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Chapter 1
Introduction to Work Based Learning in health and social care

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Introduction
The idea of a Work Based Learning conference focussing on the current work based learning activity in health and social care had been simmering for sometime before it became a reality. When attending other conferences which focused on aspects of learning for, through or at work, it became increasing clear that Middlesex University (MU) had developed a sound framework within which to recognise and accredit individual and organisational learning from work activities and had created robust work based learning programmes at undergraduate, post graduate and doctorate levels. Many of the attendees queries and dilemmas that were discussed at other conferences had already been encountered by the National Centre of Work Based Learning Partnerships (NCWBLP) or the School of Health and Social Sciences (HSSc) Work Based Learning and Accreditation Unit (WBLA). Through our experience of collaboration, accreditation and negotiation between students, employers and the University, many of the issues that were being debated within the WBL field had been considered to a greater or lesser extent within the available framework in MU. It was our belief that our WBL experience had much to offer other enquirers into WBL, whether they were practitioners, academics, employers or students.

Our intention therefore, when planning the conference and later compiling this book, was to communicate not only a flavour of the discussions that arose from that conference, but also to proffer a model of WBL that arose from our experiences. Consequently it will seem to include a strong emphasis of 'how Middlesex University' does WBL, and the theme that runs through this book is how our interpretation of WBL has been applied in a number of different scenarios. This is supplemented by the examples given in this book which present differences of experience and alternative models of WBL. This offers the reader a broad eclectic view of the variety of interpretations and applications within the subject discipline of WBL, which is for the individual to interpret and use depending on their own situational needs. However, it must be said that not every interpretation represented here is congruent with MU's philosophy of WBL, but it has been included to encourage breadth and depth of the debate.

The Middlesex Model of Work Based Learning

The School of Health and Social Sciences (HSSc) is a large multi-disciplinary, multi-vocational School of the University and the WBLA Unit works across a wide sceptrum of activity, offering modules and awards in Work Based Learning Studies, from health care assistants at levels 0/1, to senior health managers working at board level within the NHS who are enrolled on the Doctorate in Professional Studies in Health. At the time of this conference there were over 200 students enrolled on our programmes, of which 39 are doctorate participants. We work with colleagues to assist both recruitment and retention through Accreditation of Prior Learning, and the use of project modules centred upon work activities. We also work with upwards of 30 external

organisations from across the public, private and voluntary sectors, including the Department of Health, through accreditation of learning activities. We run programmes in partnership with diverse organisations such as Leadership London, the NHS Modernisation Agency, Leadership Centre and Local Authorities. We have also recently become partners in the NHSU.

The school began it's involvement with WBL firstly in 1996, initially as a means to confer academic credit to extremely knowledgeable and skilled nurses who were enrolling on the Diploma in Womens' Health Care so that they could concentrate on gaining new knowledge, rather than revisiting previous learning. Thus we learnt about the value of prior accreditation and from there became involved in the whole area of WBL. After a variety of changes and mergers we became a Work Based Learning and Accreditation Unit in our own right. As befits an emergent discipline, both in terms of a new subject and introduction to a new school, we occupy a unique niche within the university, working in a matrix fashion across two schools, thus forming partnerships both within the university and with external organisations. We work closely with the National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnerships (NCWBLP), who have developed both a national and international reputation with Centres in Hong Kong, Athens and Cyprus. Middlesex remains the only University to have been awarded the prestigious Queens Anniversary Prize for Excellence and Innovation in Higher Education for Work Based Learning.

Work Based Learning
Recognition of the importance of the work place in learning is not new; indeed the economic and social imperatives of developing a workforce able to deal with technological change have driven educational policy and practice since the 19th century. Neither is it new within the health and social care sectors, where in-service training was traditionally undertaken by experienced staff, to develop and enhance the practice of both new and experienced staff. However, this training tended to be restricted to a small part of the workforce, (usually already trained in professional disciplines), and did not always offer tangible rewards for the participant.

