

The Work-Based Learning Student Handbook 2nd edition

Palgrave Study Skills, Macmillan Education (2015)

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Although still a relatively young field of study, work based learning (WBL) is now an established part of a wide variety of FE and HE courses designed to equip the learner with the knowledge and skills for work. Work is no longer the place in which we apply what we have learned through formal education. It is, or can be, the context and content of our learning. Conscious attention to our purposeful action in the world is a rich source of knowledge although, as Polanyi reminds us, much of what we know in this way is tacit. WBL can help us articulate and critique this knowledge and therefore improve it.

Why is WBL so powerful and practical? What are its main features? How are courses in WBL organised? What influence can the student or employer have on the content and delivery of WBL? Can prior work experience be converted into academic credit? How is WBL assessed? If you are a newcomer to WBL then you could do no better than pick up a copy of this book. With chapters written by experienced practitioners in WBL from a variety of backgrounds the reader is provided with a clear and comprehensive introduction to the field. In these pages you will learn how an individual, business or organisation can use the building bricks of WBL to accredit existing knowledge and skills and create a bespoke programme of learning *in* and *through* work that will benefit the individual learner and contribute to the goals of the organisation.

The editor and publisher are to be commended for providing a friendly and accessible framework that holds the various chapters together and in ensuring that the reader has access to plentiful examples, case studies and exercises throughout the book. Whether exploring the academic skills involved or constructing your own programme of learning, making a claim to prior learning or undertaking a work-based project, the book offers a step by step guide to the challenges and opportunities of this approach to learning.

In the five years since the publication of the first edition there has been an explosion in social media and their employment in higher education, so gone is a chapter on online support and in its place a new chapter asking the question “what can social media do for me?” The book also

recognises the global nature of the workplace and, therefore, the importance of understanding between cultures and the potential of multicultural inquiry.

This is not necessarily a book to read from cover to cover but one to refer to frequently. With this in mind I found the chapter on some of the terminologies employed in WBL and the key subject and activity list pointing to the different chapters in which they are discussed very helpful. It might have been useful to bring these two elements together so that they cross-reference one another.

WBL opens new horizons to our understanding of learning and the way learning is assessed. If another edition is considered can I respectfully suggest an additional chapter giving the reader a sense of where this might lead? WBL opens up the promise of a deeper understanding of self as an actor in the world, and offers a foundation on which to build innovative approaches to individual and organisation development. What are the longer term implications of WBL for the workplace, and for formal education? How might an individual or an organisation embed WBL practices in their daily work beyond the pursuit of a formal qualification? What is the future for WBL? What are the critical edges of the field that might shape its development?

That said, I am reminded of Pi, stranded alone with a Bengal tiger on a lifeboat drifting across the Pacific Ocean, desperately referring to the survival manual at critical moments in his journey. No manual can replace the resourcefulness of the practitioner but this book does offer a wealth of practical guidance that can enrich and support the newcomer to WBL tossed about by the conflicting demands of work and learning. The authors have successfully tamed the tiger and produced a valuable resource for both the teacher and learner to keep within arms reach for future reference.