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**Researching professional practice:
The integrated practice perspectives model and continuing education.**

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Abstract: The "Integrated Practice Perspectives" model reframes previous efforts to link education with professional practice by using theories of situated cognition and learning. Reframing allows other variables in professional performance to be identified, performance to be more thoroughly linked to social and cultural contexts, and a more integrative and deeper conceptualization of professional practice and context to be developed.

Introduction

Researchers and practitioners alike have become increasingly concerned with exploring ways to strengthen the linkage between professionals' continuing education, and their practice. These efforts have been motivated by a number of factors, including: (a) new conceptions of professionals' ways of knowing (Cervero, 1988; Harris, 1993); (b) recognition of the socially constructed nature of professional knowledge and practice (LaDuca & Engel, 1994); and, (c) debate about the transfer of learning across contexts (Perkins & Salomon, 1989; Detterman & Sternberg, 1993). All these factors point to a need for more integrative approaches to researching and understanding professional practice and professional work contexts. Such an approach is needed to create and drive a cohesive research agenda that is applicable across the professions and that can address the current and evolving challenges facing them. Therefore, the purpose of this project has been to develop a model, the Integrated Practice Perspectives (IPP) model, for researching and understanding professional practice. This model, developed through review of literature and application with two professions, draws extensively upon previous efforts to connect educational programs with professional practice, and existing approaches of exploring the actual work and working roles of professionals. But it also recasts these earlier efforts into a broader framework that draws on theories of situated cognition and learning (a) to identify other relevant variables in professional performance; (b) to link more thoroughly professional practice and performance to social and cultural settings; and, (c) to provide for a more integrative and deeper conceptualization of professional practice and its setting.

The Integrated Practice Perspectives Model and Related Literature

Three major research and theory building strategies have typified efforts to link educational programs to professional practice. Each attempts to both describe the dimensions of professional work and tie these descriptions to definitions of professional competence and performance. The first approach entails the establishment of minimal levels of practitioner proficiencies and competencies (with knowledge and skills being major types) needed for credible professional practice (Nowlen, 1988; Willis & Dubin, 1990). The second focuses on determining the functional domains, responsibilities, and tasks of practice in a given profession (Queeney & Smutz, 1990; Willis & Dubin, 1990). The third approach requires study of the actual work behaviors and practices of practitioners within the practice setting in order to identify characteristics and circumstances of practitioners' work, as well as to develop a composite of working roles (Lanzilotti, Finestone, Sobel, & Marks, 1986; McGaghie, 1991, 1993). Related to each approach is debate about whether models of performance and competence should be unitary or multidimensional. While unitary models have been found to be more predictive of competence at later career stages, multidimensional models have three important advantages: (a) they recognize the increased differentiation of competence that comes from professional experience and different roles, and the need to conceptualize and research practice across these dimensions; (b) they permit targeting educational experiences to particular areas of learning needs that vary by role, experience, and setting; and, (c) they are useful in analyzing how specific work context factors support or limit competence across dimensions (Willis & Dubin, 1990; McGaghie, 1993). The one weakness inherent in all these approaches is that they assume that competence and performance are essentially individual affairs (Nowlen, 1988). Therefore, an adequate conceptualization of professional practice and context must also be grounded and reframed within the social and cultural settings in which professional knowledge, professional roles, and professional performance are socially constructed.

