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Original Citation

Avis, James (2002) Work-based learning and social justice: learning to labour? In: British educational research association conference, 12-14th September 2002, University of Exeter. (Unpublished)

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Work-Based Learning and Social Justice: 'Learning to Labour'?

Draft - working paper

**Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association,
University of Exeter, England, 12-14 September 2002.**

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Abstract:

The paper explores work-based learning in the context of current changes taking place in vocational education and training in England. It seeks to locate these within an understanding of the English economy. The paper analyses these issues, drawing upon a literature that examines the work-based experiences of young people. This allows an engagement with notions of social justice, providing an opportunity to address the rhetorical question, 'Learning to Labour', posed in the title.

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Before exploring the main argument of the paper I would like to raise a number of caveats. Firstly, work-based learning has been associated with the acquisition of workplace qualifications. Boud and Symes draw a distinction between work-based and learning in the workplace:

Work-based learning needs to be distinguished from workplace learning, that form of learning that occurs on a day-to-day basis at work as employees acquire new skills or develop new approaches to solving problems. No formal educational recognition normally accrues to such learning, whether or not it is organised systematically. The emergence of work-based learning acknowledges that work, even on a day to day basis, is imbued with learning opportunities, heretofore not recognized as educationally significant or worthwhile. Work-based learning gives academic recognition to these opportunities, when suitably planned and represented. (2000, p14)

Within this paper I am not going to examine particular types of work-based qualification, rather I seek to explore work-based learning, placing it in a more general and cultural context. This allows questions about identity and the cultural production of subjectivity to be raised. In a similar fashion the assessment regimes present in work based-learning rest with the production and validation of preferred forms of learner identity and autonomy (Ecclestone, 2002).

Secondly, the movement towards work-based learning (WBL) derives from a particular understanding of the economy and labour market needs. This economic understanding sits alongside an interpretation of the types of knowledge and skill required for successful performance at work. These arguments suggest that waged labour is the most appropriate locale in which to develop such

knowledge and skill. There is a strong performative thrust in such arguments which are critical of much that passes for education in schools, universities and colleges, which is seen as divorced from the real world of work. Mainstream education is castigated for being too abstract and disciplinary bound and thereby becomes separated from 'real world' concerns with 'what works'.

Work-based learning is orientated towards a number of different constituencies which emphasise the development of three or four key groupings. Much is made of the development of work-based learning for professional groups such as teachers. It is claimed that against the sterility of much that passes for professional education in the academy, WBL allows professionals to build upon their work-based interests and problems in the development of knowledge that directly addresses workplace issues. The knowledge, understanding and skills produced in such a context it is claimed, will have a greater salience to work-based problems and be of greater use than that produced in the academy, which may itself be distorted by unwarranted disciplinary intrusions. Work-based learning and the knowledge generated it is suggested, will make a significant contribution to the effectiveness and efficiency of the individual learner and their organisation. Elements of performativity and instrumentalism can be seen in such approaches to work-based learning.

A related current in the move towards WBL is a concern with addressing perceived labour market needs, particularly at Level three (National Qualification Framework), where it is assumed there are shortages of craft and technician labour. The work-based learning route is seen to address this shortfall by offering young people the opportunity to develop work-based skills whilst simultaneously gaining credentials which provide the possibility of progression in education/training. Such a pathway seeks to attract those young people who are impatient with the academism of the school curriculum and who wish to acquire useful and practically orientated education/training experiences. These are young people, who whilst academically able, are disengaged from the school curriculum. They are the type of respondents who featured in Unwin and Wellington's (2001) study of modern apprenticeship, who sought to combine practical work-based experience with the acquisition of qualifications. This current sits alongside a concern with social justice and cohesion as well as with the provision of equal educational opportunities. This can arise in two ways. Firstly, for those who are disaffected from and underachieving within the educational system the work-based route is thought to provide an avenue towards inclusion by offering young people practical and relevant experiences that articulate with their interests and allows them to develop skills and understanding of work processes. Secondly, WBL is thought to address equal opportunities and social justice issues by providing academic recognition of the skills and knowledge already acquired by those in employment which would otherwise go unrecognised.

