A tentative return to experience in researching learning at work

This paper explores possibilities for more democratic approaches to researching learning in and through everyday workplace practices. This links with a concern with who is able to speak in representations of learning at work, what is able to be spoken about and how knowing, learning and experience are inscribed in theories of workplace learning. I propose that Rancière's notion of 'the distribution of the sensible', which draws attention to an aesthetic dimension of experience, knowledge and politics, provides a useful way of exploring learning in and through everyday workplace practices. The approach points to the possibility of knowledge without hierarchies and a shift from a knowledge – ignorance binary. An understanding of experience as aesthetic enables accounts of learning which counter the story of destiny in literature on learning in and through everyday practice. It also points to a very different way of doing academic research. The presupposition of equality is the point of departure in this approach and the purpose of research is the verification of equality (rather than the verification of oppression). The paper makes a significant contribution to literature on learning in and through everyday workplace practices by disrupting a prevailing view that knowledge is necessarily tied to identity.

Keywords: democratic politics, aesthetic experience, knowledge hierarchies, workplace learning

Introduction

At a time when notions of distance, detachment and purity in critical theory seem less secure than once thought, it feels like critique may have 'run out of steam' (Latour, 2004). The attempt to separate ourselves from our cultural traditions, our social practices, our interests and values, for so long held up as the preferred technique for seeking the 'truth', no longer seems possible, desirable nor effective as a strategy for achieving more democratic societies (Kompridis, 2006). This is particularly evident when we consider that the truth of inequality, oppression and domination, which has been so well documented in sociological texts for decades, appears to have reaped very modest rewards in terms of bringing about more equal societies (Edwards & Fenwick,

1

2015). Poverty is on the increase in many countries, including the UK, and xenophobia is on the rise (Dorling, 2015). The increasing popularity of political parties that have the closing of borders and reducing migration as their raison d'être provides one example. The recent referendum in the UK on whether to remain or leave the EU drew attention to the concern about border control and immigration by a large section of the UK population. The expression of this concern has been repeated in other countries with the election of Trump in the US, the revival of One Nation in Australia, the resurgence of Front National in France, Golden Dawn in Greece and so on.

A pressing question then for researchers and scholars interested in democracy and social justice in times when foundationalist principles seem less certain and 'post truth' politics appear to be on the ascendance is how might we (academics) produce knowledge in more democratic ways (e.g. Connell, 2007; de Sousa Santos, 2012; Latour, 2005; Law, 2008; Stengers, 2008)? And more specifically for the readers of this journal, how might we produce more democratic accounts of knowledge and learning that take into account not only different knowledges but different ways of understanding knowledge and its relationship to experience?

In an effort to disrupt existing knowledge hierarchies workplace learning researchers coming from an adult education tradition have been active in the project of mapping sites of learning beyond the academy. This has included inscribing workplaces as sites of knowledge production and learning (e.g. Billett, Fenwick, & Somerville, 2006; Boud & Garrick, 1999; Boud, Solomon, & Rooney, 2006; Fenwick, Nerland, & Jensen, 2012; Harman, 2012). This political project potentially enables knowledge hierarchies between the academy and workplaces (and other sites of knowledge production) to be levelled through recognising the knowledge production and learning that take place beyond the academy. But in focusing on breaking down knowledge

hierarchies between workplaces and the academy have we workplace learning

researchers been too hasty to put workers in their place? Has too much attention been

paid to a notion of knowledge as necessarily tied to identity? And can learning in and

through workplace practices be understood and represented as other than a process of

socialisation and adaptation?

This paper engages with these questions by examining the contribution of what

has been called the 'aesthetic turn' in political thinking (Kompridis, 2014b). The

aesthetic turn is an approach that draws attention to 'the distribution of the sensible'

(Rancière, 2004). In other words, who and what is able, and not able, to be seen, felt,

heard, thought and so on in a particular ordering of the sensible. Drawing on Rancière's

discussion of the aesthetic dimensions of politics, experience and knowledge the paper

explores what this opens up in terms of thinking about and researching learning at work,

particularly more recent literature on learning in and through workplace practices

(Gherardi, 2009; Green, 2009; Hager, Lee, & Reich, 2012; Wenger, 1998).

