

**Simulated work environments: Learning to be a worker
prior to being a worker**

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INTRODUCTION

Pre-Apprenticeship programmes (PAPs) are government funded schemes which aim to provide a transitional step between school and the workplace for young adults leaving school at 16. The emphasis of such schemes is to not just to provide ‘relevant’ skills for a designated industry but also to instil desirable work attitudes into the young person and encourage a positive disposition and responsibility towards continual learning and development of oneself. Such schemes are typically operated by a college or private training provider within a training facility (for example a college).

Within this paper I examine, with the use of ideas taken from the literature on spatiality and actor-network theory (ANT), how the construction of the learning space is enacted in an attempt to create a legitimate workplace environment. I argue that the strategies to emulate the working environment can only be partially successful as the network of multiple actors, artefacts and spaces involved in the practice of such schemes provide for contradictions and limitations. In particular I focus on the problems of trying to enmesh one space (that of the workplace) within another space (the college/learning environment) which have often contradictory aims, different understandings of acceptable behaviour and mismatched networks.

THE ‘SPATIAL’ AND THE ‘SOCIAL’

Space has come increasingly to the forefront of research in workplace and learning literature (c.f. (Fox 2000;Fox 2002;Law 2004;McGregor 2003;Nespor 1994)) Much of the research into spatiality has been influenced by Foucault’s work on ‘spaces of enclosure’ where these spaces (for example, factories, prisons, schools) have a disciplinary function which is defined through the space. Through such work space can be understood to have its own laws and disciplinary constraints (Edwards & Clarke 2002), with certain behaviours being accepted as normal within the space, while others are ‘cast as problems—deviant, repulsive, or irrational’ (Fenwick 2002).

Within the literature space is not an inanimate location, a ‘backcloth against which action takes place’ (Edwards & Clarke 2002). It should not be seen as a fixed, stable ‘object’. Rather space should be understood as ‘relational, both producing and a product of interconnected

practices’ (McGregor 2003) p354. It is a construction which comes into existence through people or objects and their relations (Mulcahy 2007), within which ‘the spatial and social are reciprocally constructed through materially embedded practices and performances that create and maintain everyday social relations, including gender’ (Rose 1999). Space cannot therefore be understood without examining the interactions of networks of actors (human and non-human). So networks become the focus of spatiality, but networks themselves are ephemeral rather than static. They are continuously adaptable, they ‘expand, contract and shift configuration over time and even the most stable and predictable of them are constantly being reappropriated and redefined by the nature of the flows that animate them...’ Nespor 1994 (cited in (Edwards & Clarke 2002) p157).

ANT (Latour 2007; Law 2004; Law & Hassard 1999) is based on the idea that action cannot exist outside of networks; ‘things, people, whatever, only ever ‘act’ in ‘networks’’ (Fox 2002) p77. Without these networks actions become meaningless and inactive (ibid). The relationships between actants (neologism for human and non-human actors) are the key focus for ANT studies, with consideration of the ways that ‘the actors or actants are mobilised and managed, to maintain a particular relationship; ‘to make things happen’ (Law 92) cited in (McGregor 2004) p353. Unlike many other studies on relationships, ANT does not privilege human interaction but stipulates the importance of non-human actants within the network. Non-human encompasses animals, technologies and objects, all of which acquire a significance and meaning when positioned in a network (Jewson 2007).

Networks should not be thought of as static and formed but as continually emergent, with networks continually being reproduced and maintained. Relationships are continually re-negotiated as different assemblages of actors form alliances and seek to achieve their own objectives which may be in conflict with other alliances and objectives (Jewson 2007). As Rose (1999) points out, networks through which programmes are enacted are fragile, complex and dynamic, with multiple points where actors have to ‘play his or her part in the processes that govern him’ which also means multiple points ‘at which citizens are able to refuse, contest, challenge those demands placed upon them’. Although these networks are continually active and fluid the processes often create an ‘ordering of effects’ (Law 92) in which certain configurations of networks become enacted into ‘extremely durable forms.

