Like Spinning a Coin?

Student Perceptions of the Relevance of Formal Transnational Study to Their Workplace and Career Aspirations

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Why Investigate?

- Phase 2 of a longitudinal study of the online masters programs. Instrumental. Decision-makers are clients. Evaluation model is based upon Stufflebeam’s CIPP (Context, Input, Process and Product).

- Evaluation Team – roles & tensions
  - Program Coordinator: annual report to demonstrate viable & sustainable; aligns with/contribution to ... FoEd strategic plan
  - Progression, and retention versus student perspective
Areas of Interest from the 2004 Study

- Students as active lifelong learners – determinants of careers and life
- Students in a community of learners and community of practitioners (in their program)
- Students in workplace settings
Data Collection for Phase 2

- Background context: online survey [LLL]. All ‘active’ 2006 students in online programs, graduates and those cancelling in 2005 and 2006.
- Communities: online focus groups purposeful selection from volunteers. [personal agency; transnational professionals, transnational learners; workplace ‘affordances’].
- Individuals in contexts: online interviews. Purposeful selection from volunteers.
Models & Frameworks: Students as active lifelong learners

- LLL is a contested terrain – “multiple meanings, purposes and desired outcomes in relation to learning for life and work” (Grace 2004, p.386).
- Lifelong and lifewide learning – the learning landscape of formal, non-formal and informal opportunities throughout a lifetime (Knapper & Cropley 2000)
  - “Learning transfer is an extraordinarily narrow and barren account of how knowledgeable persons make their way among multiple interrelated settings” (Lave 1996, p.151)
  - An individual’s motivation for and attitude towards learning rises as key issues with the embrace of lifewide learning (Solverket, 2000)
Progression – taking a break

- ‘I have only just returned from England where I took time off to attend my sister’s wedding. I take deadlines very seriously and am currently struggling with several work-related deadlines that I could not have anticipated when I embarked on this course many months ago. Additionally, my wife is in her final trimester and is finding it increasingly difficult to look after our toddler without my support.’

- Hello Kaye - yes this is Jud Holdzer - still plodding through my Masters (sick last year) I will organize my enrolment for Sem.II over the weekend... I still have three subjects to go.

- The reasons for the interrupted study were personal and had to do with the breakdown of my marriage and the subsequent upheaval to my family and life. I am now settled into a new home, job and pattern of life and feel strongly about completing this course. however due to family commitments (i have a 13 year old son) and work commitments i am only able to commit to one subject a semester.
Models & Frameworks: Community of Learners and Practitioners

- Wenger’s communities of practice (Wenger, 2000). Novice to expert and life trajectories (Wenger, 2005) and
- Bourdieu’s concept of habitus
Meshing Worlds - Bourdieu’s concept of habitus

... Professional competence is enhanced by the study, I have more confidence in myself to put my opinions out into my work environment and can back it up with research. The collection of papers that I undertook during my study have had a cumulative [sic] effect in the development of this practice competence and my own confidence in self. And it continues post qualification. I can now enter into discourse with other professionals as an equal and what a surprise as someone who has more knowledge at times. The discourse has only just begun really outside of the learning environment and long may it continue.
Student Comment re Value of their Program in the Workplace

- *I'm delighted to say that my previous employer who had pushed me to study an MBA now is happy to ask me to work as an educational consultant - and is proud to refer to my 'almost complete' Master of Online Education degree as a consultancy skill. The company now recognises that postgraduates with a focus on online learning have special skills and knowledge that are valuable selling points in a rapidly changing world!*"
Models & Frameworks: Students in Workplace Contexts & Formal Learning

- Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’. “[W]ays of operating, inclinations, values and rationales acquired by individuals from various ‘formative contexts’... also inculcated through experience within the field” with “a tension between possibility and constraint“ and “... a structure that provides the possibility for agency within a limited arena of choice”... (Taylor 2005, p.175, 176)
- Billet’s ‘affordances’ workplace learning (Billett 2002)
Teaching Online was a transformative experience for me, as was Education and Globalization and the International Development Option (2 semester research project). Why? Because the students lived, ate, and breathed the courses - sharing ideas and learning so much from each other - bringing in so much research in such a short time. I remember everything I learned in those courses...including the readings which I absorbed because I argued them through with my fellow students, used them to support real life research etc. Interestingly, I cannot recall a single reading or quotation from a couple of other courses that I will not name. The student interactive courses were not easy courses. In fact they were the hardest of all.

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Intersecting Worlds of Students

- Are located & operating in concurrent worlds
- As members of multiple communities
- Where learning is intentional & legitimated through practice
- Transnational enriches learning

... education is a resource, rarely holding a privileged ‘fixed position’. ‘Best matches’ influence up-take and continuity. Education can develop different relationships dependent upon design.

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Queries and conclusions?

- Like Spinning a Coin?
- Models or theoretical/conceptual frameworks useful for our consideration?