In the first part of the paper the aesthetic turn in political thinking is introduced,

with a focus on Rancière's argument that experience has an aesthetic dimension and that

knowledge can be understood as non-hierarchical (2004, 2006, 2014). The next part of

the paper examines the ways the relationship between experience and knowledge has

been understood in practice-based accounts of learning at work. Following Rancière's

argument, I examine the ways these accounts tend to tie knowledge to identity. The

final part of the paper considers the possibilities opened up by the 'aesthetic turn' to

researching learning in and through everyday workplace practices and suggests areas for

ongoing exploration. It is proposed that an aesthetic understanding of experience offers

a resource of hope for those interested in equality and democracy as it disrupts the

ongoing separation of academic and practical reason which prevails in practice-based accounts of learning at work.

What is the 'aesthetic turn' in political thinking?

In a recent collection of essays titled 'The aesthetic turn in political thought', Kompridis (2014b) outlines a set of concerns in political thinking which he suggests are linked with aesthetics, broadly conceived. These include:

-the problem of voice and voicelessness

-the problem of the new

-the problem of integrating (rather than dichotomising) the ordinary and the extraordinary

-the problem of judgement

-the problem of responsiveness and receptivity

-the problem of appearance and what is given to sense to make sense of

This wide-ranging take on aesthetics parallels longstanding concerns in the field of adult education such as: who is able to speak in accounts of learning; who and what is able to be heard; who and what is visible and not visible; and what gets to count as experience and learning (e.g. Cooper, 2014; Fejes & Nicoll, 2008; Fenwick & Edwards, 2013; Fenwick & Field, 2014; Hall, Tandon, & Global University Network for Innovation, 2014; Harman, 2014; Laginder, Nordvall, & Crowther, 2013; Tett, 2014)? Might the 'aesthetic turn' in political thinking have anything to offer learning theorists as we explore these questions in relation to how learning in and through everyday practices at work might be conceived?

When thinking about politics and aesthetics, the work of Rancière provides a useful resource. Rancière draws attention to an aesthetic dimension of politics using the

concept of 'the distribution of the sensible'. In 'Politics of Aesthetics' (2004) he defines

'the distribution of the sensible' as 'a distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity

that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to

participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution' (p.

12). 'The distribution of the sensible', then, orders in a particular way what is

noticeable, perceivable, valuable, significant, or in other words 'what is given to sense

to make sense of' (Kompridis, 2014a, p. xvii). Rancière argues that changing 'the

distribution of the sensible', by enabling what cannot currently be seen and heard to be

seen and heard, creates alternative possibilities for thought and action, and that this

reconfiguration *is* democratic politics. In other words, democratic politics involves

transforming experience. And it is in this sense that politics is aesthetic.

Rancière sees 'the distribution of the sensible' as intricately interconnected with

an aesthetics of knowledge and he draws on Kant's alternative story of knowledge to

make this point. For Kant, according to Rancière, aesthetic experience suggests the

possibility of disinterested knowledge, which is made possible by a 'disconnection from

the habitual conditions of sensible experience' (2006, p. 1). Following Kant he argues

that aesthetics is the capacity to both perceive a given *and* to make sense of it. It is

'sense doubled' and there are three ways this relationship can be understood (2014).

The first is where 'the faculty of signification rules over the faculty that conveys

sensations' (p. 263). Rancière calls this 'the order of knowledge'. The second is where

'the faculty of sensation' rules over the 'faculty of knowledge', and this is 'the law of

desire' (p. 264). The third is a distribution that 'escapes the hierarchical relationship

between a high faculty and a low faculty' (p. 264). Neither sense, nor the ability to

make sense of sense is privileged in an aesthetic understanding of experience and, for

Rancière, this enables 'two worlds – two heterogeneous logics' to come together in the same world (p. 272).

It is the non-hierarchical knowledge relationship and what this makes possible that is of interest to Rancière. He argues that this aesthetic dimension of knowledge disrupts a way of thinking that can be traced all the way back to Plato. For Plato, there are those with knowledge, who are destined to rule, and those who are ignorant and destined to work. Plato's universal categories and the knowledge-ignorance binary this creates, ensures the impossibility of doing two things at once. For Plato, argues Rancière, a well organised community is where each person does what they were destined to do by nature, which means that the worker has no time to be anything but a worker. This particular distribution of time and space, and the particular understanding of knowledge which accompanies it, means that the worker never has time to be involved in the broader community, and hence politics (Rancière, 2004). For Rancière, the Platonic myth insists on a relationship of 'reciprocal confirmation between a condition and thought' where '…an abode must determine a way of being that in turn determines a way of thinking' (2014 p.277). In other words, the Platonic myth ties knowledge to identity. In contrast, Kant's notion of aesthetic experience enables the worker to be disconnected from their condition.

