

PAPER:

***LEARNING ON THE JOB:  
RESEARCHING WORKPLACE RESTRUCTURING***

***Tony Brown  
Centre for Popular Education  
University of Technology Sydney***

Abstract:

This paper looks at workplace restructuring and training in two manufacturing plants in the clothing and steel industries in NSW. It builds on doctoral research in progress, examines issues of restructuring in two factories and focuses on the informal and incidental learning of workers at those factories. The research was commenced with the purpose of giving voice to workers on how changes in their factory and industry had affected them. Most of the changes which had taken place during the 1990s had revolved around the introduction of team work, quality systems, and leaner production. In each case education and training was seen as a valuable aid in facilitating change.

The paper will focus on how workers have responded to those changes. It will also set the particular changes in a wider context of economic restructuring and in particular workplace restructuring and show how workers' knowledge is routinely appropriated in order to improve the profitability of companies often at the expense of those very workers. It will raise questions about what issues are left unasked in workplace restructuring and ask in whose interests is such research being conducted. Is the issue of the 'meeting the needs of research clients' as straightforward as is often presented?