It is, however, comparatively new to consider learning derived from the workplace as an academic activity worthy of recognition and award within a university. This was the subject of much controversy in the early 1990's, in Middlesex University as academics hotly debated the spheres within which WBL occurred (Portwood 2000). It was conceded that learning occurred 'through' and 'at' work, but was learning 'from' and 'in' work also valid? Subsequently WBL has evolved from being regarded as a mode of study to being recognised by the Quality Assurance Agency as a subject in its' own right, and the numbers of Universities offering it as a subject continues to grow, both in the UK and overseas.

The underpinning assumptions of WBL at MU is therefore the belief that valuable learning occurs not just *at* work but also '*through, from and in*' work, and that knowledge is situational rather than discipline specific. As such it informs, empowers and enhances efficacy through the development of new insights and knowledge. At MU, the subject area was influenced by research into '*the curriculum in the workplace*' funded by the Department of Employment in the early 1990s. This highlighted that for many people work generated continual, often complex challenges in knowledge, skill and application, in order to meet requirements for development whether professional, personal or organisational. For adults, learning is often implicitly and

explicitly organised around activities and relationships at work. Essentially there is a cycle: work is learning based and learning is work based. The distinctive character of this has been described as 'intelligent scepticism' and 'focused intelligence' (Portwood 2000).

Essentially WBL is based on partnership and on negotiation; the role of the academic may be that of facilitator and guide rather than subject expert. This represents particular challenges for academia; the knowledge to be developed and presented is owned not by the academy, but by the practitioner and his or her community, and this challenge should not be underestimated. This may be at all academic levels but particularly doctorate level where practitioner expertise may be greater than that of university staff. The epistemology of practice is rooted in the creation of use; of practical knowing through the identification of frameworks and maps rather than by codification. It is contractual in nature and represents a true transfer of power. This empowerment model concentrates on learning and change, and is ideally suited to professional practice and to the development of better skilled, more qualified and more flexible workers that are needed if modernisation is to be achieved within the health service.

As times change, so knowledge changes; work changes and what counts as knowledge changes. Knowledge slips away, sometimes quietly and sometimes not. In the 21st century we see another shift, from what we *know,* (expert led, discipline specific) to what we *do*, from contemplation to action: the epitome of work based learning. Even in conservative, traditional universities change is clear. It is evident in the rise of courses such as business studies and computing, and in the decline of subjects such as history and classics. What is notable about these areas is the attempts by academics to turn them into new disciplines. The rise of work related learning however, is not the same as work based learning. The developing notion of the workplace as the site of learning, of the 'learning organisation' (Wenger 1998), 'lifelong learning', and workers not merely as employees but as lifelong learners and partners in their learning journey, is still emergent. There is a wealth of knowledge *about* work, but usually this has been undertaken by academics who are essentially outsiders, but it is only in recent times that knowledge about work is being generated from within the workplace.

The development of WBL in many universities has been informed by a number of educational theories that emphasise reflection, relevance, self-concept and individual responsibility (Kolb 1984, Knowles 1988, Rogers 1983). Add to these the excitement of learning and creation of new knowledge that partnership working can engender. Common to these theories is emphasis on reflection and the focus on individual meaning and responsibility within a professional and/or organisational framework. Also common to them is the neglect of other important factors, especially social factors in learning through and at work, described by theorists such as Eraut and Wenger. These factors can be very strong and have the potential for encouraging or inhibiting learning. At best the social contexts are very powerful mechanisms for learning and for change and can lead to the development of 'communities of practice' where participants develop, share, and critique knowledge and practice. Wenger (1998) suggests that we are all members of such communities, experts in some, novices in others, but always with an ability to contribute and to learn. At worst however, social contexts of learning through work can stifle innovation and learning, exaggerating power relationships, inequalities and competitiveness. One aim of this

book is to present a model that offers creativity and learning from work, within a partnership with the learner/ worker, employer and university.

Introduction to the conference papers

The collection of workshops and papers within this book will offer a variety of models of work based learning within health and social care, and demonstrates the demands on both facilitators and organisations that work based learning brings. Following the conference all presenters were approached and asked if they would like to contribute their presentation as a chapter to this book, and most have done so. We have taken the opportunity to elaborate upon the conference examples of WBL innovations and applications by including additional material from members of the WBLA and NCWBLP at Middlesex, thus offering further examples of some of the practicalities of the work based learning programmes and alternative modes of practice. For example, Accreditation of learning is often viewed as the central tenet of creating a successful work based learning programme (Boud & Solomon 2001). Therefore we have included examples of accredited programmes that offer students recognition for their learning and training within their own workplaces. Accreditation also offers an entry point into the MU academic framework that can used by the student to gain an academic award at a later date, and is a key factor in valuing work based learning.

