Employer engagement in assessment of work-based learning in foundation degrees

**Literature Review of employer engagement in assessment of work-based learning in foundation degrees, in the UK and beyond, to date, with a specific focus on the early years sector**

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**Introduction**

This literature review has been designed to inform a project at the University of Hull Scarborough campus based on 'Developing Knowledge and Skills for Employer Assessment of Work-based Learning in Foundation Degree programmes'. It includes a background overview of the early years sector, foundation degrees and employer involvement, selected aspects of work-based learning and assessment, and reports of employer involvement in assessment. The literature reviewed suggests that this is a complex and emerging area of development for both employers and higher education providers but that evolving connective tripartite assessment models may be a way forward.

**Background overview of early years sector**

Baldock _et al_ (2005) summarises the historical development of what is now the early years sector as one in which there were virtually no childcare services until the end of the nineteenth century. It was only in the middle of the twentieth century that governments began to see the care and education of very young children as an area where policy making was required. This became a question of increasing concern to parents and others in the last third of the twentieth century... However, real change did not occur until after the election of the Labour government in 1997 (p.15)

Reporting in 1990 Rumbold (DfEE, 1990) describes a disparate childcare workforce in which adults ‘have traditionally enjoyed less esteem than those’ working in older age ranges with ‘differ[ing] markedly opportunities for in-service training’ (p.20) and (Abbott and Pugh, 1998) many workers with ‘no formal qualifications … [but] often considerable practical experience’ (p.149), with skills and knowledge held tacitly.
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Developmentally (Campbell-Barr, 2009) ‘The lack of state interest in childcare meant that historically it has been up to the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector to meet the growing demand for childcare’ (p.77). The development of the (DfEE 1998) National Childcare Strategy (Campbell-Barr, 2009) ‘aimed to address the affordability, accessibility and quality of childcare provision’ (p.77) and has contributed to ‘the mixed economy of childcare’ (p.78) which now includes a range in the types of provision: childminders, nurseries, full daycare providers, sessional providers and out of school providers; and a range in the management of provision: large private chains, small independent providers, committee management, limited companies and some maintained provision. (p.78)

Findings from a qualitative research report conducted in 2001 to assess business skills in the sector (Osgood and Stone) identified that ‘there was considerable variation by setting’ (p.2) with

... private day nurseries ... most likely to adopt strategic approaches to planning ... often employ[ing] the help of “financial experts” including accountants, small business advisers and bank managers to devise business plans and manage financial aspects ...

... managers and supervisors from the voluntary sector settings ... tended to rely heavily on the goodwill of members of the local community for financial advice and support ... Due to relatively small turnovers and non-profit making structures managers in these settings were adept at developing reactive management styles...

... childminders tended not to regard themselves as running a small business ... an overwhelming view was that it was not necessary, nor possible to strategically plan, since demand was thought to exceed supply of childminding vacancies, and the size of provision was governed by regulations (p.2)

In her ‘exploratory study’ which ‘involved interviews with a range of childcare providers in one Local Authority’ (p.80) Campbell-Barr (2009) then goes on to discuss how provision and expansion is creating ‘sustainability fears in childcare’ in two areas, ‘a lack of business skills in the sector and a fear that business principles will erode the caring nature of childcare’ (p.78) concluding that ‘providers ... do need to be supported in developing their business operations so that a firm economic base is being built upon’ (p.92) but that ‘none of the providers discussed business training’ (p.82). Cannell (2009), writing on behalf of The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), suggests that businesses in general may benefit from using a performance management approach which ‘is a process, not an event. It operates as a continuous cycle’ (np) in which
Corporate strategic goals provide the starting point for business and departmental goals, followed by agreement on performance and development, leading to the drawing up of plans between individuals and managers, with continuous monitoring and feedback supported by formal reviews (np).

Cannell (2009) also explains ‘performance management is not easy to implement’ (np).

Campbell-Barr (2009) found that ‘the cost of training was a significant consideration for many of the providers’ with some providers explaining they ‘select the course that they thought the most worthy and then adopted a system where one member of staff would attend the training and then cascade the information to other staff’ (p.82). This approach reflects Rainbird’s (2000) observations that ‘at the operational level, questions of cover, leave, the need to maintain levels of production or service delivery may make it difficult for employees to be allowed time away from work for training’ (p.189) and in small businesses, where employers are hands-on, releasing employers might be equally difficult to achieve. One policy approach developed to recognise such skills in the workplace and adopted by some in the childcare sector has been the competence-based assessment system of National Vocational Qualifications, which are assessed within the workplace, although the urgent need to develop an (DfES, 2006b) Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF) is testament to the historically existing variations in qualifications. The current statutory legal requirements in childcare are (DCSF, 2008a) that ‘in registered settings other than childminding settings, all supervisors and managers must hold a full and relevant level 3 qualification’ (p.31) which currently (CWDC 2009b) includes a range of NVQ awards as well as many other equivalencies. In line with government upskilling policies (DfES, 2005) ‘to build a world-class workforce for children and young people’ (p.1), as part of its wider response to Leitch (2006), the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (DCSF, 2008a) for providers of childcare in 0-5 years age range, also includes statutory guidance on training. This includes guidance that (DCSF, 2008) ‘providers should support their staff in improving their qualification levels’; ‘regular staff appraisals should be carried out to identify the training needs of staff. A programme of continuing professional development should be applied so that these needs are met’; and ‘providers should use training made available by the local authority and other sources’ (p.31).

Offering an overview Cannell (2009) explains
Many organisations without performance management systems operate "appraisals" in which an individual's manager regularly (usually annually) records performance, potential and development needs in a top-down process ... organisations with performance management systems need to provide those involved with the opportunity to reflect on past performance as a basis for making development and improvement plans, and the performance and development review meeting ... provides this chance. The meeting must be constructive, and various techniques can be used to conduct the sort open, free-flowing and honest meeting needed, with the reviewee doing most of the talking (np).

Part of the performance management process involves measurement which (Cannell, 2009) provides the basis for providing and generating feedback, and thus can build the platform for further success or identify where things are going less well so that corrective action can be taken ... Measure the wrong things, perhaps simply because they are easy to measure, and an entire performance management system can fall into disrepute (np).

On the subject of feedback Cannell (2009) discusses the role of 360 degree feedback which ... became increasingly talked about in the 1990s, if not widely used. It consists of performance data generated from a number of sources, which include the person to whom the individual being assessed reports, people who report to them, peers (team colleagues or others in the organisation), and internal and external customers. It can also include self-assessment (np).

As part of the current English government's (DfES, 2005) 'Children's Workforce Strategy' the role of 'Early Years Professional', and 'Early Years Professional Status', have emerged (DfES, 2006a) proposing (DfES, 2005) 'new professional roles to support the delivery of higher-quality early years services' (p.24) with an initial focus in 'private, voluntary and independent settings' (p.33) who will be ' "fit-for-purpose" graduate qualified early years professionals' (p.25). Current government targets for the roll out of EYPs are that there should be (NYCC, 2009) 'an EYP in every full daycare setting by 2015 (2010 for Sure Start Children's Centres)'. Within the early years field there is a growing body of work concentrating on understanding the evolving EYP role (for example: Brock, 2006; DCSF, 2008b; Evans, 2008; McGillivray, 2008). Kagan and Hallmark (2001) describe a pedagogical leadership role thus:

Practitioners make instructional decisions on a daily basis with each child, but a pedagogical leader takes it a step further. A pedagogical leader functions as a bridge between research and practice. With knowledge and information provided by researchers and academicians, and armed with first hand experiences, pedagogical
leaders serve as interpreters of research and theory. They are disseminators of new information to other teachers, as well as to parents and the public (p.10)

To achieve this award practitioners must (CWDC, 2008) demonstrate graduate level achievement and professional and personal competencies and abilities assessed against a newly developed series of standards. In recognition of the diversity of practitioners training (CWDC, 2009a) four different access pathways are available for EYPS including an Extended Professional Development route for practitioners moving on from a foundation degree. Thus, as Brennan et al (2006) comments 'in some employment sectors, such as early years education, foundation degrees are part of a deliberate push to professionalise certain work roles' where 'the foundation degree is seen as a key enabler of workplace learning' (p.31) with 'initiatives stem[ming] from the “supply side” ( … [with] governments pushing for ever more highly qualified workforce)' (p.58).

