reflected their interpretation and meaning of respiratory practices, their understanding of knowledge building and knowledge sharing while working towards the development of new knowledge and professional practices. The paper discusses the preliminary findings including, the effect of this research on both the hospital and teaching/learning practices at the university training the respiratory therapists. The study illustrates the connections between informal learning, creativity and the innovation in respiratory care. In addition, it helped the participants to develop her or his professional knowledge and skills.

Modelling Professional Practice: An exploration of university teachers' intentions for introductory classes in professional fields

Author: Anna Reid, Macquarie University Sydney, anna.reid@mq.edu.au

Co-authors: Peter Petocz, Macquarie University, peter.petocz@mq.edu.au
Sue Gordon, University of Sydney, s.gordon@usyd.edu.au

Teaching in professional fields has major impact on students' understandings of their field and future work (Reid et al, 2008). While research often looks at the outcomes of formal learning – from assessment to employment, – there is very little research that explores the way that students are first introduced to a discipline area. Previously we have explored teachers' conceptions of teaching subjects where the subject is minor (but essential) in a broader program of study (Gordon et al, 2007). Such introductions make an important contribution to students' knowledge and professional expectations. To explore this issue, we interviewed a range of teachers from a variety of professional areas to investigate how they go about introducing their particular discipline. What are teachers' aims and what do they do in their first classes? How does teaching convey messages about what teachers see as important for an introductory subject? An analysis of responses indicates that a form of professional modelling may give students indications of how teachers conceive of the profession.

In this paper we develop a theory of teaching as it relates to introductory classes. Four themes have become apparent from our findings. Firstly, an academic theme, where teachers focus on discipline knowledge, sometimes using unit outlines as a catalyst, whilst introducing the language, ideas and representations underpinning academic discourse within the disciplinary area. Secondly, an apprenticeship theme, where teachers aim to give students practical experiences and understandings relating to their future practice. Here teachers identify skills, resources and activities that students could use in their future work and communication with other professionals. Thirdly, an affective theme focuses on students' themselves and interpersonal relationships, emphasising trust, anxiety reduction and engagement. In some cases, the affective theme includes physical activities, such as juggling, in the first class, intended to provide metaphors for how to approach learning in an unfamiliar area. A fourth theme may be described as experiential, where students' previous impressions of the discipline or professional area are explored: this emphasises the diversity found in students' backgrounds and life experiences. We postulate that the pedagogy of introductory classes models a reflective practice that could be seen as contributing to pre-professional competencies. The participant group included expert and experienced practitioners – some were winners of various awards for teaching and many had significant interests in research-based pedagogies. In their discussions of the importance of teaching introductory topics, participants provided models of the profession. The findings provide a key to best practices, illustrate ethical and pedagogical challenges and highlight problems of introductory classes where teachers may not be much engaged with modelling for a future profession.

Narrating Knowledge. The essentially contested character of professionalization and professional knowledge

Author: Christian Lystbæk, Aarhus University, chtl@dpu.dk

The paper will argue that the so called "younger professions" (e.g. social work and health care) are facing a turbulent and challenging time. Work and society are dominated by commitment to demands for high levels of demonstrable accountability, cost-efficiency and measurable quality. I.e. evidence-based practice is an expectation and fashion, often used to emphasize the grounding of practice in research knowledge that provides measurable evidence for best practice. At the same time, there is a growing distrust of the supremacy of scientific and technical knowledge. Traditional professional attitudes are perceived as unacceptably patronizing, and monopolies of knowledge are challenged, and the concept of "client rights" has increasingly gained acceptance. Hence, the identification of needs is beginning to become a joint endeavour.

Thus, concerns of both citizens' rights and the increasing cost of public services have given rise to prominent accountability measures to promote the potentially conflicting aims of efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness and quality. Increasingly, these aims are being framed by a complex web of state regulation. Cynics might argue that whereas the State previously sought to protect its citizens from the unqualified practitioner, it now seeks to protect them from the qualified.

The paper will discuss how, in the light of the turbulent and challenging times with a plurality of potentially conflicting aims, we can conceptualize professionalization and professional knowledge in a manner that facilitates understanding of learning and experience.