What all these approaches to WBL have in common is an interest in relevant and useful knowledge underpinned by a critique of the exclusions embodied in academicism. Such orientations are legitimated by particular understandings of the economy as well as by the type of knowledge required to enable successful performance at work. These ideas raise questions of identity, performativity and subjectivity as well as the resulting contradictions. There is for example, a serious tension between the ideational base upon which WBL has developed and the low waged, low skilled characteristics of the English economy. Similarly there is a contradiction between the rhetoric of upskilling and employer reluctance to provide adequate education/training for their workforce (Coleman and Keep, 2001).

Competitiveness

Pivotal to New Labour's educational strategy lies a particular construction of the global economy and the relation of schooling to this. Central to this understanding, as embodied in the competitiveness educational settlement, lies the suggestion that if the English economy is to be successful the education system must develop learners able to add value to production processes. In this paper I consider the role of WBL within this context, paying particular attention to the way in which this is addressed in the development of vocational pathways in the 14-19 curriculum. Morris writes in the foreword to *14-19: Extending Opportunities, raising standards*,

In the 20th century the education system was too often a one-size-fits-all structure. It neither demanded nor provided excellent standards in education for everyone. Nor did the education system adequately target the needs of the individual pupil.

In the 21st century, to be prosperous, the economy will depend heavily on the creativity and skills of its people. In a knowledge economy it is vital that we tap the potential of every one of our citizens. (DfES, 2002, p3)

Such arguments are premised upon a particular and rhetorical understanding of the English economy, its potential for development as well as those factors that inhibit this. The rhetorical move is towards an economy characterised by high skills, high trust, high waged work relations, in which the skill and knowledge of the worker becomes pivotal to economic success. In this scenario the worker/learner is construed not only as the route to competitiveness but is at the same time required to be infinitely flexible and adaptable, responding rapidly to the caprice of the economy. In this way the worker/learner will be enabled to reinvent themselves continuously so as to sustain employability. Levitas cynically notes:

What is described as a 'lifetime entitlement to learning' is effectively a lifetime obligation to acquire and maintain marketable skills. (1999, p121)

Within the competitiveness educational settlement the worker is seen as the key factor of production and economic success through the application of value added waged labour. This process sits alongside a particular and related understanding of knowledge, one stripped of universal pretensions, becoming localised and tied to the enactment of skill in the workplace. The next section explores the relationship of the English economy to its rhetorical construction and is followed by a brief exploration of the forms of knowledge that align with work-based learning.

High Skill/Low Skill

Central to the competitiveness settlement is the rhetorical claim that if the English economy is to compete effectively globally it needs to ensure that the labour force is highly skilled and educated in order to generate value added products. Failure to do so, it is claimed, will lead to secular economic and social decline. These arguments are predicated on the need to break away from the low skills equilibrium and to replace it with one based upon high skill, high trust and high waged work relations (see Finegold and Soskice, 1988; and for discussion, Coleman and Keep, 2001). These moves derive from an analysis of the economy that argues that there is a need to break away from the forms of Fordism characteristic of the post war period, or alternatively suggests we are now entering an epoch in which worker creativity is the key to economic success. In this new epoch older forms of class antagonism have been superseded by a qualitatively different economic and work context. These arguments suggest failure of the English economy to modernise in line with new conditions will lead to economic decline and a lowering of the standard of living. Hence, the need to break free of the low skills equilibrium.

It is necessary to comment on these construction of the economy which seemingly imply we can all anticipate intellectually demanding and high skilled work. I think three areas need exploration: low-skilled work, routes to competitiveness and the distribution of skill within the English economy.

