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Manuscript title:

'The constant state of becoming': power, identity and discomfort on the anti-oppressive learning journey

Abstract:

The development of a clear personal and professional identity – 'knowing oneself' – is frequently cited as a key factor in supporting anti-oppressive practice. In the field of health and social care, work placements are a major vehicle for equipping students to become anti-oppressive practitioners committed to making effective diversity interventions in a range of organizational settings.

This article highlights some of the tensions inherent in the formation of such an identity and pays particular attention to issues such as discomfort, power inequalities, the discursive production of the self and ways in which educational and workplace organizational settings can simultaneously promote and inhibit such identity development.

The article concludes that the discomfort experienced by students as part of this learning process is not only inevitable but necessary to becoming an anti-oppressive practitioner, and that the narrative process offers ways of empowering both students and service users to challenge oppression.

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Introduction

Higher Education Institutions in the UK are increasingly providing work placement opportunities for students. These are sometimes called 'work-based learning' and are often perceived as a vital part of the development of the current and future workforce (University Vocational Awards Council [UVAC], 2005; Developing European Work Based Learning Approaches and Methods [DEWBLAM], 2006). *Work-based learning* is a term used to describe a class of university programmes that involve collaboration between universities and work organizations to create expansive rather than restrictive learning opportunities that straddle traditional academic learning and the development of skills in the workplace (Boud & Solomon, 2001). The emphasis is thus on identifying and demonstrating learning that has occurred through work-based activity. The learning may occur in the workplace 'formally' (and is therefore planned), but also 'informally', resulting from the challenge of the work itself and from spontaneous interactions with people in the workplace (Eraut, 2000; Unwin, Felstead & Fuller, 2007). This is especially significant for undergraduate students on health and social care courses, based as they are, on interpersonal interaction and interventions. Work-based learning therefore, is a "complex interconnected relationship between performing everyday work tasks, the utilisation of skill and knowledge, and learning". (Unwin et al., 2007, p.2).

For students training for health and social care professions, work-based learning plays a central role and, indeed, may be compulsory. There is also increasing pressure to train future professionals who possess appropriate professional values that support anti-oppressive practice: in social work and social care considerable emphasis is placed on developing the anti-oppressive practitioner (Social Work Reform Board, 2010); and in health, following the Francis Inquiry, greater importance is attached to recruiting individuals with the appropriate 'values' (Health Education England, 2013). In this context, a key aim of work-based learning is to provide relevant and appropriate educative experiences to enable students to develop as anti-oppressive practitioners and hence contribute towards the development of good practice in the effective use of diversity interventions in organizations.

The recent Munro report (2011) has led to the reform of social work training and stresses the importance of developing a new critical reflection culture within the workplace. This recognizes the centrality of critical reflection to the process of complex decision making that social workers are required to undertake in responding to unique interpersonal situations. This is in contrast to the current competence-based approaches that exist where "agency systems have become over-reliant on rules and procedures" which Wilson (2013) argues "present formidable obstacles to learning both at an individual and organisational level". (p. 154).

Much of the current climate can be attributed to the new public managerialism emanating from the late 1990s, and the continued power of global economic systems that value a neoliberal and marketized context. Globalization, financial deregulation and the marketization of public services have contributed significantly to the erosion or decimation of public services. This has, in turn, led to a 'tickbox' culture of following rules and procedures which Morley and Dunstan (2013) regard as antithetical to anti-oppressive practice. Wilson (2013) suggests that this is likely to mean that students will invest less time and effort in more reflective learning if professional performance is measured by the ability to follow such rules and procedures.

The new Professional Capability Framework proposed by the Social Work Reform Board (2010) and the Munro proposals (2011) advocate greater critical reflection. Mackay and Woodward (2010) suggest, however, that current agency contexts are procedural and managerialist, and as such, find that current students are weak on critical reflection and anti-oppressive practice. It is unlikely that workplaces will have caught up with the Munro recommendations as quickly as social work training has – leading to opportunities for dissonance between university-based learning and work-based learning.

Despite these tensions, work-based learning is widely considered to be a highly suitable vehicle for training students to be anti-oppressive, reflective and critical practitioners. Yet rather limited attention has been paid to the propensity of work-based learning to mirror and replicate existing power structures and inequalities routinely found in the workplace,

academic institutions and wider society. Moreover, whilst work-based learning is intended to empower students, there are ways in which it can also lead to their exploitation and tacitly encourage them to maintain the status quo, especially since work-based learning can offer students the 'worst of both worlds' by, on the one hand, equipping them with generous helpings of theories and models relating to anti-oppressive practice, and on the other, subjecting them to the very real and immediate demands of the workplace that can have a culture which is antithetical to those more relativistic and idealistic academic values. This may result in pressuring the student to comply with procedural or even reactionary ways of working – and so undermining the very values and learning that work-based learning is intended to promote.