These contributions offer examples of a 'Work Based Learning Continuum' (Workman 2001), ranging from learning that is prescribed by an organisation, reminiscent of NVQ systems, which meets the particular learning objectives for staff, and extending to learning that is completely negotiated by the learner, which fulfils their personal objectives with added benefits to their organisation, almost as a serendipity of the individuals' learning. At the prescriptive end of the continuum the WBL opportunities are usually related to specific training or education which fills a skills gap or prepares for a change or extension of practice.

Within this continuum there are several examples presented. Begg and Alexander (Chapter 2) present the emergence of a competency training programme centred around work demands that require specific skills devised as competencies, that can only be acquired through supervised practice in the work environment. This then, is an example of the work situation making the learning context specific rather than discipline specific. Using WBL to meet the essential competencies for pre-registration mental health nursing using the clinical placements as an opportunity to test new theories and practice new insights is presented by Birch, Gallagher and Finlay (Chapter 3) who report on the use of a combined open learning and work based learning approach as used by the Open University to train care assistants. The effectiveness of these programmes relies on a partnership agreement between the students, university and employers to enable the student to gain the clinical competencies that demonstrate effective learning.

Lang, Allarton and Alsop (Chapter 4) also consider the use of WBL to contribute to the preparation for professional practice, particularly within an interdisciplinary framework and describe a process of training support workers to become occupational therapists and physiotherapists. To some, the model that is presented could be reminiscent of the traditional nurse training which included the elements of clinical placements within which specific skills

were to be acquired. However, the opportunity to include accreditation of prior learning within the students award, the inclusion of two years prior experience in a relevant post, together with commitment from all the stakeholders in regard to the smooth running of the project and considerable investment in development of local staff provides another model of WBL which provides skills training in a geographically diverse situation, and also prepares the individual to extend their role from support worker to professional practitioner.

Organisational accreditation of professional development programmes or training packages comes at a midway point of the WBL continuum. Organisational accreditation is presented by Rounce (chapter 5) and introduces the process and structures that need to be in place to ensure effective quality accreditation of academic programmes is achieved. Three case study examples are used to illustrate the range of applications of accreditation and all demonstrate the benefits of accreditation to organisation, academia and the individual.

The use of accredited education programmes as stepping stones for practitioners is presented in chapter 6 (Donovan, Andrews and Timms), where organisational and government policy demands are incorporated into a structured training programme. It would appear that this is not without its' practical difficulties, such as how to reconcile academic and practice learning outcomes within a realistic and pragmatic assessment framework. The essential presence of mentorship support in the immediate learning environment is also indicated, and the discussion indicates issues related to risk assessment and the management and assessment of such programmes delivered within Trusts, which has implications for all providers of work based learning programmes. However, it also proffers a model whereby the demands of the Government lifelong learning agenda (DoH 2001) can be met and the personal learning that is generated when commencing a new job can be captured and recognised as valid and valuable (Boud & Solomon 2001).

Another example of the effectiveness of organisational accreditation is that of the Richmond Fellowship Diploma in Community Mental Health (Bassett &Allen, chapter 7). This programme equips practitioners with particular skills to meet their clients' needs, although they may have a wide range of previous academic experience, which may or may not be relevant. On completion the students can access a specific programme, validated by MU, to provide an opportunity for these practitioners to progress to a degree for non professional mental health workers. Using the university academic framework to enable students to recognise their learning wherever and however it occurs, is a fundamental principle of WBL at MU and, the opportunity to use credits gained from accredited programmes and bring them into the University's academic structure has been a major feature of the success of WBL within MU (Portwood & Garnett 2000). This is an excellent example as to how organisational accreditation benefits the organisation as it recognises the knowledge base within the organisations own culture and seeks to articulate that knowledge which is derived from work practices and the situational context in which it is generated (Armsby 2000). The curriculum becomes centred within the work place and necessitates partnership with higher education, immediately challenging traditional modes of higher education as it implies that work defines the curriculum rather than academia (Boud 2001). However, if a higher education institution provides the framework within which the learning is acquired and a real partnership is achieved, then the intellectual capital of both higher

education and the organisation is expanded and enhanced (Garnett et al 2001), which is evident from this example.