Foundation degrees and employer involvement

Costley (2007), referring to the recent developments of work-based learning ‘in higher education … in many countries, especially in Europe and specifically in the UK, France and Scandinavian countries and also in Australia’ (p.1), comments on the ‘… debate for WBL concern[ing] how universities recognize and approach practice-based knowledge (Armsby et al, 2006) … since the knowledge of work-based learners is presented in unfamiliar ways to that of disciplinary knowledge' (p.2). Costley (2007) goes on to describe certain identified similarities and approaches as follows:

WBL is subject to the same quality procedures of, for example, external examinations, double marking, moderating, etc, as in any other field. Assessment is usually contextualised within a particular work situation which could be a placement or a student's full time work. Some assessment strategies have overcome the lack of control of the assessor concerning the context by involving employers or work-place supervisors in the assessment process. Another technique is the use of personal and professional development plans, learning diaries or learning logs, but not models where examinations are 'sat'. Other assessment tools include presentation, interview, reflective reports and portfolios. Generic assessment criteria are often used that relate to specific work-based abilities that are similar to key and transferable skills (p.4).
However, according to an analysis by Burke et al (2009) reporting on the findings of a ‘large evaluation study of the development and delivery of FDs at Kingston University in south-west London’ (p.15) it would appear that ‘different definitions and models of work-based learning were in operation across the FDs’ (p.27). It might, of course, be argued that this difference is, of itself, a reflection of the involvement of various bodies in their design. Burke et al’s (2009) research included an early years model in which all students were employed during the FD and ‘work-based learning is also integrated into assignments’ (p.28). Burke et al’s (2009) study, addressed to FD course directors and students, found that

A small number of students and course directors commented on who was involved in assessment (The university, college, employers). Where employers were involved in the assessment of students, this was seen as positive by all those who commented on employer involvement. However, some course directors identified that employers were not currently involved in student assessment. Other course directors reported that employers played an important role in assessment on the FD:

[employers] provide witness testimonies for the APEL [Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning] portfolio. Work-based assignments include discussion with the employer. Assessors make spot checks through phoning employers.

Senior engineers … [in the workplace] assess practice and this contributes to the overall assessment. (p.27)

Edmond et al (2007) reporting on their experiences of ‘five FDs offered by the School of Education at Brighton’ also explain that

the use of the workplace as a site of assessment is managed differently across different FDs, depending on a number of factors, including what might be termed the workplace culture in relation to assessment of performance, the resource implications of assessment through observation by workplace staff, and the availability of staff appropriately qualified to undertake such assessments … Where they do not exist or do not exist uniformly across a sector (such as in the Early Years Sector), then the cost of enabling such assessment, within the budget of the FD, can become prohibitive (p.176-177).

Thurgate and MacGregor (2008) appear to agree with Edmonds et al (2007) above, commenting ‘assessments of work-based learning is a dual responsibility and is expensive in human resources. It is this feature of FDs that is not recognised in central funding’ (p.31). More generally for Thurgate and MacGregor (2009), working from a case study perspective on a health and social care foundation degree, they also found in developing ‘the vehicle of workplace tasks … to value the workplace as the focus of learning’ (p.149), that ‘a review of the literature identified a dearth of information relating to the role of Work Place Tasks within Foundation Degrees’ (p.150). Similarly, searches by this researcher to date appear to have
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revealed little published research specifically based on employer perspectives of engagement in foundation degrees as a whole, or on the subject of assessment within them.

Turning now to look briefly at the history and construction of Foundation degrees, according to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAAHE, 2004), such degrees

... were introduced by the Department for Education and Skills in 2000 to provide graduates who are needed within the labour market to address shortages in particular skills ... and aim to contribute to widening participation and lifelong learning by encouraging participation by learners who may not have previously considered studying for a higher level qualification. (p.1)

The benchmark (QAAHE, 2004) states they should

... integrate academic and work-based learning through close collaboration between employers and programme providers (p.3).

... involv[ing]the development of higher-level learning within both the institution and the workplace. It should be a two-way process, where the learning in one environment is applied in the other (p.4/5).

Thurgate et al (2007) describe ‘the philosophy of FDs [as one which] demands … fusion of academic and vocational paths in an HE qualification, unlike traditional degree programmes and the majority of vocational qualifications, and crucially, involves the employer playing a central role in developing and delivering this new initiative’ (p.216). The benchmark specifies (QAAHE, 2004)

...it is important that employers are fully involved in the design and regular review of Foundation Degree programmes. It is beneficial if employers are involved, where possible, in the delivery and assessment of the programme and the monitoring of students, particularly within the workplace (p.5).

Employers should, where possible, be involved in the assessment of work-based learning. Arrangements between institutions and employers should be specified at the outset of any partnership, and should include any training for employers that may be required in, for example, assessment procedures (p.10).

A QAAHE document in 2005 focussed on the early development of the degrees themselves reports

Providers have also worked hard to involve employers and employer representatives in FD programmes. In examples of good practice, employers play a central role in early discussions about the need for
graduates at the intermediate/higher technician level. They then continue to engage in the design and development of the programme, as well as in the teaching and assessment of students. Employers contribute to the FDs in a wide variety of ways, including the design and commissioning of live briefs and projects; WBL opportunities; student support (including mentoring); and formative (and sometimes summative) assessment. Sustaining an effective level of employer engagement continues to present challenges for some providers. In these cases, employers’ lack of involvement in regular monitoring and development, assessment practices and student feedback, and in their support for WBL, can limit the professional currency and credibility of the FDs (p.2).

Further research of interest is an academic review of literature conducted by Scesa and Williams (2008) which asked ‘What impact does employer engagement in course development have on employers and students (from the student/employer perspectives)?’ (p.2) which summarised seven results including:

• **Benefits of work-based learning to employers** were their recognition that students’/employees’ skills had improved.
• **Management of work-based learning**: issues here concerned the actors involved – students, employers, institutions/academics. For students, difficulties arose in organising placements. For employers and institutions, for example, the need to create opportunities to meet and adequately brief all involved about the aims and responsibilities of placements was emphasised.
• **Academic staff development** can arise from tutors’ close working relationship with employer organisations, resulting in valuable insights into the working of organisations and thus enhancing students’ learning experiences and outcomes.
• **Barriers to engaging employers** included lack of interest, lack of understanding, and lack of ability through time and work pressures on the part of employers, and the unnecessary use by institutions/academics of academic language and terminology.
• **Size of employer organisation**: co-operation between educational providers and SMEs can be time-consuming; there is some evidence to suggest that engaging employers through employer networks is more beneficial. (p.2-3).