Low skill

The policy rhetoric surrounding the competitiveness settlement plays down or ignores the presence of un- and semi-skilled jobs, that nevertheless remain central to the economy and to many people's working lives. Alison Wolf writes:

Manufacturing jobs have declined... however this is far from meaning that there are fewer

jobs for the unskilled because the labour market is demanding only skilled labour. On the contrary, the percentage of jobs which fall into the 'skilled crafts categories' has fallen steadily throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and is projected to decline yet more. Meanwhile, some occupations are thriving which require much less of a 'knowledge base'. The single fastest-growing job in the 1980s was 'postman'; that of the 1990s looks like being 'care assistant' in nursing homes and hospitals... While professional and managerial jobs have certainly exploded in numbers, the greatest shrinkage has been among the skilled and semi-skilled manual jobs in the middle. Low-skilled openings still exist in their millions for people to do things like cleaning streets and offices, packing and delivering boxes, staffing call centres, or operating supermarket checkouts. (2002, p48)

Neglect of the significance of un- and semi-skilled jobs in the economy is compounded by the assumption that high skilled work is the only route to competitiveness. Ewart Keep (1997, 1999) has frequently drawn attention to the various routes to competitive advantage - the high skills option is but one of these.

Skills are by no means the only, or even the most attractive route to competitive success, perhaps particularly so in the Anglo-Saxon world. Rather than seeing skill as THE key to competitive success, it might be more realistic to view upskilling as simply one model vying for senior managers' attention in a marketplace for ideas. (Coleman and Keep, 2001, unnumbered)

There is no necessary economic or social imperative compelling employers to adopt the high skill route. In addition a number of factors impinge on the labour process strategy developed by a particular firm, against which different routes to competitive advantage will be evaluated.

Core competences - routes to competitiveness

A discussion allied to skill and competitive advantage examines core organisational competences. Core competences refer to the characteristics of an organisation that enable its success, allowing it to do things better or differently to its competitors (Coleman and Keep, 2001). These core competences can be concentrated within a particular part of the organisation or more widely diffused. One can compare firms such as Aldi or Kwik Save which have fairly concentrated core competences against other organisations in which these are more widely diffused. Consequently the distribution of skill will in part be dependant on the strategy adopted towards these competences within particular organisations. This discussion indicates the complexity of work relations and counters the rhetorical claim that there is but one route to competitiveness - the high skills one. There are a range of factors and processes that have a bearing on the way in which firms address these issues. Amongst these will be the product market, the form of competitive relations the firm enters, whether it is focused on price or quality, the pattern of industrial relations, the global and regional strategy of the firm, its orientation towards investment along with many others. Brown reminds us:

In many sectors of the economy, employers are reluctant to invest in new technologies or to upgrade the skills of the workforce, *recognising that it is still possible to make good profits through competition on price* rather than product or service innovation. (Brown, 2001, p249)

Polarised skill formation - distribution of skill

Brown *et al* (2001) in *High Skills* draw our attention to the specific characteristics of the English route to competitiveness, with an economy split between a small high skilled segment and a much larger low skilled one. This economy is characterised by a low skills/high skills model, that is to say there is a polarisation between a high skilled segment of the economy e.g. bio-technology etc., and a significant low skilled sector. A large low skilled/low waged sector in an economy impacts on

product markets, encouraging competition on the basis of price rather than quality. Where competition is based on quality high skilled working relations will be encouraged whereas if price is paramount, this is not the case. Mass markets based on price competition undermine the development of a high skills economy.

There are both demand and supply-side effects to having large numbers of workers on low wages or in poverty. With respect to the demand side... both Hutton (1995) and Keep (1999) have argued that with so many workers on low wages it is hardly surprising that firms' dominant strategy has been to compete on price rather than quality, simply because the latter cannot be afforded. (Lauder, 2001, p196)

These arguments illustrate the deeply misleading nature of the rhetorical construction of the economy and skills requirement present within the dominant policy discourse. Low skilled/ low waged work remains a reality for large numbers of the working population. These wage relations encourage market competition on price rather than on quality which in the case of the latter would serve to develop the skills of the work force. In addition the policy rhetoric ignores, or at least plays down, the different routes that can be pursued to gain competitive advantage. These processes are compounded by New Labour's interest in sustaining flexible labour markets and seeing waged labour as the route to social inclusion. Such a strategy, despite minimum wage legislation, serves to sustain a low waged economy. The significance of these issues in a discussion of work-based learning is to locate it within its socio-economic context. It also raises questions about the generality of WBL and its relationship to an economy characterised by low skilled/low waged work. If WBL is to seriously address issues of social inclusion and cohesion it would need to be placed within a framework that seeks to challenge the forms of working relations that characterise the English economy.