The notion of disinterested knowledge and aesthetic experience, as well as associated concepts such as disidentification and dissensus used by Rancière to explore democratic politics, are key to the argument presented in this paper. I propose that a Rancièrian frame enables learning to be understood as expansive, whereby boundaries are blurred and new subjectivities are able to appear. This opening up to experience involves change and transformation. This provides a distinct contrast to a Bourdieusian conception of learning as socialisation and adaptation, which I suggest later in the paper

underpins many practice-based accounts of learning at work. Rancière provides a different conception of the relationship between knowledge, identity, practice and experience to that available in a Bourdieusian conception of habitus, where place is intricately linked with identity formation (1988, 1990). From a Bourdieusian perspective, learning is understood as a process of socialisation and identification with the social position one has been allocated. Bourdieu does not subscribe to Kant's account of disinterested knowledge, where knowledge is separable from identity. For Bourdieu, according to Rancière, there is a true knowledge which is aware (and liberates) and a false knowledge which ignores (and oppresses) and the disciplinary thinking of sociology seeks to narrow the gap between true and false knowledge. Disciplinary thinking is continuously trying to 'establish stable relations between bodily states and the modes of perception and signification that correspond to them' (2014, p. 278). For Rancière, Bourdieu's concept of 'misrecognition' exemplifies the sociological ambition for a correspondence between knowledge and identity through drawing attention to the 'false knowledge' of the oppressed whereby they fail to truly understand their own oppression.

Rancière provides a very different view to the relationship between knowledge and identity. He argues that the seemingly natural correspondence between identity and knowledge is 'perpetually disturbed' (2014, p. 277) through the free circulation of discourses, which 'divert bodies from their destinations' (p. 278) and this is why democratic politics is possible. In other words, the refusal to take up the social position one has been allocated and instead demanding equality enables 'the distribution of the sensible' to be reconfigured. This process 'brings forth a new experience' by making a previously invisible experience visible. In other words, it enables the appearance of two worlds where previously only one was visible (May, 2008). This process of

transformation involves disidentification and dissensus rather than identification and consensus and these concepts are particularly useful when considering how learning at work might be reconceived.

Lewis (2009), using the concepts of dissensus and disidentification, provides a useful discussion on learning as transformation and change and education as an 'aesthetic event' (p. 285). Dissensus, in contrast to consensus, enables 'disconnection from the habitual conditions of sensible experience' (Rancière, 2006, p.1). The inclusion of the 'plus one' (a term used by Rancière to refer to previously excluded individuals) through the removal of boundaries enables the appearance of something new. Rather than a community of shared practice and meaning there is a community of difference. Lewis refers to the mingling of roles and the blurring of boundaries, which produces ongoing variation, hybridity, new meanings and new subjectivities. The appearance of new subjectivities rather than alignment with existing positions points to a process of disidentification rather than identification.

Furthermore, Rancière and Bourdieu suggest very different roles for academics in terms of the production of knowledge. For Rancière, an aesthetic understanding of knowledge, through ignoring hierarchies, enables the 'battle lines' between knowing and ignorance (read as ignoring boundaries) to be redrawn. However, Bourdieu will not allow this. For Bourdieu, a more equal society can only be achieved through narrowing the gap between fact (truth) and ideology (ignorance) and this is to be achieved by drawing attention to the truth of oppression (Harman, 2017; Pelletier, 2009). Rancière, instead, draws attention to the 'democratic supplement' (the plus one) and 'infinite substitutability':

> an aesthetics of knowledge creates forms of supplementation that allows us to redistribute the configuration of the topoi, the places of the same and the different,

the balance of knowledge and ignorance so that no border separates the voice of the object of science from the logos of the science that takes it as its object' (2014, p. 279).

A rejection of a hierarchical relation between the faculties that make sense means that academic reason and practical reason need no longer be viewed as necessarily separate and equality becomes possible through removing these boundaries. Rancière anchors this argument in the notion that *all* humans have the 'common capacity to invent objects, stories and arguments…the common sharing of the capacity of thinking' (pp. 279-280). Equality is the central value for Rancière and equality is *created by the people* (the demos). This enables him to argue that we (academics) must start from a position of equality in order to bring about social change.