Gleeson and Keep (2004) recommend extreme caution in using the term ‘employer’ itself ‘as a category’ (p.41) citing a number of sources for this including an internal DfES document

… on employer engagement

Traditionally the Department has relied for its intelligence on employer views on the employers who play a part in the various delivery organisations and on the main representative employer organisations, supplemented by specific consultations and
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officials’ own ad hoc contacts. But it is clear from our analytical work that this has not been enough to meet the Department’s needs for employer engagement with policy making. In particular, our evidence demonstrates that relying on representative bodies is not enough – employers have told us that such bodies: don’t represent the views of all their members; only represent themselves; are remote from the reality of business; have a political agenda not directly related to business needs (DfES, 2002,p.19) (p.42)

Edmond et al (2007) citing Hillier and Rawnsley (2006) identify a number of ‘challenges and tensions in the implementation of FDs, the role of HE and employers in vocational education’ (p.174) which they summarise as: ‘variability of student experience (p.174); extent of employer involvement; nature of the relationship between stakeholders; and stakeholder perspectives on learning aims’ (p.175). Amongst the greater detail of these are included the statements from practice that ‘employer involvement requires careful nurturing’ and ‘that employers want learning which is specific and non-transferable to avoid “poaching” of trained staff whereas employees have different, not to say opposite aims … [also] apparent consensus over terminology used to express such “soft skills” as critical reflection, analysis, problem solving, management, social skills, in aims of programmes may hide real differences in interpretation of these aims by the different stakeholders’ (p.175). Thurgate and MacGregor (2008) suggest ‘time and space in the development stages are vital to realise the expansive potential of true collaborations – a strong marriage arrangement where the different parties have a stake in the outcome but are generous to the group activity (p.29). Hillier (2008) however, commenting from a small-scale study ‘examining the perceptions of five cohorts of employers and their employees involved in the Foundation Degree in Public Service Management (FDPSM) run jointly by City University and City and Islington College’, (p.54) refers to the difficulties of maintaining employer relationships when ‘occupational mobility among middle managers, particularly in London, is a challenge for educational providers trying to establish a working partnership with employers’ (p.55).

In a further report on Foundation degrees (Greenwood et al, 2008) focuses on the ‘Impact of Foundation degrees on Students and the Workplace’ across a range of employment sectors which includes an employers’ perspectives section from which a few summary relevant items have been extracted

• Employers identified a range of positive benefits that Fd study brought to students and the workplace. Employers noted that employees gained broader understandings of the industry as a whole, performance in the job improved (e.g. through increased knowledge and skills, increased confidence in
applying such knowledge and skills, sharing new techniques, willingness to take initiative), and personal attributes were enhanced (e.g. increased motivation and commitment). Students ‘in’ the workplace on placement brought fresh ideas, and existing staff were motivated and enthused by taking on mentoring roles.

- Employer engagement with the design and development of Fds is variable. A few had been actively engaged, but for the majority such engagement was passive, and for the minority, it had been minimal.
- Employer engagement in the delivery of Fds is also variable. Though the majority had been engaged in delivery (with employers fairly evenly divided between active and passive engagement), for a fairly significant minority engagement in the delivery of Fds was minimal.
- Employers often could be more engaged in the delivery but providers do not seem to develop opportunities, although time constraints are an issue. (p.39)

Looking a little further at this research (Greenwood et al, 2008), it would appear that those employers who had been most involved in the development of the Foundation degree were also those who remained most involved. However ‘education/early years Fds were seen to be the result of Government initiatives and there was little if any involvement in the development of the Fds by the employers’ (p.32). As far as involvement in the delivery amongst the active participants it

... was also evident in relation to assessing Fd students’ work. For example, a small animation company assessed part of the Fd when the students were on placement with them; a theatre company “judged” students when they performed; a large media company assessed the students’ work in the workplace and the students’ ability to cope with the speed demanded by the job placement and the “high energy” of the workplace (p.35).

It was further noted that (Greenwood et al, 2008) passive or no involvement was apparent in the education/early years sector with some passive involvement ‘where teachers acted as mentors for the students’ (p.35).

Work-based learning

Historically, as Foster and Stephenson (1998) report, there have been a number of forms of vocational learning programmes from ‘work-experience placements and sandwich courses’ onwards (p.157) as well as competence-based awards. Cunningham et al (2004) explain that ‘The time-served apprenticeship is one of the oldest forms of structured work based
learning’ (p.61) qualifications and Harris (2006) that ‘the ideas of learning linked to work roles and learning occurring at work are not new’ but that ‘terminology and definitional parameters are varied and unstable’ (p.89). Moreover Stenström (2009) refers to work by Stenström and Lasonen (2000) on international comparisons

… of VET systems in the European countries [which] revealed much of variation in how the relationship between education and working life is organised. Described as a continuum, at one end are countries such as Germany and Austria in which working life bears the main responsibility for VET, while at the other end there are countries where vocational education has been strongly school-based (p.221).

Writing in 1995 Guile and Young identify the results of ‘the traditional divide between theoretical and practical learning’ (p.167) as follows

First, practitioners are left either with a knowledge of theory that appears to be disconnected from practice; second, they acquire the ability to systematically reflect upon their own practice; or third, they do not develop the concepts to help them to understand how forces external to the workplace may shape or influence professional practice. (p.167)

Evans et al (2006) point to the change in terminology ‘by the beginning of the twenty first century’ (p.7) in the UK from education and training to skills and learning and suggests the adoption of the Workplace Learning Task Group definition of (Sutherland 1998) ‘learning which derives its purpose from the context of employment’ (p.5) which involves (Evans et al, 2006)

learning in, through and for the workplace … which explicitly addresses the learning needs of a variety of stakeholders in the workplace: Employees, potential employees, and government, in addition to those of employers (p.7)

… and focuses attention on its value for organizational development as well as lifelong learning, of which the learning for “employability” of new entrants is only one element. (p.20).

Coming from a range of fields of study (adult education, higher education, cultural anthropology, organisational theory, innovation studies, industrial economics, management studies, vocational education, etc), a variety of theoretical perspectives (behaviourism, interpretivism and critical theory), different points of view (the manager, the learner/worker, the development practitioner), various contexts or environments (manufacturing/production-based industries, knowledge- or service-based organisations, the public sector, universities, professional practice etc), and using every imaginable methodology (from surveys and interviews, to diaries and participant observation) they have generated a bewildering array of models (p.15).

It is beyond the scope of this review to cover all of these and only a few elements are selected below.

Costley (2007), referring to the recent developments of work-based learning ‘in higher education … in many countries, especially in Europe and specifically in the UK, France and Scandinavian countries and also in Australia’ (p.1), comments on the ‘… debate for WBL concern[ing] how universities recognize and approach practice-based knowledge (Armsby et al, 2006) … since the knowledge of work-based learners is presented in unfamiliar ways to that of disciplinary knowledge’ (p.2). Discussing ‘work-based learning programmes within higher education’ (p.219) to date Reeve and Gallacher (2005) suggest that ‘it would appear that WBL developments within universities are still limited and marginal’ with some growth visible in the ‘new type of work-related programme, namely foundation degrees (DFES, 2003), although ‘there is some evidence to suggest that it is precisely these elements that are producing the most challenges for programme developers’ (p.220). In his work Eraut (2004) has analysed the

... different knowledge cultures of higher education and the workplace, contrasting the kinds of knowledge that are valued and the manner in which they are acquired and used (p.201)

This is summarized in Appendix 1. Hager (2004) argues that formal learning

... the most influential conceptualization of learning, one that has decisively shaped formal education systems, is very problematic when it comes to understanding learning and measuring learning at work (p.242)

Beckett and Hager (2002) have named these the ‘standard paradigm of learning’ and the ‘emerging paradigm of learning’ each of which has identifiable main principles (see Appendix 2). Moreover it is suggested that (Hager, 2004)
... the standard paradigm assumptions undermine attempts to understand what is happening in learning at work, [and] the emerging paradigm offers concepts that provide a beginning of understanding. However, it should be emphasized that rather than the two paradigms of learning being polar opposites, the standard paradigm is best seen as a limited and special instance of the emerging paradigm (p.249).

Havnes (2008) agrees arguing

The privilege of assessment of theoretical knowledge in professional education, and the dominant role of university teachers, is incongruent with the situated learning perspective. The institutional boundaries between education and work represent a threat to learning to become a professional (p.109).