In this sense work-based learning can be viewed as representative of a set of social relations, one that exposes students to new communities of practice and meaning where identity may be both challenged and formed. Firstly, students embarking upon a professional course of study that has a work-based learning experience as a central part of the curriculum, enter what Burkitt (2001) refers to as a 'community of practice'. This has two major axes: one is defined through a social psychological sense of identity, a consciousness of kind; the other is made up of the interaction of resources, power, space and time in a specific setting. It is institutional. Burkitt (2001) sees them as independent but yet interactive in that they both shape the professional's experience of being that professional. All professions operate through a construction of shared identities which give meaning to the status of that profession and legitimate the act of being a professional. The subjective sense of identity which frames the 'very doing' of the job operates in an institutional context where impersonal forces operate in relation to abstract managerial concepts.

Most professionals may work in environments which they have little control over. The fabric of their working context has been significantly determined by external economic parameters and profession-specific philosophies and standards: "The institutional parameters that define a community of practice provide a shared environment, a common structured world, that those working there share." (Burkitt, 2001, p. 60). In this sense the institutional and organizational context becomes the basis for the formation of a shared identity.

However, this is far from straightforward for students entering this community for the first time. This is perhaps particularly pertinent in these changing times for both the social work and nursing professions. As a result, the community entered by students may be at odds with the emerging professional identity they are developing in the classroom. The narratives may be divergent and students may struggle to negotiate this given their relatively powerless position. Power relations then, are a key dynamic for students, particularly with regard to difference and status.

In the current UK health and social care sector interactions are inevitably intercultural, transcultural and cross cultural (Gray, Coates & Hetherington, 2007). Students undertaking the challenge of processing their own identity transformation in professional terms may be faced with groups of 'others' whom they perceive to be differentially positioned from 'themselves'. Apart from the power differential of status there is the differential of 'difference'. Arieli (2013), in her research amidst the nursing community in Israel, asks the question 'how are the challenges of ethnic diversity managed by students?'. She found that students had to learn to manage the challenge of diversity in order to manage their role. Both she and Ingram (2013) suggest that developing emotional intelligence as part of the professional identity of the 'nurse' facilitates a more collaborative and attuned approach to patients and/or service users. This further strengthens the view that emotional intelligence is a crucial part of the developing professional identity and lies at the heart of the relationships between professionals and service users (Ingram, 2013).

This emphasis on emotional intelligence as a key part of professional development in health and social care is not without challenges. The neoliberal and managerialist environment promotes procedural actions that serve managerial goals. Secondly, the diversity of the workplace means that there is the challenge of cultural specificity in developing emotional intelligence. Rietti (2008) argues that valued attributes and models may lead to professions celebrating specific attributes and overlooking individual and cultural diversity.

Anti-oppressive practice, 'knowing oneself' and discomfort

Anti-oppressive practice is one of the keys to making effective diversity interventions and work-based learning is one major vehicle through which UK Higher Education students in

health and social care develop into anti-oppressive practitioners. Through work-based learning the workplace is positioned as a crucial site for the acquirement of skills, knowledge and the formation of professional identity. It is a truism that the development of self awareness and reflexivity are vital for enabling individuals to undertake practice in an anti-oppressive way:

"Challenging inequality and transforming social relations is an integral part of anti-oppressive practice. Knowing oneself better equips an individual for undertaking this task. Self-knowledge is a central component of the repertoire of skills held by a reflective practitioner...Moreover reflexivity and social change form the bedrock upon which anti-oppressive practitioners build their interventions." (Dominelli, 2002, p. 9).

The development of students in this way is contingent on transformative learning: learning which focuses not only on the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also identity development. Despite the importance attached to 'knowing oneself' in developing as an anti-oppressive practitioner, it is a process that faces many challenges that include issues around: discomfort; power relations both within and outside of the placement organization; and the multiplicity of identity and cultural diversity. These issues are closely interconnected. Moreover, they influence – and can be influenced by – narrative processes.

