

Workbased learning as critical social pedagogy

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‘Workbased learning’ (WBL) and its more limited sibling ‘workplace learning’ are emerging as the latest innovations throughout the education system. From schools to universities, the inclusion of work in institutionalised learning processes is seen as a major advance towards a more economically viable output (ie. school leavers and graduates). On the other hand it is seen as a strategy to break down barriers between vocational and academic education and as an opportunity to improve access to higher education. Hand in hand with ‘seamless’ education and recognition of prior learning, WBL is making inroads in traditional education institutions.

Although spoken of as an educational innovation, the educational concepts and practices described as workplace and WBL have a rich epistemological tradition in debates about utilitarian and classical education on one side and a history of institutional divisions between vocational and academic education on the other. They also have a long history of experimentation reaching back to the beginning of the twentieth century.

This paper summarises epistemological and historical influences on workbased learning and develops an overview of different models and associated practices. It introduces a concept of ‘critical social pedagogy’ as basis for the analysis of different forms of workbased learning within the Workbased Learning Unit at the University of Western Sydney Nepean. This paper will be the first of a series of papers to be developed during 2000 by the newly established National Centre for Critical Social Pedagogy (NCCrisSP).

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