Relationships between work-based learning and the social participation theories (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) of situated learning, peripheral participation and communities of practice are widely made currently within the (Beckett and Hager, 2002) emerging paradigm of learning, indeed Harris (2006), in her literature review, suggests ‘they are eulogised’ (p.109). However, according to Harris (2006), ‘some of the workplace learning literature is critically reflective about learning as participation’ (p.109), on various issues including its possible implications for the role of formal learning, and the transference of knowledge across boundaries ‘for those who maintain that there are differences in forms of knowledge and forms of learning’ (p.115). Looking first at the role of formal learning, Harris (2006) suggests that ‘the logical conclusion of Lave and Wenger’s position would be that all formal learning be absorbed into the informal or the practical’ (p.109). Rainbird *et al* (2004) argues both for the ‘potential of formal learning to contribute to workers’ own sense of empowerment’ and that ‘formal qualifications… are significant in acting as filters to internal organizational labour markets’ (p.51). Tynjälä *et al* (2003) also point to Reich’s (1991) discussion of jobs that require ‘symbolic-analytic services’ (p.151) as an ‘essential element of key jobs in working life today’ requiring ‘abstract thinking and an ability to analyse and synthesise information’ (p.152) which are attributes derived from education. These views seem to support Hager’s (2004) previously mentioned position above that ‘the standard paradigm is best seen as a limited and special instance of the emerging paradigm’ (p.249).

Turning now to the selected second issue on learning as participation from Harris’s (2006) review, that of transfer, Evans and Rainbird (2006) explain that ‘it has been argued that
situated learning theory ... does not allow for the individual to grow beyond the borders of the respective community of practice or take a critical position toward it' (p.18). Tynjälä (2009) agrees suggesting because the model appears to emphasise socialisation into the existing practices of the community, these practices are taken for granted, and, thus the need to question or develop them is ignored... it seems to support reproductive rather than transformative learning. Another limitation in the model is the question of whom it recognises as a learner. This model depicts learning processes at work mainly as a novitate activity while experts inhabit a role of a kind of a teacher, facilitator or coach. However, it is not only novices in the modern workplace who learn. Fuller and Unwin (2002) showed in their study that in their daily work people teach each other across the traditional workplace boundaries of age, experience and status (p.26)

Some criticisms of elements of communities of practice theory here might also perhaps be compared to criticisms of the English National Vocational Qualifications structure for Havard (2001) argues that ‘the notion of “acceptable” as opposed to “exceptional” performance is a UK perspective strongly embedded in the NVQ movement’ (p.63), and Rainbird (2000) that whilst National Vocational Qualifications may be useful in boosting confidence of those who do not have qualifications ... it may be difficult to use this methodology to establish progression routes. This is because workers can only be assessed at the level they are currently performing’ (p.188).

Assessment is carried out by trained assessors (Munro and Senker, 2006), other ‘experienced employees’, who visit employees in their workplaces and assess ‘through the successful demonstration of job-specific skills and knowledge in the workplace’ (p.136). Assessors are trained to observe and assess (A1, n/d) ‘candidates by using different assessment methods’ and must show that they can

1. Develop... plans for assessing competence with candidates
2. Judg[e] evidence against agreed standards to make assessment decisions
3. Giv[e] candidates feedback and support on ... assessment decisions
4. Contribut[e] to the internal quality assurance process.
(A1, n/d, p.1-2)

However, according to Evans and Rainbird (2006), in the 1990’s assessment became a pre-occupation, with specialists such as Alison Wolf, fiercely critical of the idea that “competent” performance
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... of various functions in the workplace could be taken as sufficient evidence of the relevant “underpinning” principles and bodies of knowledge. (p.20).

Referring to the field of nursing Percival et al (1994) explains

... competence refers to the total performance capability of a nurse. Thus competence encompasses far more than merely the ability to adequately perform tasks or technical skills. Competence includes the knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and attitudes that reflect and underpin the practice of the nurse and therefore, requires measurement in the practice context (p.139).

Watson and Robbins (2008) also stress the importance of the ‘authentic assessment of performance’ (p.315) arguing that

Whilst portfolios, practicals and coursework can provide valid assessment data, they have low levels of authenticity as they generally constitute artefacts of learning and are abstracted forms of ‘evidence’; they are representations of the learning or performance that is possible by a learner and they do not always offer opportunities to ‘see’ the performance in its entirety (p.316).

Reporting on work on performance assessment of nurses in the Netherlands Smits et al (2008) also give it value as ‘an important component within the array of alternative or innovative assessment methods and strategies’ (p.169).

It is also the far ranging perspective of performance, it could be argued, that Moyles et al (2002) sought to describe in ‘develop[ing] a final Framework of Effective Pedagogy for use alongside the CGFS [Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000)] in identifying performance indicators for early years practitioners’ (p.2). (* now replaced by the DCSF, 2008, Early Years Foundation Stage); and the perspective is in the current (CWDC, 2008) Early Years Professional (EYP) guidance which states

To attain EYPS, practitioners must provide evidence that they meet all the Standards. Being an EYP, however, implies more than meeting a series of discrete Standards: It is necessary to consider the Standards as a whole in order to appreciate the skill, creativity, commitment, energy and enthusiasm required for maintaining high quality personal practice in the early years and the intellectual and leadership skills required of effective EYPs (p.6).

Of the assessors themselves the guidance explains (CWDC, 2008) ‘the national providers of training and assessment exercise fine professional judgement when preparing candidates to meet the Standards, and when assessing candidates for EYPS’ (p.6). Bearing in mind here the (DfES, 2006a) newness and emergent nature of the EYP role little published research on
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selection of EYP assessors appears available, however in personal communication (Thompson, 2009) one training provider offered the following perspective

I think assessors need to be good mentors and that was the basis of first selection – using existing mentors who have successfully mentored trainees in the Early Years Foundation Stage. … Qualifications are also important – initially they were all chosen because they had early years Qualified Teacher Status (not enough EYPS around to use them!) (np)

Returning now to more theoretical discussions on situated learning critiques, Lee et al (2004) cite the importance of Engeström’s (for example 1995 and 2004) work which

moves beyond the concerns with learning as this occurs within communities of practice and addresses learning, knowledge production and “expertise” as these are dynamically constructed through and across multiple and interacting communities of practice (p.11)

This attribution of importance is also reflected in other contributors such as Harris (2006) who states that ‘the learning and participation paradigm has taken a giant developmental step through the work of Engeström’ (p.110), which is based on cultural-historical activity theory, and (Lee et al, 2004) replaces ‘the notion of community of practice … with the term “activity system”’ (p.11). Engeström et al (1995) suggests that expertise has both vertical and horizontal dimensions which are equally important. The vertical view is ‘a discourse of “stages” or “levels” of knowledge and skill … which assumes a uniform, singular model of what counts as an “expert”’ but in the horizontal one ‘experts operate in and move between multiple parallel activity contexts … [which] demand and afford different, complementary but also conflicting cognitive tools, rules, and patterns of social interaction’ (p.319). Guile and Griffiths (2001) suggests that ‘the tendency to treat “vertical development” in isolation from “horizontal development” reflects the institutional separation of formal and informal learning’ (p.116).

Engeström et al (1995) further proposes that both vertical and horizontal dimensions are both polycontextual and boundary crossing. Tuomi-Gröhn et al (2003) explain that

polycontextuality means that experts are engaged not only in multiple simultaneous tasks and task-specific participation frameworks within one and the same activity and are also involved in multiple
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However boundary crossing here has a deep meaning since (Tuomi-Gröhn et al, 2003)

what is transferred is not packages of knowledge and skills that remain intact; instead the very process of such transfer involves active interpreting, modifying and reconstructing the skills and knowledge to be transferred for the process is multi-directional and multi-faceted, involving transitions between activity systems like school and workplace; on account of its dynamic nature, this process is called developmental transfer.