The paper will argue that in professional health care, which has become subject to a plurality of potentially conflicting aims, learning takes the form of critical inquiry and reflection on a range of aims and interests rather than acquisition of previously specified performance behaviour. This kind of reflection is of growing importance as the professions become subjects to a plurality of sources of knowledge, a plurality of forms of knowledge, a plurality of values and life forms among their clients, i.e. contested and competing views on what characterises "good practice". Hence, the paper will argue, the concepts of professionalization and professional knowledge are essentially contested concepts, i.e. essentially involves disputes about its proper significance. Professionalization is not only a matter of the cultivation of professional knowledge and practices, but extends to asking "difficult questions" that are neither a mere prelude to inquiry nor peripheral to it, but central to it. Thus, we must treat the question of what it means to "belong" to a profession and "possess" professional knowledge as radically open questions, i.e. questions that needs to be raised continuously in professional work rather than a question that is answered before one engage in professional work and practice.

Professional associations as agents for lifelong learning

Author: Monika Nerland, University of Oslo, monika.nerland@ped.uio.no

Co-authors: Berit Karseth, University of Oslo, berit.karseth@ped.uio.no

This paper examines how professional associations take on responsibilities and engage themselves in efforts to enhance practitioners' opportunities for learning throughout working life. While the notion of professionalism historically has been related to questions of managing an exclusive area of expertise within the frames of occupational closure, the situation today calls for a greater emphasis on change, learning and knowledge development (Forrester 2004). The politics of lifelong learning and the emergence of international qualifications frameworks call for a reconsideration of responsibilities between the professions, educational institutions and the state.

In the wake of this professional associations are positioned in an ambiguous landscape in which contesting discourses and policy initiatives operate. As the generic mode of formal organization for professions (Freidson 2001) they are requested to rethink their role as managers of knowledge and learning. The demands and needs are however often explicated in different ways within different countries and areas of professional work.

This paper aims to investigate how professional associations of today frame and enact their role as agents of lifelong learning. Four associations representing the main professional bodies for school teachers, nurses, engineers and accountants in Norway are chosen for examination. The paper builds on a previous analysis of the same associations in which we focused on their ways of employing discourses of knowledge as a means of promoting professionalism. This analysis showed profound differences between the associations as to how they engaged to secure the quality of professional work. In this paper we focus on their ways of taking up responsibilities for enhancing and supporting their members' opportunities for learning in a lifelong perspective.

The questions addressed in the paper are:

- What visions of lifelong learning seem to govern the positions taken by the four associations?
- How are the respective associations' strategies for enhancing lifelong learning related to notions of formal and informal learning and of shared responsibilities between educational institutions and working life?
- In what ways do internationalization processes influence the positions taken?

Selected policy documents from the four associations in the period 2005-2008 are analyzed and compared to reveal different manifestations of life long learning strategies. In addition we draw on in-depth interviews with key persons responsible for learning and professional development within the respective associations. We discuss the positions as to how the knowledge domains are organized, and their implications for developing modern forms of professionalism.

FORRESTER, K. (2004) The quiet revolution? Trade union learning and renewal strategies, *Work, Employment and Society*, 18 (2), 413-420

FREIDSON, E. (2001) *Professionalism: The Third Logic*. London: Polity Press

Professional Identity, Experience and Learning

Author: Henning Salling Olesen, RUC, hso@ruc.dk

Professional Identity, Experience and Learning

The paper will deal with subjective aspect of professional work and the status of professional knowledge offering a concrete development of the more abstract and detached understanding of knowledge (re)production in the sociology of knowledge tradition. A general heuristic model is proposed for analysing the concrete relation between professional work, the knowledge base of the profession and professional consciousness building, and developed with examples from the medical profession, researching professional identity and learning of general practitioners. Interpreting interviews with general practitioners about how their professional knowledge is being used and challenged in everyday situations it is argued that the relation between discursive representations and their situated and embodied experience shows the challenges, the limitations and potentially also the developments of professional knowledge. On the basis of these interview examples it is argued that professional knowledge is practically reproduced or developed in a specific process of defensive consciousness and learning reflection. The understanding of the role and importance of subjective experience in this process is discussed in relation to concepts of knowledge.

The transition from learning to work: Analyzing the student – worker interface

Author: Leigh Wood, Macquarie University, michelle.muchatuta@efs.mq.edu.au

Co-authors: MM, , l.wood@efs.mq.edu.au

There is an obvious connection between graduates and the workplace, this connection is the 'student – worker interface.' This paper aims to investigate this link and the nature and quality of business students' transition, including how best to nurture a successful transition from student to work life. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the gap between HEO institutional rhetoric and the reality of working life for graduates. This paper will attempt to bridge the gap between HEO rhetoric and the reality of student- worker experiences by suggesting ways in which HEOs and the workplace may facilitate student–worker transitions.