Knowledge

A thriving knowledge society must be cosmopolitan and open; it must reward talent and creativity; it must invest in people and education. The radical innovation and knowledge creation that underpins modern economic growth thrives in cultures that are democratic and dissenting; that are open to new ideas from unusual sources; in which authority and elites are constantly questioned and challenged. (Leadbeater, 1999, p10)

In the move towards work-based learning lies a particular understanding of knowledge (see for example, Symes and McIntyre, 2000a; Garrick, J., Rhodes, C. 2000). This view of knowledge draws on a number of the elements found in the critique of modernity and sits with the suggestion that social formations have moved away from simple modernity towards reflexive modernisation. Such a movement carries a shift from mode 1 disciplinary based knowledge to mode 2, characterised by interdisciplinarity.

... a transformation of knowledge, a move away from ... mode 1 knowledge which is homogeneous, rooted in strong disciplines which are hierarchical, and transmitted to novitiates in an apprentice-master relationship, to mode 2 knowledges which are non-hierarchical, pluralistic, transdisciplinary, fast changing, and socially responsive to a diversity of needs such as students' dispositions and industrial priorities. (Smith and Webster, 1997, p104)

Chappell *et al* suggest that the new epistemological discourses:

... appear to unsettle modern understandings of knowledge by reversing the traditional binaries that privilege one form of knowledge construction over its 'other'. Today, epistemological discourses emphasize knowledge constructed as practical, interdisciplinary, informal, applied and contextual over knowledge constructed as theoretical, disciplinary, formal, foundational and generalisable. (2000, p137)

The movement towards mode 2 knowledge articulates with post-fordist understandings of work relations as well as the claim that valid knowledge can be gained at work, which in turn can be used to enhance the performance and effectiveness of the organisation. These arguments have an affinity with the suggestion that value added waged labour is the key to competitiveness and that high skilled, high trust, high waged working relations will create the conditions in which continuous improvement can take place. Such a context requires that tacit and informal work place knowledge becomes formalised, and that such knowledge becomes generalisable across a particular institution or organisation so as to enhance performance. Work-based learning can be seen as part of this process in as much as it leads to the formalisation of that which was hidden transmogrifying, it into generalisable though institutionally specific forms of knowledge.

What discussions of reflexive modernity add to the debate about work-based learning and knowledge is the claim that disciplinary based knowledge rooted in the academy is out of kilter with these new conditions. Disciplinary based knowledge with its hierarchical and hide bound structures cannot respond quickly enough to address changing organisational needs. This knowledge is also seen as elitist and exclusionary when contrasted with work-based knowledge that arises through an engagement with work practices. In the case of the latter, knowledge is thought of as democratised and being rid of its elitist pretensions (see discussion in Garrick and Rhodes, 2000). Knowledge derived at the workplace is thus thought to be more authentic and useful than that derived elsewhere as it has the potential to enhance individual and institutional performance. This ideational framework forms a regime of truth and system of governability in which the worker/learner must constantly reflect upon their labour process with a view to continual improvement (Edwards and Usher, 2000; Scheeres *et al*, 2000). This is the context of performativity in which there is an affinity between the way in which knowledge is construed and work processes. However, the reality of work relations is very far from these constructions which nevertheless are attempting to form preferred understandings of work. The preceding conceptualisations provide ideological supports for instrumental and pragmatic forms of knowledge concerned with 'what works' (Barnett, 2000). Similarly they operate with an idealisation of work relations that are construed as being freed from social relations, thereby normalising and validating workplace relations. Any recognition of social antagonism or patterns of exploitation arising at the site of waged labour are thereby marginalised. Paradoxically such interpretation of knowledge and its relation to work seeks to construct the worker/learner both atomistically and collectively as capital. Beckett cites Handy's comments on intellectual capital that can be used to illustrate this process.

