

# Developing agentic professionals through practice-based pedagogies

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Individuals' development for and during professional practice arises through a duality between personal and social contributions to learning experiences, albeit also shaped by brute facts. These contributions comprise affordances and norms and forms of the social and brute world beyond the individual, on the one hand, and individuals' engagement with these contributions, on the other. Importantly, the relations that comprises this duality are mediated by both the press of the social world (i.e. the degree by which it is able to assert its suggestion) and individuals' engagement with these suggestions, as shaped by how they are personally construed and constructed (Billett 2006, 2008). Over the last two decades, much has been made of the contributions of the social world to individuals' learning in response to an earlier dominance of explanations from cognitive theory, which was premised heavily on individual capacities alone. In particular, the emphasis on contributions of the immediate social world has been privileged in recent times. This is evidenced in explanations offered by distributed cognition, communities of practice and activities systems. Yet, absent in these accounts are human intentionality and consciousness (i.e. the cognitive experience)(Valsiner 2000). This shortcoming needs to be addressed because, for instance, accounts of learning for and through professional practice cannot be premised on the immediate social contributions alone, despite their crucial contributions. Whether referring to the social suggestion in terms of what is afforded in educational programmes (i.e. the enacted curriculum), in professional practice (i.e. situated practice) or another social settings (e.g. engagement with co-workers or other students), the bases by which individuals construe and construct these experiences shapes how and what they learn (e.g. the experienced curriculum, participation in practice) from sources beyond but through their personal experience.

Importantly, although the social world can be powerful, key social theorists all identify limits to and potency to its suggestion. Berger and Luckman (1967) claim that the social world is unable to project its suggestion in ways which are comprehensive, uniform or even without ambiguity, and individuals taking up of these suggestions will be distinct in particular ways because of this social fact. Giddens (1984) proposes that, rather than individuals being wholly subject to and posterior to the social world, that the social world requires individuals' agency to sustain and transform its norms and practices, in response to changing societal needs. Moreover, Foucault (1986) suggests that no amount of surveillance and monitoring can control desire, which has implications for professional dispositions and values. That is, human interest and values might well be impervious to the demands of the social world. Not least of the implications here is the need for individuals to actively engage with the social suggestion, because of the kinds of knowledge required for effective practice are generated and sourced in the social world. Therefore, the learning of these historically-derived, culturally-shaped and situationally-pertinent forms of knowledge likely arises from an active engagement by learners with the social world.

Such assertions emphasise the key role that human agency, intentionality and capacity plays in two processes of change: (i) learning by humans and (ii) the remaking and transformation of cultural norms and practices, such as occupational practices. Hence, both individuals learning and societal change is shaped by human intentionality.

What is suggested here is that conceptions of learning for professional practice need to emphasise the role of the personal epistemologies and agency (Billett 2009). In particular, this agency is likely to be important for the rich learning of the complex and massive bodies of

knowledge which constitute effective professional practice. This proposition includes the agentic role that students' engagement in integrating experiences in workplace and practice settings, such as in nursing, medicine, physiotherapy, etc will need to exercise when engaging with, securing and reconciling the contributions from each of the settings. Yet, there is also a more general educational purpose here. In order to be effective in professional practice, practitioners are required to be agentic in their exercise of their professional practice. Consequently, developing learners' capacity to be agentic stands as an important goal for both their professional preparation and ongoing development. This claim suggests important challenges for university educators, particular as much of what we do might be described as higher vocational education.

This paper first elaborates these assertions, and discusses their significance for learning for and through professional practice. Then, some preliminary bases for how this agency might be developed in courses are advanced drawing upon recent work which is sought to identify how such agency might be developed for and enacted within higher education programs that aim to develop professional capacities. These conceptions and tentative procedural suggestions are offered as a means to promote broader discussion on how best the development of learner agency might progress

The presentation will likely be structured through the following headings:

- Learning through life-wide and lifelong experiences
- Epistemological agency and learning
- Agentic professionals
- Developing agentic professionals through integrating practice experiences
- Promoting agentic personal epistemologies

## References

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