The transition from university study to professional working life is important to individual students, employers, universities, the higher education sector and more generally to national economies. A better understanding of the match between skills required by industry, and skills learnt at university is therefore paramount. This study examines the transition from the perspectives of those undergoing the shift – graduates! Expected outcomes of this paper include an enhanced understanding of the transition from learning to work for business graduates and suggestions as to how higher education curricula may be re-informed to better prepare graduates for a life in work.

There has been research in Europe examining the transition from student life to life as a professional (Abrandt Dahlgren et al., 2006; Hult et al., 2003), but considerably less attention has focused on the transition from learning to work in Australia (Wood, 2004), particularly from the graduate's point of view. This paper recognizes the lack of Australian literature, as well as a general gap in literature from a graduate or student-worker perspective, (Johnston, 2003). This paper will highlight the differences between the perceptions and reality of the transition to work for Australian business students. Outcomes will include recommendations for changes in curricula to nurture graduate capabilities such as collateral, cross-cultural skills required in employment.

The Research Plan: 25 graduates be interviewed using semi – structured interviews to ascertain their perceptions of the transition to professional work. This number is sufficient to show the range of ideas as data saturation is usually achieved within this number (Richards, 2005, p. 136). The interviews will be transcribed and analysed using phenomenography with the aid of the software tool NVivo. Phenomenography looks at how people experience, understand and ascribe meaning to a specific situation or phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997). It is a qualitative methodology that is often used to describe the experience of learning and/or teaching. Questions will focus on the process of finding professional employment, what employers expect and then whether graduates believe they are adequately prepared.

The work of social educators and their profession – on the development of professional competency in child care institutions

Author: Anders Elof Nielsen, UC Sealand, aen@ucsj.dk

According to research done by Ph.D. Ester Nørregård Nielsen in "Social educators in the shadow" (2006) the child care professions in Denmark are characterized by their lack of closure strategies towards non-professionals like the children's parents and the unskilled assistants they have a working relationship with on a daily basis.

In this paper, I will present my plan for a research of the mechanisms and strategies within the field of the profession of social educators. It will involve the analyzing of the actual professional strategies of the social educators.

My aim is to describe the problems and challenges of using the case study as a method of social research, in the field of child care professions. According to Bent Flyvbjerg (2006), the social researcher is confronted with some general 'misunderstandings' regarding the case study as a valid method of scientific research, ex. that "theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge; or that one cannot generalize from a single case, therefore, the single-case study cannot contribute to scientific development" (Flyvbjerg, 2006:1).

The case study is a part of a pilot experiment that I wish to perform in my PhD project, in the preliminary stages of my investigation of the issue of professionalization of pedagogues in a Danish child care institution.

Using workplace learning as a lens to reframe academic development

Author: Jan McLean, University of New South Wales, jan.mclean@unsw.edu.au

Co-authors: Jacqui McManus, University of New South Wales, j.mcmanus@unsw.edu.au

How do academics learn and develop in the workplace? How might they be best supported to do so? These questions are most typically tackled from within the field and framework of academic development, generally in relation to teaching (which draws largely from research into student learning). Academic development, however, is a field in turmoil. Numerous articles have questioned the impact of academic development, (for example, see Gray & Radloff, 2008, Weimer, 2007), and highlight the lack of connection between academic development and academics themselves. Recently many have indicated a need for a re-conceptualisation of academic development, not towards further self-examination (of academic developers), but towards a more critical scholarship (Lee 2008) and to look at academic development practice through different critical lenses (Clegg, 2007). This paper explores how research on the many and varied aspects of workplace learning can and should inform this re-conceptualisation of academic development (and research underpinning it).

One of the issues is that much of the literature focuses on the effectiveness, relevance and role of academic development as a field of study (for example, Weimer, 2007; Gray & Radloff, 2008), as opposed to focussing on the academics themselves and supporting them to do their work. This is also reflected in the often quite negative way academics perceive academic development (see for example, Lee & McWilliam, 2008; Dearn et al, 2002; Knight, 2006). It is also highlighted in recent accounts of the history of academic development (Barrow et al, 2008; Lee et al, 2007).

We argue that research into workplace learning and all the different perspectives it brings offer a powerful lens through which academic development can be re-conceptualised to position it more closely with the worker. There is a growing interest in the worker's identity, for example, and the central role it plays in conceptualising workplace learning that we propose will provide valuable insights in guiding a reframing of academic developers' practice. Other relevant issues explored in the literature on workplace learning, such as agency, complexity theory and informal learning, equally offer important contributions to the re-conceptualisation of academic development.