Moreover it is suggested

Engeström names the vertical dimension, referred to earlier as (2004) ‘a divided multi-organizational field or terrain of activity’ and the horizontal one as ‘knotworking and expansive learning’ (p.161). He (2004) explains expansive learning as

A new theoretical idea or concept [which] is initially produced in the form of an abstract, simple explanatory relationship, a “germ cell”. This initial abstraction is step-by-step enriched and transformed into a concrete system of multiple, constantly developing manifestations. In an expansive learning cycle, the initial simple idea is transformed into a complex object, into a new form of practice. At the same time, the cycle produces new theoretical concepts – theoretically grasped practice – concrete in systemic richness and multiplicity of manifestations (p.151).

Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström (2003) further explain that ‘In such projects of expansive learning and developmental transfer, three parties learn in collaboration and dialogue: the school, the student and the workplace. They are all engaged in constructing their partially interdependent zones of proximal development' (p.33).
Engeström (2004) says ‘knotworking may be seen as the emerging interactional core of configuration’ (p.153) and ‘negotiated knotworking … the defining characteristic of collaborative and transformative expertise’ (p.152)

characterized by a pulsating movement of tying, untying and retying together otherwise separate threads of activity. The tying and dissolution of collaborative work is not reducible to any specific or fixed entity as the centre of control. The locus of initiative changes from moment to moment within a knotworking sequence. (p153).

Engeström (2004) has moreover devised a model to further explain the concepts which, drawing on Vygotsky’s thinking, he refers to as his envisioned zone of proximal development of expertise (See Appendix 3). In this model

the community of the expert activity system is not any more limited to the members of an institution, such as the primary-care health centre or hospital clinic. The community encompasses the whole ‘producer-customer network’ and thus spans across multiple institutions operating in divided terrain. In other word, the envisioned zone of proximal development of expertise implies a fluid, expansive de-institutionalization of expertise. In this case, de-institutionalization does not imply a return to atomic individualism. It implies that the future subject of expertise is a constantly changing, yet longitudinally robust knot of contributors (p161).

Looking briefly at Paavola et al (2004), they conduct a critically examination of (2004) Engeström’s model of expansive learning, alongside (1994) Scardamalia and Bereiter’s model of knowledge building, and (1995) Nonaka and Takeuchi’s model of knowledge creation and find that they all have ‘important commonalities’ (p.558). They all appear to support models in which acquisition of knowledge and participatory perspectives of learning are joined so that Paavola et al, 2004) the ‘knowledge-creation perspective focuses on analyzing the processes whereby new knowledge and new mediating objects of activity are collaboratively created, whether in schools or work’ (p.573).

Returning now to the multiple relationships between educational programmes and work for work-based learning, Harris (2006) in her literature review, mentions Young and Guile’s (1994) ‘notion of connectivity in relation to professional development (p.31)’ (p.114), but does not appear to expand upon it. (References to it are absent from Lee et al’s review in 2004). However Evans et al (2006) suggest that

one way to appreciate the diversity of approaches used is through Guile and Young’s (1995) “connective” typology … four models of
learning found in vocational programs that include workplace experience … They are analytical rather than descriptive; no specific work-based program necessarily fits neatly into any of the models, and some programs may contain elements of more than one model (p.21)

Evans et al (2006) also emphasise the importance to them of the connective model for

Unlike the other models for which many examples can currently be found in higher education, the connective model suggests a direction for future development that is consistent with the contextualized understanding of workplace learning developed [by the authors] (p.22).

The centrality of Guile and Young’s connective model is also emphasised by Tynjälä (2009) who sees

the core concepts [of] connectivity, which refers to bringing together things that have earlier been separated, and transformation, which refers to the changes that take place through connective activities

as

… the theoretical foundations [for] our argument for the integration of learning and work, and collaboration between schools and workplaces (p.12).

This is important because, Stenström (2009) explains, ‘In the modern industrial and post-industrial eras a clear divide between the context of production (work) and the context of reproduction (education) has become evident’ (p.222). Moreover, for Tynjälä (2009)

… connectivity leads to transformations at the level both of individual learning and of the learning of organisations and systems. Our conclusion is that it is important to consider the workplace as a learning environment for both employees and students, in order to ensure the continuous development of competence. This requires close collaboration and partnership between education and work. (p.12)

Griffiths and Guile (2003) explain that they have been developing

… an approach to learning and the production of knowledge through work experience which breaks through the barriers created by overly defined and differing contexts (e.g. school and work) in which work experience and, arguably, any form of learning in any organisation takes place. … [for which] our research has required an engagement with what we know of learning theory and development and, in particular, we have drawn upon Cultural Historical Activity Theory (‘activity theory’ in short). (p.57)
In the process of this development they have proposed a typology of work experience models (referred to above by Evans et al, 2006) (see Appendix 4), identified a number of learning ideas (2003) ‘associated with work which explicitly inform a connective model of work experience’ (p.58), and see ‘learning [a]s a mediated process which occurs as individuals learn how to engage in and use … four practices to come to terms with the world’
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(p.59). The four practices are identified as (Griffiths and Guile, 2003): ‘the practice of thinking’ (p.59); ‘dialogic inquiry’ (p.60); ‘the third practice is “boundary crossing” ’ (p.61); and the fourth ‘is the resituation of knowledge and skill’ (p.61). They also stress that ‘a particular challenge for us is to avoid the idea of connectivity being interpreted as connectedness (simply linking contexts and/or modes of learning)’ (p.64). Stenström (2009), views this typology as ‘highlight[ing] the need for new curriculum frameworks … [which] would enable students to relate formal and informal, horizontal and vertical learning. Therefore, learners need to be encouraged to conceptualise their experiences, as this serves different curricula purposes’ (p.223-224).

Assessment

According to Havnes and McDowell (2008)

assessment of learning in schools, colleges, universities, and in professional and workplace settings, is increasingly being questioned. We are in a period of rapid change and innovation in relation to assessment policies and practices (p.3)

Watson and Robbins (2008) agree suggesting ‘assessment methods and theories have become disengaged from contemporary developments in understanding how learning takes place in vocational and work-based settings’ (p.326). Whilst Gibbs and Simpson (2004) describe some of the issues relating to the ‘assessment as measurement’ aspect from an education perspective thus

When teaching in higher education hits the headlines it is nearly always about assessment: about examples of supposedly falling standards, about plagiarism, about unreliable marking or rogue external examiners, about errors in exam papers, and so on. The recent approach of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to improve quality in higher education has been to focus on learning outcomes and their assessment, on the specification of standards and on the role of external examiners to assure these standards. Where institutional learning and teaching strategies focus on assessment they are nearly always about aligning learning outcomes with assessment and about specifying assessment criteria (p.3).

However as Havnes and McDowell (2008) also explain

... in an analysis of the historical development of assessment practices ... Shepard (2000) argues that the social meaning of assessment is changing, firstly from an act performed at the end of a learning trajectory to an act in the course of learning, and secondly,
Reporting on a case study in New South Wales on developing student self-assessment Tan (2008) identified some of the dilemmas involved in developing such innovative practices including

The dilemma for many teachers lies in vesting students with sufficient power to realize the benefits of self-assessment, and yet retain sufficient power for themselves to regulate the self-assessment outcomes of students. In contrast, the academic developers were more concerned with a different dilemma – with forms of power and hierarchy that self-assessment challenges and whether institutions vest academics with sufficient power and autonomy for effective self-assessment practice. This has many implications for academic staff development in relation to articulating and promoting more effective uses of self-assessment (p.235).