The WBL continuum progresses from the prescribed organisational content, and increasingly becomes negotiated by the students themselves. WBL that arises from problem solving in actual work situations is a fundamental aspect of the MU work based learning academic validated pathway. The impact this can have upon individual students is reported by McDonough and Chapman (chapter 9) who write from their own experiences of becoming work based learners whilst studying for a masters award. This further end of the work based learning curriculum, where learning is generated exclusively by the learner themselves, can be more challenging than traditional HE programmes, and illustrates the power of the knowledge generated by investigation of work practices. Within the MU WBL curriculum framework, project work is negotiated by the student with the aim of completing an academic award, whether it be a degree, masters or doctorate, and is situated within the curriculum of the workplace whereby the academic framework is controlled by the higher education institution, but the content is determined primarily by the fully employed learner (Brennan & Little 1996). Essentially the student recognises his or her own learning deficits and undertakes a programme which recognises and accredits her previous learning, and plans the means to achieve both an organisational goal of completing a work based project and solving a work related problem. S/he also achieves a personal goal of gaining an academic award and validation of her own work based learning experience on a par with formal education awards. A counter notion is presented by Garnett (chapter 8) who considers the contribution of academia to the intellectual capital of the organisation, drawing on current knowledge management theories. Using the MU WBL programme as a framework he argues that the work based project, which is focused on real work issues, has the potential to contribute to the human, structural and customer capital of both the employer and the university.

Ramage (chapter 10) also explores the impact of WBL learning upon the learners themselves, and in her discussion of the learning activities and opportunities presented by work based learning, presents a case for recognising the validity, integrity and effort involved in undertaking WBL. Her contribution resonates with discussions relating to the depth, breadth, challenges and quality assurance of WBL as explored by Boud & Solomon (2001). Moore (chapter 11) also illustrates the efforts required to involve all stakeholders in the learning process, and recognises the individual efforts and achievements of the work based learners themselves, both in the short and long term. McKee and Burton (chapter 12) offer a unique model of WBL and consider a number of factors related to experiential learning of the individual, not least the need for professionals to acquire skills in learning to learn in order to maintain their professional competence and skills.

The furthest extent of the WBL continuum is presented in the discussions relating to the personal and professional development of individuals through the WBL Masters and Doctorate programmes provided by MU. Specific examples of how the MU curriculum framework has provided the opportunity for individuals within the largest organisation in the UK to gain recognition for the experiential learning acquired during the implementation of NHS service improvement projects and modernisation programme, as well as developing skills of critical

appraisal and academic discernment in the process. Inglis (chapter 13), Rounce, Garelick, Portwood & Vernon (chapter 14) draw strands of this debate together, contexualising it and demonstrating the applicability of a work based learning doctorate programme for the health and social care disciplines.

Initially we wanted to provide a diverse conference programme offering something for everyone with an interest in the health and social care practice and academic communities. However, this was not to be. Whilst there is much debate around the coming together of health and social care we simply did not get papers put forward for consideration. This perhaps reflects the differences in investment between the two areas and represents a challenge for the future. The advent of the NHSU, its place and role in higher education and in care, had been a hot topic of debate amongst academics and practitioners alike, particularly as to its value and contribution to the current practices of delivery of education and training, and it had been anticipated by many that this would go some way towards bridging the divide between social and health care. Concerns ranged from the notion that it would subsume all other HEI's providing health care education, and broadened to scepticism that it would ever become a reality in the UK and have any kind of real impact upon professional learning. Dr Rosanna Breen, (Chapter 15) from the NHSU has contributed a paper that has developed out of her role as research assistant in the NHSU which presents some of the current understanding of good practice in work based learning, based on some theoretical perspectives and exploring some of the generic principles underpinning quality work based learning.

It is hoped that some of the innovations and applications included in this book will demonstrate the transferability of skills and learning between work contexts and professional disciplines that work based learning offers. We hope that you find the book stimulating and informative and look forward to the debate that we hope this will provide.

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