Discomfort

Work-based learning often involves 'problem-based learning', a type of learning experience which is characterized by its uncertain and open-ended nature. As Barrett and Moore (2011) state, problem-based learning is laden with risks. In a work-based learning context the risks are not only faced by the student, but also the workplace organization, the university, as well as the staff and service users in the workplace. For example, the student is untested as a worker and may commit errors which could harm the interests of service users as well as the reputation of both the workplace organization and the university. As such, the workplace may immediately become a site of tension, of 'discomfort' in both personal and professional terms.

In professions such as social work it is widely acknowledged that these risky and unpredictable qualities are necessary in order for the desired learning to take place. Sakamoto

and Pitner (2005) suggest that developing as an anti-oppressive practitioner is an experience characterized by discomfort due to its unpredictable and personally challenging nature. Munro (2010), for example, talks about the 'artistry' of reflective practice and how it is about responding to unique situations as opposed to building a repertoire of formulaic responses. In his discussion of 'transformative learning', Mezirow (1997) stresses the role that critical reflection on our assumptions has in developing autonomous thinking – which is surely a prerequisite for anti-oppressive practice. According to Coleman, Collings & McDonald (1999) students' integration of emotional and cognitive components of learning is vital if they are to undergo such a transformational learning experience. All this supports Raelin's (2000) point that achieving the goals of work-based learning requires new learning that is attained through a combination of thinking, experimentation and dialogue with others. In doing so, students are being asked to transform their frames of reference, thereby challenging their lifelong assumptions, beliefs and habits of mind. This could also cause considerable discomfort, especially as they may be entering workplaces where the dominant value bases are in contrast to those that have become a central element of their development.

For the student on placement, critical reflection becomes a key vehicle for making sense of their experiences in the workplace and forms an essential part of their development, a vital element in their transformative learning (Bay & Macfarlane, 2011). It unsettles 'taken-for-granted' thinking and standardly accepted arrangements and practices. The development of this reflective artistry is not, however, inevitable and neither is it assured simply by the use of work-based learning as a learning strategy.

In the tentative and equivocal arena of problem-based learning, Barrett (2006) argues that we cannot pass directly from an old state to a new state: we enter a transitory phase or 'liminal space'. Entry to this space does not guarantee progressive learning: it is a doorway that can lead to transformation or, if the student's discomfort is too great, it may lead to stagnation or even regression (see Coleman et al., 1999; Hughes, 2013). This portrays the kind of 'high stakes' learning that work-based learning demands (in which the student's very identity can be threatened) as highly fragile.

Given the central role of the student's identity in developing anti-oppressive practice, it seems clear that for work-based learning to be truly transformational the student's emotional as well as cognitive states need to be fully engaged and they need to undergo some kind of qualitative reconstruction. Yet these components of the student's learning do not tend to be valued equally. The demands of the workplace can require the student to suppress or even conceal their emotional responses. Moreover, university assessment strategies invariably privilege the 'head' over the 'heart' by rewarding the academic performance rather than the emotional development of the student. Even when students are encouraged to reflect critically on their experiences the rewards inevitably go to those who are most successful in presenting their learning in accordance with academic conventions.

The kind of learning experience required for the formation of an anti-oppressive practitioner, then, is not incremental or inevitable – rather, it is transformative. Indeed, it is learning which does not have a discrete end-point or 'finishing line'. According to Coleman et al. (1999) transformative learning involves a 'constant state of becoming' and this is in direct contrast to competence-based learning.

Power relations

Unfortunately, this tension places everyone involved in work-based learning in an uncomfortable position. At the same time that the student is faced with the highly risky prospect of transformative learning and the sometimes painful personal and emotional changes involved in this learning, the demands of formal course assessment combined with the demands and expectations of the workplace can militate against this and, instead, serve to replicate and perpetuate existing inequalities. The student's vulnerability as a learner coupled with their desire to achieve membership of a professional group with the appropriate identity may be at odds with the demands of becoming an anti-oppressive practitioner. This may be especially so given the demands of formal assessment and the demands and expectations of the workplace.

At the same time as universities and workplaces encourage students to develop reflective artistry, become autonomous learners and subsequently to be anti-oppressive practitioners, they place most emphasis on the student's "...ability to follow rules and procedures," (Wilson, 2013, p.169). In this sense it is clear that there can be dissonance and conflict between the ideals and theories of anti-oppressive practice and the student's experience in an organizational setting (Hughes, 2013; Mackay & Woodward, 2010).

Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) make the point that helping professions typically adopt a 'top down' approach according to which assistance, knowledge and expertise are dispensed from above: from the tutor to the student and from the practitioner to the service user. In this context, earnest attempts to develop anti-oppressive practice can unwittingly lead to further oppression via the 'teacher/student' trap: "instead of moving toward social justice and partnership, the teacher/student trap has a way of forcing social workers to perpetuate and re-inscribe power differentials and social injustice." (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005, p.439).