THE PROBLEM OF YOUNG UNTRAINED PEOPLE

Modern government policies can be understood as devices which attempt to address problems of the state. Programs do not simply emerge from the ether, but are developed through a process of representation and negotiation which usually begin with the identification of deficiencies that need to be rectified (Li 2007). Before programmes can be developed, practices need to be ‘rendered technical’ which involves representing ‘the domain to be governed as an intelligible field with specifiable limits and particular characteristics, defining boundaries, rendering that within them visible, assembling information about that which is included and devising techniques to mobilise the forces and entities thus revealed’ (Rose in (Li 2007)). Policies tend to be successive, with the ‘failure’ of one policy always being linked to attempts to develop programmes that will ‘work better’ (Miller & Rose 2008).

Government policy aimed at young adults entering the workplace focuses on the limitations and deficiencies of people who leave school at the age of 16. Young adults are rendered as deficient requiring intervention to enable them to participate in society as active workers and responsible citizens. This problematisation of young adults who need ‘training’ to ensure that they do not ‘remain ‘undisciplined’ and therefore economically unproductive’ (Edwards et al. 2004) p127 has been a focus of government policies in the UK for well over a century. In 1909 the then government commissioned a report into young adults which concluded that government intervention was needed to provide young adults with ‘mandatory attendance at trade school for all youth under 17’ (Thelen 2004). Yet any attempt to bring such plans to legislation were thwarted and although over the next 70 years different policies on youth training and education were implemented, any real policy shift did not take place until the 1980s when government began to remove some of the responsibility of vocational training away from employers to government funded agencies.

In the 1980s government policy focused on designing, organising and funding programmes for young adults in the form of the Youth Training Scheme (Unwin 2007). The 1990s saw government led schemes such as the ‘Modern Apprenticeship’ which were designed to ‘increase the stock of intermediate skills’ (ibid) which were claimed to be missing in young adults. Similarly, in the 2000s new programmes are being developed and old programmes modernised in an attempt to overhaul the 16-19 vocational education system in a response to once again the view that young adults are inadequately prepared for the workplace; ‘Many

employers are not satisfied with the basic skills of school leavers going directly into jobs' (Secretary of State for Education and Skills 2005, p4).

The emphasis in government policy is not just on creating an employable body but also on developing bodies which are willing to continue learning and developing after completion of compulsory education; thus young adults should be encouraged to 'continue in learning until at least the age of 18' ((Secretary of State for Education and Skills 2005, p4). Thus policy is not just focused on preparing young adults in the transition into work but also to try to generate an ethos whereby once in the workplace, the young person will be willing to continually seek to improve and develop him/her self.

PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMMES

Pre-apprenticeship programmes (PAPs) are part of a suite of current government funded initiatives to help young adults to find employment. These governmental programmes, which include PAPs, apprenticeship schemes and entry to employment schemes, have been developed as a mechanism to 'fix' this problem that young adults not only lack the skills needed for entry into the workplace but also in many cases lack motivation/interest in learning.

In this paper I focus on only one of these schemes the PAP which according to recent Government policy documents can be defined as:

'an alternative initial phase before transferring to the more traditional employer-led apprenticeship route. They provide an important opportunity for young people who have found it difficult to gain employment or for those who require an initial period of planned training before employment. All learners on PLAs are non-employed. The role of PLAs is to provide a flexible route through which young people can acquire the underpinning knowledge and skills that will be required for successful completion of the full apprenticeship framework. PLAs are followed by an employed phase in order to demonstrate practical working skills in a real working situation.' (OFSTED 2008) ¹

PAPs are non-work-based courses which typically take 12 months to complete and are held at dedicated training facilities such as further education colleges or private training providers.