In the age of intellectual capital, who owns the capital? It is not the shareholders. It can't be in any real sense. *The people who own the capital are the core workers of the company.* In other words it's the assets who own the assets. (Beckett, 2000, p77)

From a slightly different stance Rikowski commenting on 'human capital' writes:

There is force-expenditure (of human labour-power), but also development of this labour-power on the basis of capital, labour power capitalised - and as labour power is inseparable from the person, then we have *personhood capitalised, humans capitalised, human capital*. Capital becomes a living social force within the human and internal and internalised social relation within individuals - *and this is the basis of the transhuman; it is this which makes us 'extra-human'*. **Capital is not just 'out there'; we are it, it is us**. [my emboldening] (Rikowski, 1999, p70-71)

The interest in developing work-based knowledge that can be used to enhance efficiency is a recognition of the way in which variable labour power produces surplus value. As such this interest in workplace knowledge is not new, but what is, is the increasing significance of such knowledge in winning competitive advantage. It should be noted that workplace knowledge has always been 'owned' by the worker, the trick has been for capital to appropriate this and to use it for its own interests. Rikowski draws our attention to the equivocations and contradictions of this process in which the worker becomes 'human capital', in that they embody the contradictions surrounding this

process and thus are an embodiment of class struggle.

Vocational Pathways - Learner dispositions

The development of vocational pathways at 14+, addresses at one level young people's disaffection from schooling yet seeks to encourage progression to higher levels (see DfES, 2002). However, at the same time, as is the case with curriculum 2000, these pathways work within the academic/vocational division. In *Schools Achieving Success* it states:

For the first time there will also be the opportunity of a predominantly vocational programme for those with the aptitude, beginning at 14 and going right through to degree level. Such a programme might include a significant element of work related learning from 14, followed by a modern apprenticeship or full time vocational study at college and then a foundation degree for those who have the potential. (DfES, 2001a, p31)

Such differentiation within institutions will be matched by a similar process across schools and colleges. In addition the development of foundation and advance apprenticeships will introduce differentiation into the post-16 youth training system with consequences for progressions. However all of these interventions are concerned to enhance and incorporate work based learning. This can be seen in New Labour's development of Centres of Vocational Excellence in Further Education (COVE).

Centres of Vocational Excellence will develop new, and enhance existing, excellent vocational provision which is focused on meeting the skills needs of employers, nationally, sectorally, regionally and locally. They will seek to give a greater number of individuals from all backgrounds access to the high quality vocational training which they need to succeed in a modern economy. (LSC, 2001, p3)

COVE will also reach back into the compulsory sector with a view to enhance the vocational education of 14-19 year olds. Learners will increasingly find themselves confronting a highly differentiated education system through which they will have to steer a path. Vocational pathways will be developed for those who have become disaffected from school and may also become an option for those who have an interest in the practical development of skills at the workplace whilst gaining qualification with a view to progress to higher education. Such pathways as found in the Modern apprenticeships will sit alongside other divisions such as that between the academic and vocational. Such differentiation may be compounded by the development of specialist secondary schools. An increasingly differentiated education system marked by a plethora of pathways may find itself serving to reproduce the patterns of inequality and structural differentiation present in wider society. Findings from the sociology of education suggest those who possess cultural capital will be in a position to make best use of such a system (Wolf, 2002; Bourdieu, 2002).

Early studies addressing young people's transition to work and their youth training experiences have served to illustrate the way in which these lead to the formation and production of identities that reproduce class relations (Avis, 1984, 1991; Bates, 1991; Finn, 1987; Hollands, 1990; Moos, 1979; and see Mizen, 1995). Moos, (1979) for example, illustrated the way in which the early youth training schemes sought to prepare young people for casualised and intermittent waged labour. Key to these processes were particular orientations to mental and manual labour. Many of the early studies focused on underachieving youth and explored resistance to schooling which served to propel young people towards waged labour. These studies suggested schooling had marginal relevance to the lives or interests of these young people and manual labour was thought to be overly abstract and separate from real world concerns. Willis' (1977) work for example, illustrated the way in which young people associated manual labour with effeminacy, and Stafford's (1991) work exploring experience on a youth training scheme illustrated the way in which trainees actively resisted practices that were reminiscent of the classroom. These studies illustrated the way in which mental/manual divisions were associated with the development of class and gendered identities that articulated with