This might entail what Fook (2000) describes as students remaining emotionally detached from clients (and perhaps also from themselves) and seeking 'correct' solutions. The likelihood of this occurring is increased in the wider context of neoliberalism and the pressures exerted by managerialism in the workplace. In contrast to the importance that Arieli (2013) and Ingram (2013) attach to emotional intelligence, there is often, as Wilson (2013) argues, an 'embargo' on emotion in organizational settings. Morley and Dunstan (2013) argue that neoliberal values erode a professional identity and, in its place, promote procedural actions that serve managerial goals. The subsequent loss of professional autonomy undermines reflexivity and renders the critical manouevring of the novice anti-oppressive practitioner even more risky and less likely to yield the 'correct' solutions that managerial goals prize so highly. As a result, emotional material is likely to be contained or suppressed rather than examined and explored.

In this way the neoliberal managerialist context puts in place the conditions for the 'teacher/student' trap as it privileges the 'expert' in a hierarchical relationship with the service user (Morley & Dunstan, 2013), instead of encouraging and rewarding collaborative

practice. The effects of this include the perpetuation of the power inequalities between the student, their tutors, the mentor/manager in the workplace but also between the student and the service user. Not only is the student subject to the power being wielded above them in the hierarchy, they are also encultured in the practice of wielding that power over those who are located beneath them in that hierarchy. As Prilleltensky (2008) remarks: "not enough attention has been paid to the potential dual identity of being an oppressor and an oppressed person at the same time." (p.118).

Similarly, Mullaly (2002) argues that "the process of becoming an oppressor is hidden from the person." (p.208), highlighting the need for enhanced self-awareness and critical reflection. This is a widely recognized problem in the helping professions: Tew (2006) draws attention to the 'insidious tendency' of professionals to retain status and exert power over others' lives; Proctor (2008) warns that the increasing emphasis on 'professionalisation' serves to protect the expert status of practitioners but also widens the gap between the practitioner and client as well as leading to rule-bound rather than ethical practice.

This gap can be thought of in terms of power inequality but also as one of emotion. If, as Fook (2000) argues, procedural working leads to emotional detachment then this sabotages the transformative learning which lies at the heart of developing anti-oppressive practice. If there is limited emotional challenge then there is scant room for transformative learning or the discomfort which Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) argue is vital. If no shifts are occurring in the student's identity then the only learning taking place is that of skills and managerially-approved procedures: how will the student come to know her/himself? Transformative learning and anti-oppressive practice might therefore be stymied by workplace and professional enculturation:

"If our goal is to enhance wellness and fight oppression, awareness of our actions and those of our students, clients, and community partners is crucial. It is entirely possible that people may be aware of being oppressed, but not of being oppressors. We may wish very strongly, and consciously, to liberate ourselves from social regulations, but we may be buying, less consciously, into oppressive cultural norms." (Prilleltensky, 2008, p. 122)

Self and identity in the organizational context

There are additional dimensions to this 'insidious tendency' to seize power and wield it oppressively. The whole nature of an individual's identity is arguably bound up in, or even produced by, the discourses s/he draws upon and constructs with others through joint interaction. Dallos (1996) argues that the process of two or more people interacting involves a 'joint construction' in which the actions of one participant influence those of the other, and so on in a reciprocal and ongoing series of exchanges. Furthermore, the joint construction is composed of interpretations and the extraction of certain meanings by each participant – which serves to make social interactions both complicated and unpredictable. Miell and Croghan (1996) make the point that social relationships are highly complex on a number of levels: they are dynamic, shifting things governed by wider social relations and which change over time. This relies heavily on: "…the idea that the meanings which constitute a person's experience of the world emerge from their interactions with their social world. They are not fixed but are always open to interpretation and renegotiation." (Miell & Croghan, 1996, p. 310).

This serves to emphasize a number of key points worth exploring further. Firstly, social interactions involve ongoing negotiations between participants. These negotiations involve mutual definitions of who one individual is in relation to another, their respective roles in a given situation, the appropriateness of behaviors, and so forth. Secondly, since social interactions are emergent, constructive and dynamic (i.e. 'not fixed'), change over time is a defining characteristic. There are other issues which are to some extent implicit in the first two points: the negotiated and changing roles, accounts of previous interactions, emotional responses and so on necessarily alter as individuals exit one social context and enter another; and the renegotiation of social interactions will, from time to time, involve conflict between participants as the needs and wishes of one individual are reconciled with those of another.