¹ The name pre-apprenticeship programmes (PAP) has replaced programme-led apprenticeship (PLA) since this report and hence PAP has been used within this research)

Eligibility for the courses tends to be vague and determined locally and may include the need for academic qualifications, especially in 'key' subjects such as English, numeracy and information communication and technology (ICT). Often where the courses had specified minimum academic qualification requirements they were seen as 'flexible' and potential students were interviewed and assessed to determine whether he or she would be allowed to participate in the programmes. Many students were accepted without the relevant qualifications but were highlighted as being 'in need of additional support'. Flexible entry requirements are an accepted practice within the PAPs, as there is an understanding that many of the young adults for whom the courses are aimed will not have strong academic backgrounds. There is an understanding, although certainly not promoted by the training providers, that such courses are primarily for 'poor achievers', those 'disengaged' at school, and 'trouble-makers'.

The courses are promoted as an alternative for those adults unable to find work or an employment based apprenticeship scheme; those that have failed to enter the system and therefore require 'modification' before being sent out to try to enter the system again. Yet, contra to the official criteria, a small number of the students in this study had achieved employed status although they were not active in the workplace. In this case, the students had secured apprenticeship placements with organisations (typically blue chip companies) which required the young worker to undergo basic skills training prior to commencement of their apprenticeship scheme. These students were privileged in terms of receiving a wage from their employer whilst attending the course. The other students are only able to claim an education maintenance allowance (EMA) of £30 a week which is means-tested based on their parents income.

The courses are government funded and colleges and training providers bid for the contracts to run the schemes which have to follow a specified framework. Each course requires 3 parts to be undertaken: practical relevant trade skills; underpinning theoretical knowledge and 'key skills'. Key skills which include English, numeracy, ICT are supplemented with other skills associated with 'employer/employee responsibility'. This includes training and coaching in desirable work related attributes such as working with others; improving own learning and performance; and problem solving. Assessment of competence for the course includes completion of portfolios, practical assessments and assignments, and formal examinations (in the form of on-line questionnaires). On successful completion of these courses, the students

are assisted by the college/training provider to find a suitable employer to enable continuation of their learning/training via an employee-based apprenticeship scheme.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

This paper is part of a larger study being conducted for my PhD in management in which I am researching the role of apprenticeship schemes in developing young adults into ‘skilled workers’. The empirical data in this paper is undertaken through ethnographic and qualitative methods which have involved interviews and discussions with a number of people from two sites offering pre-apprenticeship programmes in the North West. Those interviewed have included ‘students’ (young adults undertaking these courses), tutors, training provider managers, work-placement officers and young apprentices (who have completed pre-apprenticeship courses). The interviews were unstructured and in some cases ‘students’ were interviewed in groups. Typically interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours. The interviews were supplemented with participant observations where I spent one day at each of the sites participating in lessons and workshops, informally chatting to students and staff and shadowing tutors.

The two sites where the study was undertaken are both situated in relatively poor demographic areas and are notorious for deprivation with a number of interviewees also warning of the problems of ‘territorial conflicts’ within the localised areas. One site was a further education college and the other was a private training provider and whilst this involves different configurations of resources and formats, many similarities in the day-to-day practices were observed and thus providing for this paper to be developed. The study focused on a number of pre-apprenticeship programmes that were being operated by the sites within the areas of electronic/mechanical engineering; motor vehicle; construction and business administration. With the exception of the business administration, all the courses were predominantly taken by young males (only one female was interviewed/ known to be on these courses). Business administration had a roughly equal balance of males and females.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

‘THE ACTORS’

Whilst there are many actors who play a role in the creation and enactment of these courses, for the purpose of this paper, I focus on 2 sets of ‘actors’: staff and the young adults participating on the courses. In order to analyse the interactions and day-to-day practices it is first important to provide a little background to our ‘actors’. In particular I would like to focus on the way in which actors label themselves and each other. The vocabularies we use to describe ourselves and others in action facilitate the creation of the ‘subject’ (Rose 1999; Zemblyas 2006) and the ways in which such a subject is expected to act. Thus naming prescribes roles and ‘identities’ to the actors, influencing what is understood as acceptable or ‘normal’ behaviour and as such can be seen as a means of disciplinary technology.