It could be argued that these implications may also affect the development of (Reeve and Gallacher, 2005) ‘radical and innovative approaches’ which include work-based learning and ‘pioneer new forms of participation’ (p.219) where ‘partnership can … be understood, Hastings (1999) suggests, as a ‘hot-house’ of cultural change’ (p.221). Reive and gallacher (2004) go on to identify three key ‘problematic … partnership’ (p.223) issues in the development of work-based learning programmes which are: ‘Do employers want this kind of partnership?’(p.224); ‘Difficulties in bridging different cultures’ (p.227); and ‘the influence of alternative agendas’ (p.229). As part of the latter Reeve and Gallacher (2004) comment on findings that ‘moves towards curriculum innovation are balanced by an anxiety about going too far in this direction, and as a result, losing the confidence of the institution in the academic rigour and the quality of the programmes’ (p.229).

Dysthe et al (2008), however, reflecting on Norwegian higher education, suggests that with the ‘new modes of assessment’ has come a ‘new interest in criteria’ suggesting that since ‘assessment is contextualized so … the formulation and use of criteria must reflect local priorities and values’ (p.122) for ‘criteria development should … be seen as an ongoing process of negotiation rather than as static reifications of beliefs about the quality of a
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particular product’ (p.129). Thurgate and MacGregor (2008) report that in their Health and Social Care Foundation degree space has been identified locally where an HE/FE partnership gave the lead in specialist knowledge and skills provision, “the power”, to an employer for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the learning outcomes for their employees. New processes were then developed and new boundaries negotiated to ensure the module learning outcomes were achieved and the employer satisfied with the knowledge and skills development (p.29).

Reflecting on ‘their experiences in their own institutions’ (p.5) of assessment of co-operative work-based learning in New Zealand and Australia Coll et al (2002) suggest that there is a mismatch of what employers value and what institutions are keen to assess, [which] may be due, in part at least, to the difficulties associated with the assessment of work experience. These difficulties relate to the holistic context in which work experience takes place, and the complexity of the dimensions to be assessed. The authors suggest that defining the purpose of the work-based learning is paramount, but because of the above difficulties this is not straightforward (p.5-6).

In a separate article, to which Coll also contributed, (Zegwaard et al, 2003) it is also ‘argue[d] that defining what is to be assessed and the purpose (i.e. in terms of learning outcomes) of the work-based learning is paramount’ (p.12). Coll et al (2002) suggest that ‘employers value so-called soft skills such as interpersonal skills and communication skills’ (p.5) whilst Zegwaard et al (2003) report research that reveals that employers of, for example, new teachers “display a clear preference for ‘evidenced’ comments over ‘predictive’ comments” (Cameron-Jones and O’Hara, 1994, p.213) … hence … some employers wish to see ‘rigorous’ assessment procedures that can be backed up with ‘solid’ evidence, whereas others are keen to see evaluation of non-technical competencies (p.12).

Aspects of this are also reflected in a small-scale research project based on employer responses to a FDPSM, (Hillier, 2008) who … found that middle managers in particular want their employees to be successful in the workplace and have identified transferable skills, the ‘soft skills’, as being particularly important goals for achievement when undertaking the FD (p. 55).

Also of interest is Thurgate and MacGregor’s (2009) research where they have conducted a brief literature review on assessment within work-based learning and have identified four main themes of purposes for assessment as:
planned learning for employment and role development in the organisation; improved quality of service provision where knowledge is applied to upgrade the workplace activities; application of learning outside of the context in which it was first understood; and learning that enables the employee to be fit for purpose in the organisation. The dilemma is how to channel the developing graduate thinking skills to complement the requirements of the employer for their employee’s role (p.151).

In addition to identified challenges such as these it is necessary to include the problematic of work-based learning itself. Havnes (2008) explains ‘there are critical voices, particularly from socio-cultural, situated learning, and cultural-historical perspectives, questioning the power of formal education to prepare for future competent action outside of education’ (p.102). Hager (2004) contributes his perspectives on the role of ‘assessment’ or ‘judgement’ in measuring learning at work where the influence of ‘the standard paradigm of learning [with its] … sharp separation of the processes and products of learning’ (p.247) has ‘diminished … the significance … of the so-called practical judgements which are about what to do’ thus ‘judgement as it occurs in workplace practice is banished to the category of “educationally uninteresting” ’ (p.245). Hager (2004) continues

The emerging paradigm of learning, with its focus on holism, judgement, action and context, better represents the kinds of learning that occur in workplaces. At best, the type of learning valorized by the standard paradigm is but a small part of learning in workplaces. Thus, when it comes to assessing learning at work, retaining the assessment assumptions of the standard paradigm will only serve to guarantee ineffective assessment (p.250).

Hager next identifies three ‘key assessment assumptions of the standard paradigm of learning’ (p.250) ‘which learning at work challenges’ and calls for ‘more research … to expand our understanding of learning from work and the most appropriate ways of measuring its progress and of enhancing its development’ (p.257). The three assumptions he identifies are: ‘First, that individuals are the locus of learning, second, that what is learnt is stable over time, and third, that learning trajectories are common across all learners’ (p.257).

Continuing considerations of the role of assessment rather than its practices, Havnes (2008) asserts that ‘assessment has a vital role to play in bridging the boundaries between education and work and the wider society’ (p.102). Drawing on the work of scholars such as Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström (2003) he argues that assessment in professional education is
a ‘boundary object’ defined by Bowker and Star (1999, p.297) as ‘objects that inhabit several communities of practice and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them’ which are able to ‘travel across borders and maintain some sort of constant identity’ (p.16). Therefore for Havnes (2008)

Assessment as a boundary object puts the institutional knowledge and practices in diverse contexts in focus. Assessment would go beyond qualifying new professionals for future professional practice, beyond constructivism and co-constructivism, and emphasise the confronting of institutional practices and knowledge of work and education, for students, professionals and teachers in professional education. Consequently, how to involve these three groups of agents as participants in the social practice in assessment is a challenge (p.112).

This identification of assessment as a boundary object therefore creates links between assessment and Griffiths and Guile’s (2003) work on connective models of work experience through the concept of boundary crossing and thus the ‘development of partnerships with workplaces to create environments for learning’ (p.72).

Reports of employer involvement in assessment

As mentioned earlier in this review not much literature has been identified which refers to employer engagement in assessment, and much of the literature which is available about employer engagement in assessment refers to its occurrence in a peripheral way which has already been covered above. However there are a small number of examples which do go into more detail and six of these are now explored below.

One case study report on employer engagement in assessment (Church and Bull, 1995) invited employers to ‘assess and provide feedback on student oral presentations’ for a geography course (p.197) which was aimed both at upskilling tutors, who were previously unfamiliar with the approach and had sought support from a skilled employer within the retail sector, and providing students with some realistic employer experience. The subsequent evaluation of the project identified benefits for both staff and students but found ‘benefits to the retail employer were less easy to identify’ (p.201). In this model the employers had no specific input until the summative assessment stage. Laybourn et al (2001) report on a very different approach developing a formative model involving a focus on groupworking skills
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and ‘midway through the project employers came into the university to observe them working. Employers gave immediate feedback to the students in groups ... and as individuals’ (p.369) enabling students to ‘meaningfully benefit from the employers feedback in the latter half of the project’ (p.370). No report is made about employers views of this approach except that ‘employers [felt] that working as a group of three or four is helpful in that they can discuss performances amongst themselves before giving feedback’ (p.378).