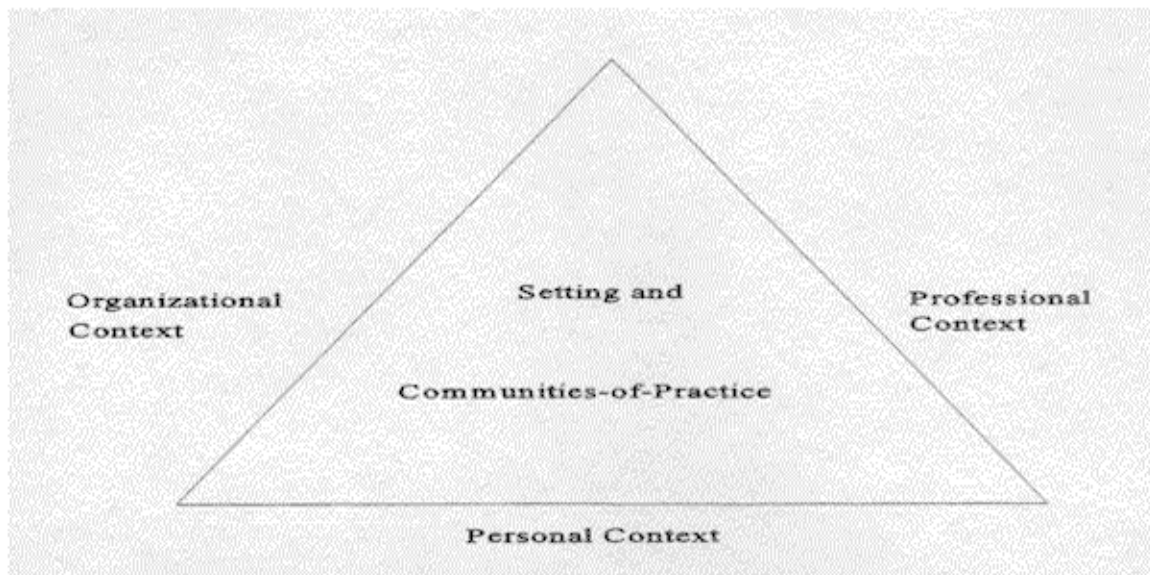
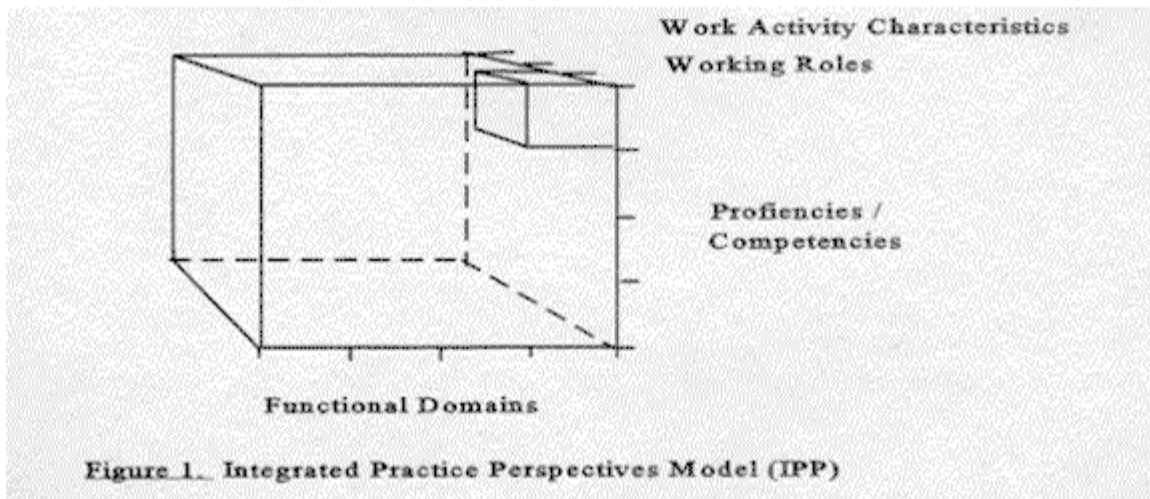
The IPP model incorporates the three major research and theory building strategies, along with the multidimensional aspect of performance, by suggesting that understanding the multidimensional nature of work and practice of professionals requires descriptions of what practitioners actually are doing (the recurring events or working roles in actual practice settings), not simply or only what they are supposed to be accomplishing (functional domains, responsibilities, tasks) or how well they are supposed to be doing it (proficiencies and competencies). The model also grounds and reframes the four approaches into social and cultural settings in several ways. First, it incorporates Brown and Duguid's (1991) distinction between canonical practice, or practice based on authoritative and normative expectations of the profession (i.e. proficiencies and functional domains) and the employing organization (e.g., job descriptions and organizational rules), and noncanonical practice, or practice characterized by roles and practices that have been socially constructed through interactions of participants in particular communities-of-practice (Brown & Duguid, 1991; LaDuca, 1980; Goffman, 1974).

Second, this grounding and reframing also draw upon Lave, Murtaugh, & de la Rocha's (1984) distinction between arena and setting, the former being objectified and normative descriptions of context and the latter being the practitioner's edited, subjective versions of the context. Elements of the setting, i.e. tools particular to the setting, and the individual practitioner's interaction with other individuals and the setting itself, as described by Lave et al. are also included in the model and become important variables in understanding professional setting and performance. Other variables, such as time--in activities, social interactions, reflection and judgment (Eraut, 1994) and socially constructed and negotiated roles (Goffman, 1974; Strauss, 1978)--are included to ensure that exploration of setting addresses variables of relevance to professional practice. The part that activity plays in performance is also considered, particularly as related to the purposes of activity, problem definition and shaping, and definition of professional roles (Lave et al., 1984; Goffman, 1974).

Third, because it is integrative, the model relies upon multiple "rules of evidence" about practitioner performance and context. The proficiency/competency and functional domains approaches rely most heavily upon perceptual, normative, and quantitative data to describe and prescribe professional performance. However, by incorporating research on actual professional practice, as framed by the anthropological and sociological underpinnings of situated learning and cognition, the model permits, even encourages, qualitative approaches, e.g., observation, story-telling, to inquire into practice. These qualitative approaches permit the actual work of practitioners to be described and analyzed. But they also allow focus on practitioners' tacit knowledge, the actual roles practitioners play as these have been socially constructed within practice, and the meaning that they ascribe to work, roles, and setting. Further, qualitative approaches enable us to focus on the underlying processes through which learning and knowing occur and the interrelated ways that practitioner roles and settings are socially constructed. For example, Strauss' (1978) description of the renegotiation of roles among health care professionals within a mental hospital to arrive at an inter-professional social order different from the traditional physician-led, hierarchical one, is an illustration of how the social construction of actual professional roles and the recursive impact of negotiations on knowing can be addressed. Orr's (1990, in Brown & Duguid, 1991) concept of "work arounds" captures the dynamics of actual practice in which individuals, in a community-of-practice and in recursive relationship with their setting and tools, solve problems of practice in ways that are not congruent with company rules and norms, highlighting the dynamic tension that exists between the canonical and noncanonical aspects of practice. Lave and Wenger's (1990) work on apprenticeship provides another example, especially of the way novices are initiated into the work of experts.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate different aspects of the IPP model. Figure 1 highlights the interrelationship of the approaches to studying professional practice along multiple dimensions. The approaches are represented by the axes, upon which the multiple dimensions of practice are represented by "tick" marks. An intersection of the approaches is illustrated by the cell. Figure 2, in contrast, focuses our attention on factors influencing the setting of professional practice within