Young adults

The term I endeavoured to use and which was often used by tutors was ‘young adult’ or ‘young person’, signifying a status of having just reached adulthood and thus inferring a sense of maturity and responsibility on the actor. This projects expectation on the actor to take responsibility for his/her own development in a mature way and to embrace the opportunities to improve and thus increasingly become responsible workers and citizens. Yet at some point most of the interviews with staff, the ‘young adult’ reverted back to being addressed in childhood terms: for example: ‘kids’; ‘girls’; ‘Little Jenny’; ‘boys’; ‘lads’. This drift back to the young adult as child provides alternate spaces where different norms can be expected and tolerated. This paradoxical understanding of the actor is also reflected in the everyday practices within the training course. For example, within the work shop, the young adults are expected to adopt a mature working attitude and course literature addresses them as ‘young people’; yet at other key times responsibility is denied as parents are consulted and become the agent responsible for the student.

These young adults whilst aspiring to become ‘workers’ are not only experiencing the pretence of being ‘workers’ through the college created spaces, but are also experiencing what it is like to be ‘students’. The connotation of being a student is typically very different than that of being a worker. Being a student is tied up with certain acceptable behaviours, acceptance of rules based around college requirements, an ethos of knowledge accumulation,

and the attainment of qualifications. The young adults in the survey who were participating on the PAPs considered themselves as students, learning in a college, not as workers. This can be contrasted to young adults interviewed on employer-based apprenticeship schemes who categorically saw themselves as workers not learners. The understanding of how one locates oneself in a space is important as it frames the scope of actions and defines what is seen as possible and normal.

Tutors/staff

Most of the staff/tutors within this study were of the 40+ age group and their current employment had involved career changes from industry to education. Their association and expertise as practitioners was very evident within the interviews and participants were very keen to confer their eligibility to teach students through their understanding of work-based practice. There was a clear understanding that tutors needed to have background practical experience in their trades, 'how-to' knowledge was not enough, it had to have been lived-in experience of what it is like to be a 'skilled worker' in their chosen field. Skill of trade was the key legitimacy of ability to teach on these courses with most of the tutors having no formal teaching qualifications and in many cases tutors also having no academic qualifications outside of technical qualifications gained for the trade.

There appears to be a positioning of the tutors as 'old-timers' working with the 'newcomers' to engage them in the 'community of practice' (COP) (Lave & Wenger 1991). This is based on the idea promulgated through theories of social learning whereby learning is about becoming increasingly involved in the routines, discourses and 'culture of practice' (ibid.). The 'tutor' as well as passing on skills to perform the tasks of work is also attempting to educate the young adults in the ways of acceptable practice and workplace norms associated with the particular field of employment. But this attempt at forging a COP is problematic in a number of ways. Firstly, whilst it is possible to understand the group as a COP, it is a very different form of COP than that likely to be established within a workplace. COPs tend to be characterised as a network of members who have 'learnt the ropes', that is they are seen as bone fide members, with one or a few 'peripheral participants' who need initiation into the COP (Lave & Wenger 1991). In the case of the workshop, there is one 'old timer' and all the rest are young unskilled 'peripheral participants' which changes the dynamics of the group. Secondly, the 'old timer' badge can also be challenged, the tutor no longer participates in the type of work space in which he/she is attempting to acculturate these young adults into,

they have moved away from such COPs and now participate in very different COPs. Thus any understanding of how to 'behave' is based on an historical, reflexive perspective with some of the tutors having had very little experience of working within industry for over 10 years.

AIMS OF THE COURSE

Course promotional literature, course guides, prospectuses and handbooks/regulations are all sources which outline the expectation and aims of the courses, outlining expectations of participants and anticipated outcomes. For aims to be translated into practical action requires the understanding, interpretation and acceptance of these aims by the network of actors.