reproductive processes. Such processes were and are not necessarily all of a piece being fractured in a variety of ways. Brown's (1987) work on 'ordinary kids' illustrated another aspect of these processes whereby young people minimally accepted school relations as a necessary part of the route to respectable working class jobs. Whilst this work is dated it does raise questions about formative processes and the reproduction of class based identities, themes by-passed in current writing addressing work-based learning. Central to the formation of class based identities is the orientation towards schooling as well as to mental/manual divisions, with the latter associated with practical work-based knowledge and skills. Paradoxically these orientations remain in place although they have been re-worked within current conditions.

The majority of young people now remain in education and training post-16, with early school leaving a rarity (see Wolf, 2002). In the current conditions we can see the way in which mental/manual divisions have been re-worked to align with the new context in which young people find themselves. The concern with relevance remains, as does the dissatisfaction with abstract and overly academic forms of knowledge. In Ecclestone's work on GNVQ many students were reluctant to engage with broader academic and political debate being more concerned with the more immediate and local context of practice.

Students responses here appear to resonate with young people's resistance to 'irrelevant' education in other studies. These GNVQ related effects presented difficulties for teachers committed to broad pastoral autonomy or critical autonomy. Strong views about 'relevance and usefulness, combined with aversion to difficult subjects, meant that the relevance of evaluating a health campaign was easier to sell to students, for example, than evaluating competing theories in social policy. (2002, p154)

A similarly strong sense of the relevant was also present in Unwin and Wellington's (2001) study. The celebration of relevant practical work-based knowledge articulates with the mental/manual divide, serving to devalue and marginalize the academic against the immediacy of practice. The shift from simple to conditions of reflexive modernity serves to raise questions about the salience and validity of disciplinary and academic forms of knowledge. The concern with practice, with what works, with the relatively short term and an immediate interest in practice serves to marginalize and write off disciplinary knowledge. Not only is such knowledge of passing relevance to practice, its legitimacy has become questioned in conditions of reflexive modernity.

The paradox of these arguments is that the type of mode 2 knowledge claimed has gained legitimacy in current post-modern conditions has deeply conservative effects. Mode 2 knowledge articulates with the concern with what works. For those involved in workplace learning the hegemony of such an epistemological framework is that knowledge can easily go no further than practice. It becomes tied to the immediacy of practice and with what works. It thereby connives not only in its own construction, as a social technology, but also in the development of work-based identities that themselves are tied to a performative logic. Erased from this was an earlier concern with using work educatively for learners to explore the nature of society and the role of waged labour within it (Moore, 1983). Instead, work-based learning becomes tied to performativity, quality systems and so on, all of which seek to uncover tacit and informal knowledge in order to enhance efficiency (Garrick and Clegg, 2000).

Work-based Learning - questions and difficulties

The interest in work-based learning and the development of vocational pathways for young people, is underpinned by a number of different discourses. In part work-based learning seeks to re-integrate those who are disillusioned or disaffected from schooling by drawing on young people's interest in work. It is intended they will be re-integrated into society, their talents and potential will not be wasted and they will not be excluded from progression in the education training system. In this way goals of social justice and inclusion will be met. However, as with foundation and advanced apprenticeships, there is a real question about whether employers will be able to deliver the quality of

training required. This was consistently the case with earlier youth training schemes and has been a feature of modern apprenticeships, in which the quality of training has been extremely variable and sometimes exceptionally poor (Unwin and Wellington, 2001; Hyland, 2002; Wolf, 2002).

