



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

# PUTTING MEANING INTO WORKPLACE LEARNING

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Worker development is a term used here to describe educational efforts undertaken to promote the holistic lifelong learning of workers and managers, including their social and personal development. Emerging from training and development programs, this burgeoning area of adult education has been marked by contestation, contradiction, competition, confused allegiances, and conflicting desires. Three groups of educators are involved: (1) trainers and program developers within work organizations such as government or business and industry; (2) external providers to organizations of development programs, such as consulting firms or colleges; and (3) teachers who prepare educators for workplace practice. Educators collide with employers and other interest groups to assert control of the discourses and activities of worker development education. Fundamental conflicts in ideology persist, and educators are often pressured to reconcile radically different goals with little time and scarce resources. Despite a proliferation of methods and grand visions espoused for worker development, red flags have been raised by those struggling with the consequences of these visions as they play out in the political spaces of workplace organizations.

Some claim worker development programs simply do not work. Congor (1996) observes that they materialize as short-lived adventure climbs in the wild, pastoral bonding retreats, motivation speakers in hot hotel rooms, or elaborate simulations. These cost much but create little real change. Some are appalled at the extent to which human resource developers invade people's intimate lives. Workers' personal visions, emotions, and now their spirituality are harnessed as organizational property—capital assets “managed” to increase competitive edge (Fenwick and Lange, 1998). Naturally both workers and managers are often suspicious, even resistant to schemes to “develop” and “empower” them.

The core problem, I am convinced, is that the conceptual frameworks that inform thinking and practice in workplace learning and development are limited. One is the predominant human resource development (HRD) framework, which constructs workers as knowable objects, defined by productivity. As Townley (1994) shows, the HRD model completely fails to acknowledge multiple power dynamics and identity struggles rumbling underneath its program “solutions” to its perception of human deficiencies. A second problem is the persistent “humanistic” psychological framework that, despite talk of “systems theory” in the workplace, understands learning and development as essentially an individual process. This model spawns a wide range of assessment and training practices targeting the minds of individual workers, with little recognition of the complexities of community and patterns of participation that weave workers and situation together.

I believe meaningful work and learning are inseparable and unfold in communities whose creativity is directed towards contributing to the general “good”—defined in a space honoring multiple voices. People grow in their work by becoming conscious participants in caring relationships. Through mutual transformation we develop ethical awareness of our responsibilities and stewardship in a work community, creating together sustainable conditions that nourish one other. This is akin to Hart's (1992) vision of “sustenance work” or “production/reproduction for life” not profit, or Fox's (1994) call for new kinds of work developing sustainable energy, minds, agriculture, and spirits. A language of hope and possibility for a future where such communities thrive needs to replace the dominant language of control, human resources management, and top-down developmental practices.

Towards this end, this chapter presents three alternate theoretical frameworks which, while not new, suggest approaches for educators wishing to support workers' dignity, growth, and meaningful participation in ethical work communities. The three frames are, loosely termed, self and identity, situated learning and development, and critical cultural analysis. Each provides ways to recognize and name perplexing phenomena encountered in worker development, while opening possibilities that could transform our vocational calling as educators.

## Problems with Existing Conceptual Frames

Traditionally, workplace learning has been approached through assumptions of training workers to be more productive and to build more effective (more profitable) organizations. In the past ten years the issues have centered on change, as it intersects with a continuing chase for “quality” (increasingly defined as whatever the consumer wants or can be induced to want), and, of course, profit. This month's restructuring requires last month's managers and front-line workers to be retooled. The worker development project, simply put, is to qualify people for the latest organizational requirements. Key questions revolve around how best to plan and deliver training to make people learn more and learn faster, with less “waste.”

Workplace educators face superhuman expectations and often despair of being able to achieve the impossible. They are given intimidating wish lists defining the

desirable worker by organizations equating complex talents and characteristics with trainable "skills" (that is, see Champy, 1995): problem solving, communication and relational abilities, risk-taking, critical reflectivity, visioning, creativity, innovativeness, adaptability, systems thinking, "emotional intelligence" and, of course, ability to learn. Naturally little time is allowed for actual educational activity, as workers' hours away from the in-basket are assiduously guarded and counted. There seems to be little organizational patience for processes that foster rich human characteristics, which usually develop in unpredictable ways over years of varied experiences and intensive practice (Congor, 1996). Meanwhile educators must justify their activities (if they want to keep their jobs) in absurdly short-term deliverables: human change measured as "value-added" performance job outcomes.