Taking the example of one of the courses on offer, the course is marketed as providing; 'A mixture of vocational training and personal and social development' (TP2 website) of which personal and social development involves '*Basic skills development; Wider key skills; Individual learner support; Employability skills; CV writing and interview techniques; Timekeeping; Attendance; Personal appearance*'. The espoused benefits to the young person being (again from TP2 website and literature):

*'Recognise and develop the skills and qualities required to be a successful employee.
Gain direct experience and increase understanding of the world of work
Learn how businesses operate, across a variety of sectors and job roles
Increase their awareness of local and national career opportunities
Relate their abilities to career ideas and make more informed choices
Increase their confidence as well as personal and social skills'*

It is clear from the marketing literature that the course is intended to acculturate the young person into becoming a desirable employee with a suitable 'work ethic'. These aims were also clearly stated in the interviews with staff members. The student experience was typically described in terms of a journey from undisciplined school leaver to disciplined 'employment ready' potential worker as described in the following interview comment:

'If I look at my pre-apprenticeship learning and we look at those young people you can physically see the light bulb being switched on when they suddenly become employment ready. It's just as quick as that (clicks his fingers) but you might have been working with them for 6 months and today he comes in and you think gosh, he's ready. It's finally sunk in what he needs to do and how he needs to behave' (TP2 Manager)

To ascribe to the aims of the course, the tutors' role is widened from 'expert' passing on the skills of the trade to encompass pastoral and guardian care. The tutors' discuss their role in terms of transforming the young person into an employable subject. This involves working on attributes and attitudes which are deemed unacceptable for the workplace, replacing them with more desirable ones. Here, the young adults are subjected to technologies of discipline which work to 'normalise' (Foucault 1991) to shape into homogenised subjects, seeking to 'shape, normalise and instrumentalize the conduct, thought, decisions and aspirations of others in order to achieve the objectives they consider desirable' (Miller and Rose 1990 p8). Examples of attributes which were said to require attention include:

'Attitude modification is often required!'

'A lot of them lack basic common sense sometimes; they don't seem to be able to do anything unless we tell them to do it. We have to try to encourage them to show a bit of basic initiative. We need to try to get this over to them before they go into the workplace'

'Discipline is lacking ... a lot more young people tend to be aggressive... we have to teach discipline and respect for other people'

'Some of the attitudes that kids are coming through with ... they can't take being challenged in any way... they don't accept criticism even though it's constructive... they need to learn that their boss will criticise... if they make mistakes they need to learn that their boss is likely to make them suffer.'

Unlike the staff descriptions of modifying behaviour/attitudes, for young adults the main focus discussed in the interviews was on gaining credentials and practical experience which would be a means to gaining a 'proper job', or even a 'career'. This was discussed in terms of 'gaining a qualification', 'practical skills', and 'learning how to do the job', which can be regarded as tangible 'skills' rather than any real transformation of character/behaviour within the young person. Yet some of the young adults acknowledged that in the process they had changed their ways, or as a number described it 'grown up'.

MOBILISING SPACES AND PRACTICES

In the rest of this paper I will focus on the day-to-day practices of such a course. I will argue that the mobilising of actors, materials and space combine in an attempt to legitimise the learning space as a workplace. This legitimising as a workplace can be understood as a form disciplinary technology which seeks to forge a 'docile body that may be subjected, used,

transformed and improved' (Foucault 1977, cited in by Rabinow p17 (Foucault 1991)). For Foucault this disciplining works through several interconnected practices:

'... through drills and training of the body, through standardization of actions over time, and through the control of space. Discipline proceeds from an organization of individuals in space, and it requires a specific enclosure of space. Once established, this grid permits the sure distribution of the individuals who are to be disciplined and supervised. In a factory, the procedure facilitates productivity; in a school, it assures orderly behaviour' (ibid)

As one of the aims of the courses is to facilitate a 'work ethic' in the young adults, the space, materials and practices all need to be positioned to enable the inculcation of practices associated with the work community. Yet spaces can be multiple and subject to overlapping and multiple meanings (Edwards & Clarke 2002). Thus despite the attention to detail in the creation of a workspace in the learning environment, the effect cannot be totally pervasive and there are spaces for contradictions and re-appropriation of spaces for alternate practices and understandings.