The work of Rancière has become increasingly popular in educational literature, particularly literature concerned with education and democracy (e.g. Bingham & Biesta, 2010; Galloway, 2012; Pelletier, 2009; Porres, Wildemeersch, & Simons, 2014; Simons & Masschelein, 2010). This literature makes an important contribution in the critique of the notion of knowledge as necessarily emancipatory by directing attention to the ways power is exercised in and through pedagogical practices. But practice-based theories of learning and work are not so concerned with the pedagogical relation. Their emphasis, and thus the emphasis of this paper, is on learning in and through everyday workplace practices. I now turn to those practice-based accounts.

In search of the political in practice-based accounts of learning at work
The theoretical turn to 'practice' in the social sciences (e.g. Schatzki, 1997; Schatzki *et al*., 2001) heralded a shift in thinking about learning at work and the language of learning shifted from 'experience' to 'practice'. While an understanding of learning at work as learning *from* experience (through reflection on practice) is still widespread

(Bradbury, Kilminster, O'Rourke, & Zukas, 2015), this literature has received extensive critique by adult learning theorists (e.g. Michelson, 1996; Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997; Usher & Solomon, 1999), and others. The main concern with an understanding of learning as reflection on experience is the ongoing privileging of the 'faculty of knowledge' over 'the faculty of sensation' (or how we make sense of sense), using the language of Rancière. While there has been an increasing interest in 'practice' in literature on learning at work (e.g. Gherardi, 2009; Green, 2009; Hager, Lee, & Reich, 2012; Wenger, 1998), the ways experience is conceived in this literature and the effects in terms of how learning might be understood has received little discussion. In the section that follows practice-based accounts of learning at work are traced and the ways experience, knowledge and learning have been conceived in this literature are examined. I will propose that a Bourdieusian conception of learning as socialisation and adaptation underpins much of this literature and that this is problematic as is means politics, understood here as dissensus and disidentification, remain invisible in these accounts of learning.

The widespread circulation of communities of practice literature in the early 2000s, both in academia and in workplaces, could be described as the first wave of practice-based accounts of learning at work. In this literature learning was understood as identity work. For example, Lave & Wenger (1991) represented learning as the socialisation of workers into particular occupational norms and practices and movement from partial to full participation in practice. This enabled a shift from thinking about learning as a process of reflection on workplace experience (and a cognitive activity) to thinking about learning *in* and *through* practice and associated with activity.

This literature drew attention to 'everyday' learning at work and more democratic representations of learning (and what was able to count as learning) at work

seemed possible. However, in much of this literature, learning tended to be understood as the acquisition of skill and obtaining 'mastery' with workers moving from novice to expert in their particular occupational domain, for example, as 'the doctor', 'the manager', 'the midwife' and so on (Hughes, Jewson, & Unwin, 2007). The dominance of an understanding of learning at work as skills acquisition and mastery led to a plethora of sanitised accounts of learning at work (usually from a managerial perspective of enhanced organisational performance), and accounts of organisational change where representations of struggle and politics were absent (e.g. Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). There were few (if any) learners represented in the community of practice literature that were resistant to organisational goals or politically active.

Furthermore, there was a tendency for knowledge to be tied to identity in much of this literature and this worked to position workers firmly within particular occupational groupings and identifications. There was no time for these workers to know other than in their shared community of practice, thus continuing the story of destiny. In other words, the way workers were able to obtain mastery was through staying in their place. Learning was understood as socialisation and adaptation to prevailing occupational norms and as a result there were few accounts of the struggle over subjectivity at work (Ransom, 1997) and the refusal to be positioned in particular ways.

Rancière's critique of the concept of misrecognition is useful to consider here. While the communities of practice literature rarely drew attention to the operation of power, it was implicit in this characterisation of learning. The ongoing representation of workers as reproducing organisational and occupational norms through processes of socialisation can be understood as an inscription of the sociological view of the world

which seeks a correspondence between identity and knowledge. And, as Rancière points out, this works to separate academic and practical reason. This separation was evident in the critical management literature where everyday learning, understood as identification with occupational and organisational norms, was mistrusted and understood as false knowledge (e.g. Coopey, 1996; Coopey & Burgoyne, 2000; Deetz, 1998). In this literature workers were understood as being 'duped' by management and complicit in their own oppression at work. These workers were unable to have 'true' knowledge as they did not 'really' understand their subjective experience and only the critical scholar, with the higher order thinking of the academy, was able to know this 'truth'. Furthermore, the way experience was represented in these accounts of learning at work contributed to a continuation of the Platonic myth, with knowledge being tied to abode. Subjective experience tended to be understood as an effect of power and was not to be trusted. There was little hope in these accounts with workplace practices represented as mechanisms for reproduction rather than spaces for transformation and change.