Additionally, work-based learning seeks to address the interests of those, who whilst academically able, feel out of kilter with schooling and are seeking practical experience alongside the acquisitions of qualifications which offer the possibility of progression to higher education. The unevenness of the education/training experiences of this group has already been noted. The following section comments on the dominant theoretical frameworks that seek to justify and validate the move towards as well as the importance of work-based learning. Underpinning such work is the suggestion that practice and learning are conjoined, that we develop understanding through practice. This work also rests with a particular view of knowledge, one suggesting that knowledge derives from the immediacy of practice and is therefore situated within a particular context. This suggests that if 'real' learning is to take place it should be acquired in the context where the resulting knowledge can be practically used. In other words there is a dialectic between practice, context and the production of knowledge. Brown et al (1989) discuss situated learning and claim that schooling is an inappropriate location to develop work-based practice, as the logic of schooling is different to occupational practice. In order to become a practitioner the learner needs to be incorporated into the rules of practice. These notions are reflected in discussions that address communities of practice and that utilise the notion of core and peripheral participation. This argument suggests novitiates, through engagement in work-based practice, move from the periphery of a community of practice towards its core, during which the novice becomes a full member. It is recognised that this movement is not necessarily one-way, as the newcomer may have certain skills and knowledge that established practitioners lack, and that consequently, at times, their positions will be reversed. However, the logic of the movement remains in place. Whilst within models of situated learning and communities of practice there are gestures towards dialogic understandings and the impact of and resolutions of contradictions, these are nevertheless located within a consensual framework. The novice is being introduced to a specific community of practice through which they are being encultured into the outlook of that particular occupational group. A similar process can be seen at work in activity theory, where contradictions play a pivotal part in the resolution of difficulties as well as learning (see Engeström, 2001). However, lying behind the resolution of contradiction rests a consensual framework in which it is assumed participants in the activity system share a common understanding of the goals pursued. For Engeström (2001) learning arises when contradictions are resolved (see Young, 2001).

It may seem that the discussion above is at one step removed from the interest in work-based learning and its implications for social justice. On one level work-based learning is inclusive as it attempts to engage those disaffected from learning. However, the context in which it takes place is contradictory, and whilst it may develop young peoples understanding of work, particularly with respect to knowledge and the development of located skills, this is truncated. As can be seen in the discussion of communities of practice and situated learning much of this learning is individualised, with the young person being socialised or encultured into a specific community of practice. Although there may be aspects concerned with collective problem solving and the development of collective intelligence, this takes place on a very particular terrain, one that fails to address questions of antagonism at the site of waged labour. This partly derives from the basis upon which work-based knowledge develops, but is also a consequence of arguments about reflexive modernisation which suggest Marxist explanations of work processes developed during simple modernity are no longer appropriate.

Conclusion - Social justice

This paper has explored the policy context within which WBL is placed, has touched upon young people's experiences and has explored debates surrounding this area. WBL sits comfortably with the competitiveness settlement, one in which the key to competitive advantage lies in value added waged labour. The worker, either individually or as part of a collective process, is seen as the key to economic success. The stress placed upon WBL rests with the formation of class relations as well as with the development of forms of subjectivity required by the economic system. The worker/learner is

encourage to render explicit their tacit and informal work knowledge and to contribute towards processes of continuous improvement. To the extent that these processes are successful the young person will have learned to labour with WBL producing forms of subjectivity and dispositions that connive with performative interests. This process articulates with interests in narrowly defined notions of relevance and practice. However, there are a number of contradictions that surround these processes, not least amongst which is the ambivalent attitude of employers towards training and education, as well as the contradiction between the exploitation of workers to create surplus value and the rhetoric of social justice. Within the current conjuncture notions of work-based learning are deeply ambivalent. The critique of modernity suggests that issues of social justice and the role of educational processes in the formation of class based and other inequalities are construed as infinitely complex. Consequently WBL is seen to simultaneously face in a number of different directions. This recognition of complexity can be disabling in that its refusal to countenance dichotomies has led to the deep structures of employment relations being either ignored or downplayed. If WBL is to move beyond forms of occupational socialisation there is a need to critique its underpinning notions and challenge the reproduction of communities of practice. It needs to recover Dewey's concern with using young people's interest in work as a vehicle through which they can explore the economic, social and employment structure of society (see Moore, 1983; Hager, 2000). Without such an orientation WBL will be no more than 'learning to labour' and will fail to address issues of social justice in a serious fashion.

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This document was added to the Education-line database on 18 September 2002