'The work shop'/ 'class room' – determining spaces

One of the seminal works on spaces in education has been undertaken by Nespor (1994). His work focuses on educational spaces as a means to inducting students into disciplines or professions. He compares the spatiality and practices of undergraduate students undertaking courses in physics and business studies, illuminating the ways in which physical spaces such as the buildings and artefacts are brought into practice as 'disciplinary technologies' (Foucault 1991) in which different subjectivities are mobilised (Hughes, Jewson, & Unwin 2007). He uses the example of 'isolated, bunker-like spaces of the physics building with the newer, lighter, more open spaces of the business school' (Nespor 1994, p111), arguing that for the physics students the spaces and practices were conducive to a firm disciplinary identity within a small community whereas the structures in place for management students were much more socially open and conducive to the creation of diverse networks and interactions spanning outside of the student community (ibid).

In the study, one site (TP1) was a modern purpose built college campus which focused on vocational training and education for specific trades (engineering, construction and motor vehicle). In contrast, the other (TP2) was much smaller, older adapted facilities which were situated in 3 different locations within a 10 mile radius of each other. The facilities were described by a key staff member as 'not ideal' but there were plans (subject to obtaining

government funding) to create a more modern purpose built facility similar to those of TP1. TP2 had a more diverse offering of courses within motor vehicle, business administration, retail and manufacturing. TP2 was a privately owned company.

Within the facilities (especially TP1) there were clearly delineated areas of work environments which had been created to appear as a workplace. The façade and open spaces of the facility appeared as any other college campus, but behind college corridors, doors opened onto a number of different workshops. The car maintenance workshop was a stark contrast from the college corridor traversed to reach the workshop. The corridors were adorned with student based artefacts (notice boards, photos of students enjoying social activities such as outings and demonstrations of student work); students were seen 'mucking around' in these spaces, chatting, having a laugh, whilst moving from one class/work shop to the next. But once inside the workshop the atmosphere was more sombre, it felt very much like a typical garage, albeit probably on a larger scale than many backstreet garages. The room was zoned into different work areas such as 'paint and spray', 'welding area', 'vehicle inspection and repair areas', 'stores' and 'preparation/completion areas'. The walls were adorned with health and safety notices and 'tools of the trade' such as work charts, flow diagrams and photos of cars and car parts.

The space certainly invokes the feeling of being part of a garage setting and introduces the trainee to the tools and artefacts used in practice; real cars are worked on using tools of the trade. If anything the workshop seemed overstocked with work tools and machinery as the training space requires that a wide variety of tools and machinery are available to enable the learner to experience as diverse a range of tools as possible. The learner thus gets the opportunity to practice on machinery which may or may not be available once he/she enters the workplace.

Within each section of workspace were cars in various states of repair which were being worked on by 'mechanics'. The 'mechanics' were the young adults who had been 'mucking around' outside in the corridor a few minutes earlier. Here they were kitted out in overalls and safety equipment prepared for the task of work. It seems that most young adults adapt their behaviour to the surroundings and adopt a 'working' frame of mind when in the workshop. It is not clear whether this can be attributed to the design of the space (i.e. a place to work); the presence of a tutor (i.e. the appropriate behaviour when a tutor is about) or the

pleasure gained from working on the cars (i.e. the task encourages ‘good’ behaviour) or a combination of these and other factors.