which performance is grounded. The working role approach is focused on the center of Figure 2, where individuals-in-settings and in communities-of-practice perform, based upon their recursive relationships with settings and their interpretations of influencing contexts (including their personal contexts). Within the organizational context are job descriptions and rules, types of canonical descriptions of practice. The professional context also includes descriptions of practice, but in this case developed through proficiency and functional domain approaches to studying practice. These descriptions are also particular types of canonical practice descriptions. Although not shown, both figures assume that the model and the phenomena it addresses exist and function within the broader social context.



In summary, the Integrated Practice Perspectives (IPP) model draws upon existing strategies for researching and understanding professional competence, performance, and practice, but recasts these within the theoretical constructs of situated cognition and learning. As such, the model grounds understanding of professional competence and performance within settings of practice, taking into account both canonical and noncanonical aspects of that setting. By integrating approaches, the model also focuses upon the individual-in-setting, rather than focusing either on individual or context alone (Cobb, 1994). It also addresses issues of knowledge creation and use within the professions by providing a means through which the relation between formal, theoretical knowledge and knowledge learned in experience can be explored.

Applications of the IPP Model

The IPP model has been employed in two research studies with two different professions, evangelical Protestant clergy and university continuing educators (Donaldson, 1993; Donaldson & Kuhne, 1994; Kuhne & Donaldson, 1995). These two professions were selected for study because previous proficiency and functional domain studies had been conducted for them. Therefore, results from projects conducted by the investigators could be compared with results on competencies and functional domains as reported in extant literature. Practitioners in the two professions were studied through a combination of structured observation, in-depth interviews with subjects and members of their role sets, the critical incident technique, document analysis, and "think-aloud" protocols. Results of the studies (the actual work setting characteristics and working roles of practitioners) were compared with each profession's reported lists of (a) proficiencies and (b) functional roles and domains to identify linkages and gaps in the description of professional practice and work setting. Each component of the model was found to be important because it added distinctive insights into professional practice that are essential to a well-rounded understanding of professional work. For example, the working role approach found that functional domain and proficiency approaches to the study of the clergy had underemphasized the multidimensional nature of their administrative work, and thereby added important elements to our understanding of their practice, work setting, and knowledge.

Results demonstrated that while each approach has its own relative strengths and weaknesses, their integration through the model provides for compensatory and complementary insights that generate more complete descriptions of practice. For example, the functional domains approach provides insights into the broader functions of a profession that aid in making conclusions about the relative value of the work activities identified in working role studies. In contrast, a weakness of the functional domain approach is that it is based upon practitioner perceptions or expert opinion, and is not grounded in the observation of practice realities. The proficiency approach provides important insight into the broad areas of knowledge and skills and affords a basis for the assessment of readiness to practice and for determination of minimal performance levels for effectiveness. In a sense, such information is a measure of potentiality, a recognition of whether the "tool box" is full. However, proficiencies do not reveal how well such "tools" will be used in practice or whether the broader purposes of the "tools" will be realized in practice. The

proficiency approach, because it is not rooted in studies of practice realities, also tends to overlook the reflective elements of professional knowledge that are found by studying practitioner work setting. The weakness of the working role approach is the reverse of the weakness of the domain studies. By focusing on individual work setting and behaviors, the broader functions of such behaviors can be easily obscured. In isolation, the approach can also overlook the canonical norms and expectations established by the worker's profession and organization, thereby precluding examination of the influence these norms and expectations have upon socially constructed knowledge and performance. Also, by examining specific work activities, the determination of the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that have led to the ability to carry out such activities are ignored, unless "think aloud" protocols are also employed.

Conclusion

Application of the IPP model has provided an affirmation of the unique and important contributions of each of its components, especially if reframed and integrated within theories and concepts of situated cognition and learning. The model provides a basis for generating rich and high fidelity descriptions of practitioner performance and practice settings, the results of which can be employed in assessment of learning needs, curricular design, and competence evaluation. The model also provides a basis for a research agenda that has much potential for creating stronger linkages between education and practice across the professions. For example, questions about malleability of cognitive schemata from education to practice; the processes by which noncanonical professional roles are constructed; and, the applicability of the model's components at different stages in practitioners' cognitive development (i.e. novice/expert distinctions) all derive from the model's components and their relationships.

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