Rainsbury et al (1998) report on the development, in Auckland, of ‘an alternative assessment practice for a work-based cooperative education course, involving collaboration between academics, employers and students’ which challenges ‘the established norm of academics being the only one to formally assess students’ development and capabilities’ (p.313). The model chosen allowed for a written report assessed by the academic tutor alone leading to 50% of the module mark, whilst the other 50% was assessed collaboratively with each ‘assessor determining his or her grade for the four categories, before a meeting at which the final grade is negotiated’ (p.315). The involvement of the student as an assessor was based upon literature which supported ‘supported self-assessment by students on the basis that the benefits one obtains from critically reviewing one’s performance are transferable to the workplace and to professional practice’ (p.315-316). Rainsbury et al (1998) found little literature ‘on the role of the employer in the summative assessment of work-based learning courses’, but felt it was valid because ‘they would be in a better position to assess the student than the academic’, and that ‘employers' lack of experience in assessing students, does not mean that they lack the ability to undertake this role. Most would be involved in staff appraisal and thus would possess skills useful and able to be applied in the assessment of students in the workplace’ (p.316). Looking at the role of the academic the model suggested

By acting as an academic supervisor to the student, the academic gathers informal evidence of student achievement. The grading meeting allows the academic to use this informal evidence to moderate the more direct evidence of the student and employer. During the grading meeting the academic also acts as a facilitator encouraging the student and employer to discuss the evidence of their grades, thereby ensuring that each party’s grade can be supported before it is used in the final grade aggregation (p.317).

Concentrating on the feedback results of the process from the employers ‘all were positive about participating in the collaborative process ... however 5 of the 16 employers raised [concerns about] about difficulties in applying the assessment criteria’ (p.318). It was concluded that ‘the assessment criteria need to address the differing levels of project
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complexity and difficulty as well as be flexible enough to accommodate different types of placements. Attention needs to be given to the development of students’ negotiation skills prior to the collaborative meeting’ (p.322).

Smits et al (2008) report on exploring different perspectives of performance assessment in nursing education in the Netherlands, using a five-day performance assessment period involving ‘students, teachers and professional practitioners’ (p.169) [here the latter are being interpreted as employers in this review] with a mixture of ‘glass boxes’ and ‘black boxes’ where

Glass-boxes were transparent, observable tasks in which students demonstrated their professional behaviour during consultations with patients. A checklist was used to enable teacher and peer assessors to observe and interpret students’ behaviour and score their performance. Students had already worked with this checklist during previous course assignments. Black boxes were non-transparent, non-observable tasks resulting in written reports, assessed by teacher-assessors (p.171)

Findings included that ‘professionals were especially positive about … “preparing students to acquire skills as a beginning nursing professional”. This aspect seems consistent with the students’ belief that this performance assessment provided them with information about their strengths and weaknesses’ (p.179). Amongst suggestions for improvement are first that nursing professional, teachers and students should consult each other more often. As part of this they should discuss professional topics in the field and the meaning of criteria for performance. The experience of the practising professionals would thus complement the expertise of the teachers. Attention should be especially focused on the skills of judging performance and of giving feedback (p.180). ... We recommend developing feedback and assessor training for teachers and students as an investment in performance assessment that could be highly effective (p.181).

Smits et al (2008) go on to point to training guidelines for assessor programs devised by Percival et al (1994) as a starting point. These suggest (Percival et al, 1994)

Professional development/assessor training programs aim to assist participants to:

- enhance the understanding of competencies, processes, and issues related to their implementation
- become sensitized to competency-based assessment in the workplace
- develop skills in the use of competencies
- identify cues for the demonstration of competencies in a variety of practice settings (p.141)
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Watson and Robbins (2008) report on one of a series of an empirical studies ‘aimed to develop processes and rubrics of alternative forms of assessment based on performance’ (p.315), ‘for teaching and learning support staff working in a range of educational settings’ (p.320) explaining that

… we use the term “performance” to define the whole area of professional practice or “praxis” (putting theoretical knowledge into action or practice). Authenticity is concerned with the “genuineness” of an assessment process in making judgments about performance (p.318).

The starting point of this work was to establish a ‘working party … drawn from the schools and comprising a mixture of TLSAs as well as teachers and managers (special educational coordinators, behaviour management coordinators, head teachers)’ (p320) and ‘through a form of Delphi workshop processes with this “expert group”, assessment constructs were elicited’ (p.321) eventually leading to a list of ‘core assessment constructs’ (p.321) which were then piloted. Watson and Robbins (2008) explain that ‘Delphi is a methodology for “systematically gathering input from relevant experts on a topic” (De Meyrick 2003, 7) and has its origins in health research from which numerous variants have emerged’ (p.321). They further argue

… the focus was on achievement of highly complex personal and interpersonal behaviours, skills and dispositions, where judgements have been achieved through non-intrusive, educationally focused means. The theoretical descriptions of the assessment of performance are, we believe, essential to any debate about educational assessment’ (p.327).

Watson and Robbins (2008) report

… the outcomes of participating in the pilot have been positive for all the members of the group … in the next phase … we have attempted to address … the working party’s own requests to enable more experienced TLSAs to take on the mentoring and primary assessment role … induct[ing] TLSAs into being mentors initially, with a view that, with training and increased confidence and experience, they could fulfil the assessor role (p.326).

The final example of employer involvement in assessment discussed is reported on by Stenström (2009) which became ‘established practice’ in Finland’s VET programme in ‘autumn 2006’ after ‘experimental use in educational establishments from 1999 and is known as ‘vocational skills demonstrations’ (p.221). These are reported as

competence-based tests carried out in a work situation or as past work of a process which are designed, implemented and assessed
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by the education provider in cooperation with representatives from working life … in which cooperation between education and working life plays a central role and which brings together representatives from working life and teachers (p.222).

Stenström (2009) grounds this approach within the (Griffiths and Guile, 2003) ‘connective model’ ‘which have been developed pedagogically to form part of vocational study programmes and to improve the relationship between education and working life’ (p.224). The ‘assessment targets and criteria used are defined in the national core curriculum … although not all … are included in every vocational skills demonstration’ (p. 224), and Stenström (2009) includes a model showing these six areas to be addressed (reproduced here from p.225 cited as Targets of assessment of vocational competence in Finnish VET, Kinnunen, 2005, 70). Links are also made between this and Eraut’s typology of knowledge referred to earlier in this literature review.

Stenström (2009) goes on to explain that ‘in vocational skills demonstrations assessment is part of learning and its aim is to guide and motivate the student to learn and to acquire self-assessment skills … The most important element is the assessment discussion, which occurs after every demonstration of vocational skills … during the assessment discussion the student, among other things, receives guidance and feedback from the teacher and the workplace instructor as well as gives feedback in turn’ (p.227) and this is also further explained by the use of a model which is reproduced here.

Assessment of vocational skills as part of students’ learning process (Stenström and Laine, 2006).

Stenström (2009) further explains that
One of the reasons why the assessment discussion is so central is that other kinds of tripartite cooperation during on-the-job learning and vocational skills demonstrations are rather rare. The assessment discussion gathers together the viewpoints of the teacher, student, and workplace instructor with the aim of arriving at a mutual understanding of the students’ skills. This requires time and commitment from all participants, but a consensus is usually reached without conflict (p.229).

Looking specifically at Stenström’s comments on the role of the employer/workplace instructor it is explained that

Workplace instructors are ... valued for their professional and workplace-specific expertise. Assessment by a professional is one of the main strengths of vocational skills demonstrations. Apart from their expertise in working life, it is equally important that these assessors have taken part in a sufficient amount of assessment training, since proper training can reduce human errors of judgment and increase inter-assessor reliability ... This training unifies assessment practices, reduces different interpretations and helps to ensure objectivity in assessment (p.229).

Stenström provides a model of ‘connection between education and working life in vocational skills demonstrations’ (p.229) which is reproduced here. She also provides a table which explains the interpretation of the elements within assessment of vocational skills demonstrations which foster cooperation between education and working life (see Appendix 5).