On the whole, within the different workshop environments I visited (car maintenance, engineering workshop, electrical workshop and ‘building site’) the young adults appeared to be adopting appropriate/expected behaviour. There were a few exceptions when the young adults were seen utilising the space for unintended purposes. One example was in the ‘building site’, the young adults were tasked with building a wall to demonstrate their bricklaying skills, which most of them were endeavouring to do. There was one exception with two young men finding alternative uses for the materials – the bricklaying sand had been turned into a play sand pit where they were merrily building sand castles. This behaviour was scorned by the tutor, who seeing the activities went over to ‘supervise’ the young adults more closely. There seemed to be an understanding that the workshops were for serious work and ‘messaging about’ would not be tolerated, that once these people were in the workplace they would be expected to behave appropriately at all times. Again this contrasts sharply with those interviewed who were already working in apprenticeships whose mottos seemed to be along the lines of work hard but most of all ‘have a laugh’, as these apprentices stated when describing what their daily work was about:

‘having a laugh and mess about a bit’

‘when you are working together with people all day you need to have a laugh’

‘I think you have to be pretty loud to work here, we all tend to have a laugh’

‘there is always ways of skiving – it’s part of the fun seeing what you can get away with’

The discourse of the mock working place is to promote attitudes and practices in line with a managerial perspective of working practices, but these do not necessarily fit with the actual practices that will be experienced when the young adult traverses into the real work space. This can prove problematic when the young adult initially begins working as there seems to be a tension as to whether the new employee will ‘fit in’ within the workplace COP. Many of the apprentices interviewed explained that being quiet and shy is not appropriate for the workplace and to settle in, to ‘become one of the lads’, the apprentice had to quickly learn to give and take the ‘banter’ and ‘pranks’ of the workplace. This was also noted by employers of apprentices:

‘When they start to answer back is when you know they are settling in well. If they are just shy and retiring then they don’t seem to push themselves forward and they don’t seem to fit into the working environment as they should. But when they start to answer back you know that they are settling in well.’

The ‘working’ day is split into both practical sessions where skills are learnt and practiced and into theoretical/educational sessions. There is a separation of the practical sessions from the theoretical through the spaces in which each takes place. Unlike the practical workshops, the educational learning is undertaken within a classroom environment. The rectangular classroom was fitted with desks in rows, all facing the front of the classroom which was the ‘teaching’ space. The tutor, adorned with teaching tools such as whiteboards and flipcharts is the focal point for the session. There seems to be a different authority given to the tutor within the classroom (even though some of the tutors ‘teach’ both practical and theoretical topics) and the tutor now becomes a teacher (in the school sense). The behaviour of the young adults seemed to change as they entered the classroom with many appearing to be uninterested in the session. In contrast to the adult behaviour seen in the workshop, in the classroom it was the majority rather than the minority who were being disruptive and reluctant to participate in the class. This was seen in such behaviours as students turning around to talk to each other (whilst the tutor was talking), shouting out, throwing things at each other, sleeping, doodling and turning up late. Here the behaviour was more akin to children than of the adult behaviour expected.

The work place/learning place embedded in practices

The course incorporates daily practices which are designed to instil work routines into the young adult and to prepare them for the rigours of working life. This is done in subtle ways that help to retrain the young person from a ‘school/child mentality’ into an ‘adult mentality’. This can involve simple routines such as ensuring that students address the tutors and staff on a first name basis instead of the formality required from school (i.e. Mr, Mrs, Sir or Miss). Learners are expected to take responsibility for their own time keeping and attendance. They are introduced to technologies of self control and monitoring in that they are expected to submit a time sheet to the college weekly. In some of the workshops there is ‘clocking in’ system that is designed to ‘prepare them for the world of work’. As one tutor explained, ‘we try to make it as authentic as possible and clocking in and clocking out instils good working

practice'. This can be contrasted to the classroom settings where attendance is monitored through the traditional school register. Whilst the practice of completing time sheets conveys a sense of responsibility, and a sense of freedom to act, this is taken away by the other practices which act as a monitor and check to ensure that the young person has completed the timesheet honestly.