So is it possible for learning to be understood as other than adaptation (and mastery) in practice-based accounts of learning at work? Are there spaces for dissensus in workplaces (and a reconfiguring of the distribution of the sensible) and are we able to see transformation and change? Is it possible to write learning in and through workplace practices as a counterstory to the story of destiny with stories of workers opening up to experience and throwing off particular identities? Are there workplace pedagogies that enable transformation of workers' experience of the ordinary? Can workers (including academic workers) be understood as changing 'the distribution of the sensible'? These questions suggest alternative conceptions of knowledge and its relation with experience are needed in order to counter the story of destiny in representations of learning in and through practice.

More recently there has been a move to sociomaterial accounts of learning, which can be linked to different theoretical perspectives, including actor network theory (ANT) (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). In sociomaterial approaches, learning and knowledge are understood as 'embedded in material action and interaction (or intra-action) rather than focusing on internalised concepts, meanings and feelings of any one participant' (Fenwick et al., 2012, p. 6). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to trace the theoretical underpinnings of various sociomaterial approaches (see Hager et al., 2012, for a more detailed analysis), potentially, the principle of equality and a more expansive understanding of experience this entails could provide the starting point for research.

However, it seems that a Bourdieusian understanding of habitus, and the tying of identity, knowledge and place in this approach, is difficult to disrupt in literature on learning in and through everyday practices at work. For example, much recent literature on learning at work tends to provide rich ethnographic accounts of workers' practices which draw attention to embodiment and the realisation of subjectivity in and through practice (e.g. Gherardi, 2016; Hopwood, 2014). In common with a communities of practice approach, much of this work tends to emphasise the structuring work performed by practices rather than the ways workers refuse to be positioned and, in so doing, processes of identification rather than disidentification are made visible. Democratic politics, as conceived by Rancière, remains largely absent in these accounts. Furthermore, the analysis and writing of practice and experience is usually from the perspective of the academic researcher, thus contributing to the ongoing separation of practical and theoretical reason. We hear little in these accounts of the subjective experience of particular workplace practices, for example what it feels, smells, looks and sounds like to attend to 'leaky' bodies in aged care homes and what if feels like for

workers who are at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy (Wolkowitz, 2007). This is not to claim that a discussion of aesthetics and its relationship with learning is entirely absent from this literature (e.g. Strati, 2009). Rather, my point is that representations of democratic politics and its creation by the people are difficult to find.

Implications for workplace learning research and areas for further exploration

Rancière's focus on reconfiguring 'the distribution of the sensible' is overtly political and it is this aspect of his work that is particularly useful for researchers interested in what is and what is not visible in theories of knowing in and through workplace practices (Fenwick & Field, 2014). In drawing attention to the work performed by the Platonic myth in terms of tying knowledge to abode and the resulting distrust of subjective experience in sociological accounts, Rancière points to the performative work of theory and the ongoing separation of academic reason and practical reason in sociological accounts of oppression and misrecognition. Furthermore, he provides an alternative way of thinking about knowledge. Using the Kantian notion of aesthetic experience, he argues that knowledge and ignorance (read as an indifference to difference) are able to co-exist. This points to new ways of being for academics, more generally, and to specific political strategies for researchers of learning in and through practice.

Rancière's work highlights the need for academics to start from the presupposition of equality and this means letting go of searching for the hidden 'truth', which works to keep the oppressed in their place. This links with the work of other contemporary political philosophers who discuss the need for academics to move beyond mastery through opening up to other ways of knowing (e.g. Kompridis, 2011; Orlie, 2014; Stengers, 2008). What is key here is a notion of experience (and learning)

as transformation and change. While this is not new in adult education, for example this thinking can be traced to Dewey (1938; 1966), the connection between learning and democratic politics is less visible in the workplace learning literature.