Approaches that stress the socially determined aspects of the self (e.g. Burkitt, 2008; Gergen and Davis, 1985; Harré, 1998) point to ways in which the self is fluid and contingent upon its social context. Burkitt (2008), Gergen and Davis (1985) and Harré (1998), see the self as being constructed on the basis of social discourses arising from various social contexts (the self is therefore viewed as multiple and reconstructive). As Maccoby (1980) argues,

possessing a sense of self is not a question of absence or presence, but more of an evolution of complexity, something that develops incrementally (this fits neatly with Coleman et al.'s, [1999], notion of transformative learning being a 'constant state of becoming').

Following on from this, it is arguably not just the social interactions that occur in the workplace which can shape an individual's self and identity, but also the discourse that supports and gives meaning to such interactions. Davies and Harré's (1990) concept of 'positioning' moves from the fixed notion of 'role' that abounds in the psychology literature and, instead, promotes a more fluid account of the self. From this perspective the self is constructed from discourse which includes ready-made 'slots' (i.e. subject positions) which we can adopt. Indeed, we may be invited, encouraged or even coerced into adopting a subject position. An example commonly found in a work placement scenario would be a formal role descriptor prepared by the organization, the university, the relevant professional body, or all of these and, indeed, other parties that could attempt to ascribe a role for the student. Students might well be encouraged – even tacitly – to passively accept and comply with this ascribed subject position.

Nevertheless, positioning theory is based largely on the assumption that the individual possesses some agency and by using available discourses s/he may attempt to adapt or resist the position they are invited to adopt. As subjects we are positioned by others but also seek to position ourselves within discourse. In this way, our identities are constructed using the available cultural and social discourse and yet individuals also negotiate their positions by manipulating discourse: the individual is simultaneously engaging in and constructing the discourse.

This has clear relevance to the student on placement because these 'subject positions' have implications for power relations as discourse presents possibilities for, and places restrictions on, an individual's actions. One feature of these positioning processes (Davies & Harré, 1990) is that dominant groups are often perceived as having a more 'legitimate voice' and therefore find themselves more 'entitled' to speak and to be heard. When the discourse of the workplace is viewed as a joint construction produced by its participants, we can see that the student is likely to be positioned as a 'junior partner' in this endeavor, with diminished 'entitlement' to speak or be heard. As a result of this, their capacity to adapt or resist the

discourse is likely to be limited. It could be argued that the entire process of undertaking a work-based learning placement can have the effect of limiting the student's agency in this regard, despite commonly espoused aims to empower the student and cultivate her/him as an anti-oppressive practitioner with the reflexivity and critical consciousness that this implies.

Narrative processes

Adopting this discursive perspective reveals the key role played by narrative processes in constructing individual identity and making sense of social actions. The use of narrative may be a means to understand and talk about people's lived experience given that it starts from the assumption that narrative is a key technique used by individuals for processing the basic elements of their experience, such as time, process, and change (Squire, Andrews & Tsamboukou, 2008). It can enable us to explore accounts of what happened to specific groups of people in particular circumstances with particular consequences that can be at once so common and so powerful.

Narrative inquiry can assist in exploring how stories help people make sense of the world, while also studying how people make sense of stories. It is these stories that construct identity for individuals and groups. Exploring narrative can enable us to:

"see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change. By focusing on narrative, we are able to investigate, not just how stories are structured and the ways in which they work, but also who produces them and by what means, the mechanisms by which they are consumed, and how narratives are silenced, contested or accepted." (Squire et al., 2008, p.4).

Narrative processes may therefore be utilized as a mode of resistance to existing structures of power. This may involve the autobiographical exploration of subject positions: how individuals perceive their own subjectivity within the contexts of their lives and within the conditions of their own lived, subjective place within power relations. Morley (2004, 2008) and Fook and Askeland (2007) suggest that such a critical questioning can offer the transformative capacity to improve practice and facilitate social change by rejecting internal beliefs and the assumptions that hold them in place.

It seems clear, however, that students undertaking work-based learning often find themselves in harsh and hostile organizational cultures where critical reflection has been marginalized as

a professional activity, and yet where we demand it as a key part of students' professional development. How, then, can we proceed? In such a context, Morley (2008) suggests that a useful approach may be the process of deconstruction and interrogation of the student's own and service users' subject positions. This facilitates empowering and emancipatory possibilities and may serve as a vehicle through which to resist domination. In this way practitioners can strive to ensure that their interventions are experienced by service users in an empowering and anti-oppressive manner, while dominant power structures are challenged and changed at an interpersonal level. Morley (2008) argues that this is empowering for students and constructs new subject positions in which they are not powerless.