For one of the courses, the starting time has been changed from the traditional college starting time of 9am to 8.30am. This change again was cited as a means to prepare the young person for the early starts which are the industry norm. This earlier time for attendance was adhered to by some, but others did not seem to be able to arrive by that time. Whilst the course advocates creating routine and preparing the young adults for work, there are limits to how far this can extend. For example, although an early start can be arranged, a full working week cannot. When the young person enters the world of work he/she can expect to work between 35 and 40 hours per week but the requirements as stipulated by government policy for the 'full-time' course is just 16 hours contact time per week. The college do supplement the official syllabus with what they class as 'enrichment' activities which include trips, team-building activities and additional educational classes which provide a richer learning experience, but they do not really prepare the young person for what it is like to 'do a full week's work'. This again was highlighted by the young apprentices with a number of them saying that to start with working was really exhausting and it was really difficult to get into the routine of working long hours with limited breaks.

Although within the course emphasis is on providing a 'working environment experience', the course is constrained and determined through academic rather than work-related practices. The course is structured and controlled by the mechanisms of timetables, course specifications (as determined by examination and governing bodies), wider college aims and practices. Time-tables structure the courses in line with academic conventions and provide the young person with the opportunity of experiencing varied tasks and activities over the day. Whilst this provides a rich experience of different activities, it does not prepare the young person for the often experienced monotony of many jobs which are repetitive and unchanging throughout the day. The business administration course to some extent tried to address this problem by structuring the timetable in daily slots. This meant that the young adults experienced a work related activity for the entirety of the day and academic learning would take place over a full day. As one tutor explained one of the tasks was to teach 'filing',

something that could be grasped relatively quickly by most people but the course was stretched over a whole day:

'my field is specifically aimed at what you would do if you worked in an office, which is kind of, sometimes it can be quite boring, to be honest office work is often quite boring, it really is. It is so boring in administration so sometimes we teach a full day on filing. It is monotonous and whatever but as I try to point out to the students a day at work is sometimes very monotonous, you know it really is!'

The business administration course due to its nature was also able to provide 'real life' experiences for its students. The training provider running the course operates as a private business and employs staff to conduct administrative duties. To provide work experience, young adults on the business administration course are encouraged to participate in some of the administration duties. Many of them gain experience by either acting as receptionist or helping in the office. This allows the young adults to gain a practical understanding of tasks and enables the staff to monitor and observe them in action.

A recurrent problem cited by most tutors and staff which seems to be a problem experienced by many learning establishments was absenteeism. Tutors complained about the unwillingness of the young adults to attend college when required. It was seen as part of the staff's role to drill into the young adults the importance of regular attendance. Whilst it was the duty of staff to promote good attendance, there appeared to be a culture of absenteeism amongst college staff as well. During my observations, one of my 'shadows' was cancelled due to the staff member being absent. I also witnessed a 'prize-giving' where a small number of staff in the departmental meeting were presented with gift vouchers for 100% attendance. Attendance is difficult to address within the college environment, it cannot be addressed in the same manner as it is typically addressed in the workplace. In the workplace there will be procedures in place to reprimand and in the worst scenario dismiss the errant absentee. Whilst it is possible for the college to remove students from courses, this is not a desirable action as it is tied up with other factors. One of the key determinants of college funding is student numbers – it is therefore in the interests of the college to retain students rather than to dismiss them.

CONCLUSION

A number of writers (c.f. (Alexiou 2005;Boud & Solomon 2003;Edwards & Nicoll 2004;Huzzard 2004;Spencer 2001) have focused on the problems of mobilising practices and rituals from one institutional setting (that of the learning space) to alternate ‘spaces of enclosure’ (the workplace). In this paper I examine the opposite transition, the workplace into the learning space with similar conclusions to those of Edwards & Nicoll (2004):

‘the practices through which specific networks are formed become more complex, often involving hybrid mobilizations of disciplinary and governmental power. Actor-networks are fluid and rely on the practices of mediation between different objects within a network. Thus, even as there are attempts to mobilize workplace learning and workers as learners in specific ways, they will be subject to diverse and unexpected shifts and changes.’ (p171).

It is not the aim of this paper to make judgement on the benefits and limitations of schemes such as the pre-apprenticeship programme, but rather to question the taken-for-granted, and to highlight the way that intentions and effects are often very different ((Foucault 1991).

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