In summary, this paper identifies limitations of the more common ways of looking at academic development and academic developers' practice and offers a reframing of this whole area so that learning and development is defined and located with the academic in their context. The lens of workplace learning will enable an understanding of how academics see themselves and the place of professional development for them, rather than this being defined for them through the lens of academic developers. This, we propose, will provide a completely new perspective, which may eventuate in a renaming of this area of practice.

When is the Social service a knowledge-based organization?

Author: Kristina Westerberg, Umeå university, kristina.westerberg@psy.umu.se

Co-authors: ulf hyvönen, umeå kommun, ulf.hyvonen@umea.se
jan brännström, umeå kommun, jan.a.brannstrom@umea.se
jan hjelte, umeå kommun, jan.hjelte@umea.se
esther hauer, umeå universitet, esther.hauer@psy.umu.se

Researching Work and Learning – RWL6

Abstract

In this presentation we would like to address a subject often discussed on many levels in society – namely the knowledge-base in Social services. The concept “evidence based” is frequently used in these discussions and it may refer to different sources of knowledge: research, practice or the client perspective. A number of authors have been engaged in identifying the concepts of evidence and knowledge based work, as well as the empirical grounds in social services. From our perspective we would claim that this is not enough in order to understand how an organization may develop its base of knowledge. The processes and structure of the organization as such must also be taken into consideration. In a collaborative research project between a field research unit in the municipal Social services in Umeå and the Department of psychology, Umeå University, we are testing a model which could function as a framework for comprehending the complex patterns of knowledge consumption and production in an organization such as the Social services. The theoretical point of departure is the socio-cultural approach where the interaction between communication, cultural artifacts and motive are important ingredients. Our aim is to develop a valid model that can be used as a tool to assess the sources of knowledge as well as the organizational prerequisites, processes and structures needed in the Social services in order to become a learning and knowledge-based organization. The model is developed and tested in two on-going projects in elderly care which concern development of expertise, competence and transfer of knowledge in elderly care but also new forms of organization in order increase the quality of care.

Workplace learning and work-related identity construction in a clinical setting

Author: Susanna Paloniemi, University of Jyväskylä, susanna.paloniemi@jyu.fi

Co-authors: Kaija Collin, University of Jyväskylä, kaija.m.collin@jyu.fi

The aim of this paper is to examine workplace learning from the viewpoint of construction of work-related identities in work community among surgical residents, specialists and nurses. The concept of work-related identity is used as a mediating concept in linking work and learning. Our data derives from an ethnographic research project conducted in Jyväskylä Central Hospital, Finland. The findings presented here are based on in-depth interviews conducted among residents and specialists (14) and nurses (9). The data was analyzed by the means of qualitative thematic analysis. In addition, observational data has been utilized in interpreting the narratives told by the interviewees. By comparing the identity constructions of residents', physicians' and nurses' we aim to reveal various cultures of hospital organization and show how these are constituted in workplace learning.

From the point of view of workplace learning as socially constructed shared practices (Collin 2005), major challenges for promoting learning in clinical setting exist. It has been widely recognized (e.g. Fenwick 2004) that in order to integrate successfully into changing work settings specific kinds of learning and identification with one's work are required. Nursing is an occupation heavily relying on the social and traditional occupational identity formation (Kirpal 2004). However, the need for more flexible work is also a requirement as a result of changing work. Similarly, systematic changes taking place in medical residents' identity formation process (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann 2006) have been found. Thus, rapid changes in work settings are related to subjects' commitments and attachments and their work-related identities.

Our findings show that multiple work-related identities exist among surgical residents, specialists and nurses. Further, the identities differ from each other between the professional groups. Identities are re-constructed in continuous collective practices at work of which workplace learning forms one of the essential contexts. In the paper the findings are presented in more detail and discussed from the point of view of supporting workplace learning and interprofessional work in a clinical setting.

References

Collin, K. 2005. Experience and shared practice. Design engineers' learning at work. *Jyväskylä Studies in Education, Psychology and Social Research* 261. University of Jyväskylä.

Fenwick, T. 2004. Learning in portfolio work: Anchored innovation and mobile identities. *Studies in Continuing Education* 26 (2), 229–241.

Kirpal, S. 2004. Work identities of nurses: Between caring and efficiency demands. *Career Development International* 9 (3), 274–304.

Pratt, M. G., Rockmann, K.W. & Kaufmann, J.B. 2006. Constructing professional identity: the role of work and identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents. *Academy of Management Journal* 49 (2), 235–262.