According to this view, empowerment can be brought about through collaborative working with service users and exploration of their narratives, particularly in relation to uncovering why some subject positions are taken for granted and not contested thereby ensuring that some groups and some identities are 'powerless'. For the student on placement, critically interrogating her/his own personal and professional narratives can cultivate an understanding of how their own identity and those of service users have been shaped by the dominant ideologies and 'communities of practice'.

To embark upon this, students need to move away from viewing power as a commodity and identity as a fixed property of the individual. It is then possible to resist, challenge and change structurally produced power relations at an interpersonal level (Morley, 2008). Through the concept of positioning the student can focus on the particularities of relations in a social setting. A useful and valid starting point is an interrogation of the student's own subject positioning and a shift in the notion that the 'role' is fixed. This can enable a more fluid account of the self and one that recognizes the self as constructed in and through discourse (Harré, 1998) thereby providing positions to adapt, adopt or to challenge. Dominant discourses and the figures whom they serve can then be identified and a space opened up in which to resist them.

Bay and Macfarlane (2011), like Morley (2008), are concerned with how to prepare practitioners (students) to facilitate social change, to become anti-oppressive practitioners in this regressive, hostile and conservative climate. They see transformative learning as a facilitative aid to this in that once students have recognized their 'frames of reference' and used their imagination to redefine problems from a different perspective they can then apply

this to the question of how meaning is created and how stories are told. In so doing, they can uncover the ways in which their identities as professionals (and those of their service users) are constructed within available cultural and social discourses. Simultaneously, they can negotiate their positions (and their service users') by manipulating those discourses. As noted earlier, through these positioning processes (Davies & Harré, 1990) dominant groups are frequently perceived as having a more 'legitimate voice'. Morley's (2008) approach suggests that transformative learning is produced by the act of questioning such dominant voices and discourses. Subject positions can be thereby rewritten in more enabling terms and students are not then powerless. In negotiating meaning rather than passively accepting social realities defined by others, empowering possibilities for students as anti-oppressive practitioners are opened up and previously concealed structures of domination and power relations are revealed and exposed for wider critique and contestation.

Lave and Wenger (1991) view this as a relational process where the learning is about the individual's active engagement within the community of practice. It is this which facilitates their move from the periphery to the core of the community. In so doing, in "being active participants in the practices of social communities" they construct "identities in relation to these communities" (p. 4). Linehan and McCarthy (2000) suggest that such a focus on a conceptualization of identity within a community of practice shifts the concern from the product (the student equipped to perform) to the process (the student 'becoming' a particular type of learner). This further facilitates a recognition of the diverse settings and experiences that students may have to negotiate and an acknowledgement of the multiplicity and diversity of identity. As Wenger (1998) suggests, identity is a "constant becoming" (p.154).

Conclusion

Whilst work-based learning is correctly held to be a valuable teaching and learning strategy in developing anti-oppressive practitioners and promoting effective diversity interventions, there are clear dangers associated with it. Chief among these are: the 'teacher/student' trap (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005) and the ease with which existing power inequalities are replicated rather than challenged; and the dissonant environment which places competing and contradictory demands on the student. In addition, identity is located at the heart of the transformative learning experience and this is deeply problematic in itself because the

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psychological processes involved in self and identity are subject to ongoing debate. If there is a lack of agreement on the nature of the self or how identity is formed (and reformed) then it is difficult to make any convincing claims that we can control the learning we wish to see students achieve. The very thing work-based learning is intended to bring about – a transformed identity – remains highly elusive.

Paradoxically, this is the key strength of work-based learning. By placing the student in such an ambiguous, fluid, and sometimes hostile environment, it is possible for them to experience the discomfort that Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) contend is necessary for the desired learning to take place. In this sense, the notion of achieving a 'transformed identity' needs to be replaced with that of a 'constant state of becoming' (Coleman et al., 1999). Whilst 'knowing oneself' is a laudable aim and one which underpins anti-oppressive practice (Dominelli, 2002), it is an endeavour that does not end with the student's graduation. If graduation itself can be viewed as an exercise in subject positioning, it forms part of a wider narrative project that the student/graduate must be supported through in order to help others to find and articulate their own voices in an effort to challenge dominant and oppressive narratives.

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