Summary

This literature review has examined information available in the complex area of employer engagement in assessment of work-based learning. It first offered an overview of the early years sector from an employer perspective and identified a sector in the process of considerable on-going change. It next examined available evidence of the development of foundation degrees and views of employer involvement within this, identifying a very mixed picture both of types of foundation degree models and levels of employer engagement. A review of some of the theory and practices of work-based learning again identified this as an area of changing approaches to meet new and developing understandings of work-based learning. It then considered some of the practices and roles of assessment and finally
examined some available models of employer engagement in assessment in work-based learning. It has tried to locate this information, where possible, within the early years sector and has endeavoured to look beyond the locus of the United Kingdom, also covering information from New Zealand and Australia, the Netherlands, Norway and Finland. The literature reviewed suggests that this is a complex and emerging area of development for both employers and higher education providers but that evolving connective tripartite assessment models may be a way forward.
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Thompson, W. (W.Thompson@hull.ac.uk) (2nd July 2009) Employer engagement and assessment. Personal email to E. Painter (painter315@btinternet.com)


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### Appendix 1

**Summary of Eraut's (2004) Different Knowledge Cultures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge in vocational and professional education programmes (Eraut, 2004, p.205)</th>
<th>Knowledge found in the workplace (Eraut, 2004, p.207)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Knowledge constructed in the context of either a subject discipline or an applied field. This introduces concepts and theories to help students to explain, understand and critique occupational practices and arguments used to justify them; and to appreciate new thinking about the role of the occupation and proposed new forms of practice.</td>
<td>Codified Knowledge acquired during initial professional training and further episodes of formal learning; or in the workplace itself. The former includes codified academic knowledge of concepts, theories and methodology. The latter includes job-specific technical knowledge and knowledge of systems and procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Knowledge about how evidence is collected, analysed and interpreted in academic contexts and in occupational contexts; and the procedural principles and theoretical justifications for skills and techniques used in the occupational field.</td>
<td>Skills needed for competence in a wide range of activities and for performing several work-related roles, including leadership and working collaboratively within a team. These can be grouped under four headings – technical, interpersonal, thinking and learning – and are acquired through practice with feedback. Progression is associated with increasing fluency, responsibility and complexity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Skills and Techniques acquired through skills workshops, laboratory work, studio work, project work etc.</td>
<td>Knowledge Resources include a range of materials and on-line resources; but learning from other people is even more important in most work settings. These include immediate work colleagues and other members of one’s organization; networks of clients/customers, suppliers and competitors; professional networks; and other personal contacts developed over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic Skills claimed to be acquired during further and/or higher education, either</td>
<td>Understanding provides the basis for most action, although it is inevitably incomplete. It</td>
</tr>
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</table>
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through direct teaching or more often, as a side effect of academic work. These include:
- Basic skills in number, language and information technology
- Modes of interpersonal communications
- Skills associated with learning and thinking in an academic context
- Self-management skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General knowledge about the occupation, its structure, modes of working, cultural values and career opportunities.</th>
<th>Decision-making and judgment vary with the conditions in which they are exercised. Decisions may be rapid, with little time for analysis or consultation, or deliberative and consultative. When situations are complex or information is sparse, judgement becomes a critical aspect of decision-making: judgement of people; judgement of the quality of products, practices and processes; judgement of the relative significance of, and interaction between, different factors; judgement of priorities, options and strategies.</th>
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Appendix 2

Hager’s (2004) identified main principles of learning

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<tr>
<td>The best learning resides in individual minds not bodies;</td>
<td>Knowledge, as integrated in judgements, is a capacity for successful acting in and on the world;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best learning is propositional (true, false, more certain, less certain);</td>
<td>The choice of how to act in and on the world comes from the exercise of judgement;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best learning can be expressed verbally and written down in books, etc;</td>
<td>Knowledge resides in individuals, teams and organizations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The acquisition of the best learning alters minds not bodies;</td>
<td>Knowledge includes not just propositional understanding, but cognitive, conative and affective capacities as well as other abilities and learned capacities such as bodily know-how, skills of all kinds, and so on. All of these are components conceivably involved in making and acting upon judgements;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Such learning can be applied via bodies to alter the external world;</td>
<td>Not all knowledge can be or has been expressed verbally and written down;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process and product of learning can be sharply distinguished;</td>
<td>Acquisition of knowledge alters both the learner and the world (since the learner is part of the world).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best learning is transparent to the mind.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Employer engagement in assessment of work-based learning in foundation degrees
Appendix 3: Envisioned zone of proximal development of expertise (Reproduced from Engeström, 2004, p.162)
## Appendix 4

A Typology of Work Experience

(Griffiths and Guile, 2003, p.72)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model of work experience</th>
<th>Traditional Model</th>
<th>Experiential Model</th>
<th>Generic Model</th>
<th>Work Process Model</th>
<th>Connective Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Work Experience</td>
<td>‘Launch’ into work</td>
<td>‘Co-development’ between education and work</td>
<td>Key skill/competence assessment</td>
<td>‘Attunement’ to work environment</td>
<td>‘Reflexivity’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption About Learning and Development</td>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>Adaptation and self-awareness</td>
<td>Self-management</td>
<td>Adjust and transfer</td>
<td>Vertical and horizontal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice of Work Experience</td>
<td>Managing tasks and instructions</td>
<td>Managing contributions</td>
<td>Managing action plan and learning outcomes</td>
<td>Managing work processes, relationships and customers</td>
<td>Working collaboratively to apply and develop knowledge and skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of Work Experience</td>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>Arms-length supervision</td>
<td>Facilitation</td>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>Developing and resituating learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome of Work Experience</td>
<td>Skill acquisition Knowledge of ‘work readiness’</td>
<td>Economic and industrial awareness</td>
<td>Assessed learning outcomes</td>
<td>System thinking</td>
<td>Polycontextual and connective skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Education and Training Provider</td>
<td><strong>Provide</strong>: Formal preparation programme</td>
<td><strong>Facilitate</strong>: Briefing for and de-briefing of work experience</td>
<td><strong>Build</strong>: Portfolio of achievements</td>
<td><strong>Support</strong>: Reflection-in and on-action</td>
<td><strong>Develop</strong>: Partnerships with workplaces to create environments for learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elements within assessment of vocational skills demonstrations which foster cooperation between education and working life (Stenström, 2009, 232)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Workplace Instructor</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joint assessment</td>
<td>Responsible for implementation of assessment and ensuring the grades are based on the agreed criteria, professional of assessment and theory</td>
<td>Valued for their professional field and workplace specific expertise, professional of practice</td>
<td>Show their vocational competence (theoretical and practical skills) in as authentic situations as possible, learner during the-on-the-job learning (skills demonstrations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment discussion</td>
<td>Responsible for assessment, aware of learning theories</td>
<td>Motivate students' learning at the workplace</td>
<td>Guide and motivate students' vocational development and promote students learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Broaden their perspectives and help them to keep grip on the essential issues, help them to reflect on their own role within skills demonstrations</td>
<td>Make them think over their own ways of action and working, find new viewpoints on their work, help to reflect on their own role within skills demonstrations</td>
<td>Improve their professional judgements and their understanding of new situations, better understanding of vocational competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>Teachers’ guidance and appraisal is a significant help for students on their way to becoming professionals (skilled workers)</td>
<td>Workplace instructors guidance and appraisal is a significant help for students on their way to becoming professionals (skilled workers)</td>
<td>Important tool for improving motivation and vocational development, helps students on their way to becoming professionals (skilled workers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Expert in vocational assessment, giving feedback for students</td>
<td>Expert in vocational practice, giving feedback to students</td>
<td>Feedback promotes students' learning, getting feedback from the teacher and workplace instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Responsible for the implementation of the curriculum</td>
<td>Participant in curriculum development process</td>
<td>Participant in implementation of the curriculum (vocational skills demonstrations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>