

Theory' and 'practice' within HE professional education courses - integration of academic knowledge and experiential knowledge

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If we look historically at professional education we can see a movement from what Bines and Watson (1992) call a 'technocratic' (or technical-rational) model to what they call a 'post-technocratic' model - one primarily concerned with professional knowledge and action/process rather than academic knowledge and content. Emphasis is placed on professional development, a practitioner's theories-in-use, knowledge for practice, and on the skills required to use reflection, observation, analysis and evaluation to develop practice. Particular methods of learning and teaching concerned with enquiry, analysis, experience and reflection are advocated. If this model is fully embraced, the type of learning involved (especially when undertaken by qualified workers) is quite different from that of a more traditional, discipline-based, technocratic model. Firstly, it encompasses different ways of knowing, i.e. more subjective, reflexive, and implicit practice-based understanding. Secondly, it can also produce a different type of knowledge in the form of practice theory. The associated learning processes tend to be interpretive and inductive (Nixon and Murr 2006) and can form a more integrative relationship between practice knowledge and theory that encompasses 'being' and a personal ethical stance (Margetson 2000; Tynjala et al 2003).

So - what is the role and nature of learning development with regard to these new types of knowledge and ways of knowing in HE? This paper is a tentative exploration using the context of continuing professional development in social work.

Presenter

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I have developed a keen interest in all aspects of professional education, in particular experiential and reflective learning for professional practitioners who are undertaking HE programmes. In 2005 I was awarded a Bournemouth University Learning and Teaching Fellowship.

My present role involves me in direct programme design and teaching on the Post Qualifying Social Work Awards' units 'Enabling Work-Based Learning' (H level) and 'Leading and Enabling Others' (M level). I also provide academic support to all students undertaking Post-Qualifying Social Work (PQSW) programmes.

My research is aimed primarily at enhancing critically reflective experiential learning and its expression in an academic context. I am undertaking a Professional Doctorate and my focus is the personal epistemology of PQSW students.