Rancière (2006) also directs attention to the productive potential of boundary crossing and intersections with Others through moving across disciplines/ occupations/ institutions. Again, not new, but not always visible in literature on learning at work. Perhaps not least because it can be very difficult to do. For example, there will no doubt be protest from philosophers about my move into the terrain of political philosophy in this paper, but this in itself exemplifies the ordering work of the academy, where one should stay in their place. An aesthetic learning process might be understood as an opening up to experience and becoming receptive (Kompridis, 2011) and this suggests experimentation, creativity, novelty and improvisation, as indicated in recent literature on learning as creativity (Thijssen, 2014) and theories of learning drawing on a Deluezian framework (Green, 2015). The notion of learning as dissensus and transformation and change could make a useful contribution to literature on expansive learning (Beighton & Poma, 2015; Fuller & Unwin, 2003) and sociomaterial literature emphasising co-emergence and the rich textures of knowing and learning in and through practice (Hopwood, 2014).

Specifically for researchers of learning in and through everyday workplace practices, the notion of aesthetic experience draws attention to the importance of research accounts which provide counter stories to the story of destiny. For Rancière, emancipation *is* the ability to reconfigure 'the distribution of the sensible' (through refusing to be positioned) and a concomitant collective subjectification that is produced through this process. We need representations of workers demanding equality through refusing to be positioned, and as active in reconfiguring 'the distribution of the

sensible'. These accounts will draw attention to learning at work as the transformation of experience. For example, Katzman's (2015) discussion of her ongoing positioning as a care worker and what she was able and not able to say and know when positioned in this way exemplifies this approach.

The notion of 'aesthetic education' (Rancière, 2009) is suggestive of how the naturalness of place and the everyday might be recast and could provide a fruitful area to explore in studies of learning in and through everyday workplace practices. In attending to everyday experiences, how might 'the distribution of the sensible' be reconfigured and new modes of experience opened up? Highmore (2011) talks about a 'pedagogy of the ordinary', which is the ways our senses are worked upon in and through everyday experience. While he points out the notion of habit is politically conservative, he suggests the potential of an exploration of transformation in and through everyday habits and how habits enable sensorial change. An example provided by Highmore is the ways people are regularly experimenting with their lives through the use of new technology such as mobile phones and the production of new selves these interactions bring into effect. An area for ongoing research could be an exploration of the everyday habits in workplaces that contribute to dissensus, disidentification and reconfiguring 'the distribution of the sensible'.

A resource of hope

This paper offers Rancière's notion of an aesthetic dimension of knowledge and politics as a resource of hope for researching learning in and through practice. This is a view that disrupts a particular 'distribution of the sensible' in terms of how knowledge and experience might be understood. It disrupts a Platonic understanding of knowledge as necessarily tied to identity and place and has drawn attention to the possibilities opened

up by thinking about knowledge as aesthetic and non-hierarchical.

Following Rancière, a call has been made for research approaches which open up to subjective experience when writing about learning in and through practice. The ongoing representation of particular groups as continually dominated and oppressed may work to mask subtleties of change, transformation and transgression in workplaces and other sites. While it is important not to overlook power in accounts of practice in workplaces, primarily because of a dominant 'distribution of the sensible' in workplaces which privileges managerial knowledges, as argued elsewhere (Harman, 2016) this needs to be done with care. A way forward is research accounts of learning that include representations of workers as active subjects, refusing to be positioned and not necessarily tied to identity.

The above suggestions are tentative and care may also be needed when proceeding with a Rancièrian line of thinking for at least two reasons. First, workplace learning theorists are still trying to move beyond a dominant discourse of reflective learning, where learning is understood as learning from experience, and we need to be careful when reintroducing the language of experience as it is so closely connected with a very dominant way of understanding knowledge. Second, Bourdieu's argument for making the invisible operation of power visible is very persuasive. It is difficult to ignore oppression in workplaces, nor should we. However, Rancière's proposition of a common capacity in humans to 'invent stories, objects and arguments' could offer a way forward here. We academics no longer need to mistrust subjective experience and workers will have their own accounts of the operation of power and its imbrication with practice in workplaces.

Rancière's work draws attention to the need for research approaches that move beyond the sociological aim to separate fact (knowledge) and illusion (ignorance) and

open up to other ways of knowing, speaking and being, for both workers in the academy (including researchers) and workers in other locations. We need to start from a presupposition of equality. And in times when resources of hope seem in short supply, the political strategy of rewriting the story of destiny with its ongoing separation of knowledge and ignorance seems worth a try. Starting from the 'what if' position of knowledge without hierarchy (an indifference to difference) and the idea that humans do have something in common, that is, we all have the capacity to tell stories, form arguments and to think, opens up a range of possibilities for researching and writing learning at work. Perhaps Rancière makes it safe to return to experience?

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