At the same time, educators struggle to get people to actually use what they've supposedly learned. This gets framed as a "transfer" problem, as if developmental learning is an iron-on decal. Educators know lessons learned in a classroom do not apply easily back in the office, but they also do not usually have NASA's budget to create real-life simulations. They are stuck trying to sell-and-tell, which may explain the extraordinary loyalty to one-shot workshops of dubious developmental value.

The bottom line is educators' practice is framed by competitive relations of a marketplace economy. Therefore, they must reconcile the uncommodifiable process of learning to a commodity-oriented environment and align their services to fit a client-provider-sales relation of exchange. Curriculum becomes product, molded by fickle consumer desire, "positioned" against competitors, and driven by productivity-for-profit objectives. Many educators struggle with ideology, torn between this economic frame and their allegiances to individual learners fighting for dignity and quality of work life within the machinery of reengineering (Cunningham, 1993).

Workers respond to educational opportunities with varying enthusiasm. Some discount training as a waste of time—irrelevant to their biggest work problems, simplistic and theoretical, or too far removed from opportunities to apply the new information. Some are given mentors or sent to training sessions against their will, and resent HR staffs telling them how to change. Some are embittered by organizational ultimatums about what knowledge currently counts most, feeling their own knowledge is not valued or used (Rifkin, 1995). Many are exhausted by dehumanizing conditions left in the wake of "smart-sized" workplaces: unrelenting overload, intensity and urgency, insecurity and territorial wars, and demands to trade their souls, minds, and hearts for uncertain organizational returns (Fox, 1994). It is no wonder that workplace educators answer, "What's your biggest issue?" in one word—"Motivation!"

Meanwhile worker cynicism flourishes in the contradictions and paradoxes abounding among the new ideals of continuous learning throughout the organization. The ideals of worker empowerment, reflection, process, and collaboration often conflict with organizational norms of authoritarian management, bias towards activity and measurable performance, and competitive "competency traps" (Shaw and Perkins, 1991). Open dialogue is often subverted by contradictory meanings and interests on teams (Brooks, 1995). Workers are exhorted to take risks and value mistakes while measured by quality standards of "zero mistakes" (Champy, 1995).

Many workers are left numb, empty, useless, even violated by their jobs (Hart, 1993; Saul, 1995; Rifkin, 1995). Some grieve lost identities based on competence and experience no longer valued and needed by the organization; lost routines and knowledge that structured their lives but no longer exists; and lost relationships, as the organization cuts staff (Fox, 1994). Some refuse the productivity press to redefine their lives, seeking greater congruence between their work and values of connection, balance, creativity, and spirituality (Fenwick and Lange, 1998). Some drop out of "jobs" altogether in search of more meaningful, life-giving work (Brook, 1997; Dominguez and Robin, 1992).

Alongside these tensions and dilemmas of worker development is a growing feeling voiced by many educators I know at the University of Alberta: something is fundamentally wrong with trying to "manage" a colleague's development. Some believe that systemic organizational problems become framed as personnel issues, then recast as "training and development" problems—which seem inordinately sensitive to each new change panic gripping the business best-seller market. Critical reflection appears to be mainly for workers, not necessarily the organization. And many educators say they too are searching for connectiveness, conscious participation, creative passion, and ways to serve others through their work—energies that are restless alongside objectives of "organizational success," "competitive edge," and "expanding wealth." As I write this I am engaged in a study of women entrepreneurs across Canada, many of whom are educators who left large organizations over fundamental philosophical or ethical conflicts, and who now say they are attempting to craft new ways to integrate work, family, personal development, and financial necessity.

Many have argued eloquently (Collins, 1991; Cunningham, 1993; Hart, 1992, 1993; Noble, 1990; Schied, 1995; West, 1998) that, as general notions of "lifelong learning" become increasingly colonized by the category "workplace learning," an ideology merging education, profit, and human productivity threatens to dominate adult education and seriously compromise its deep democratic ideals. This ideology is naturalizing and mobilizing consent for core assumptions that view human capacity as capital resources, learning as commodity, and providers as market competitors. Important ethical issues and oppositional voices become blurred and irrelevant as they are swallowed by the governing market logic.

These practical and conceptual issues in worker development call for more nuanced theoretical frames. In the next section, I outline three alternative frames that may help us better understand and respond to these issues.

## Towards New Conceptual Frames of Worker Development

Threaded through this litany of problems are three main struggles confronting educators who want to help workers thrive and serve a vocational community. First are workers' struggles to find personal meaning and purpose in jobs where they seem increasingly to experience anxiety, stress, sadness, and despair. These are fundamental issues of identity related to work and the human quest to understand and unfold self.

I have summarized here varying perspectives on "self" derived from autobiographic, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic literature.

Second are educators' struggles to help people learn what they need to be successful on the job, in relevant and authentic ways. Education does not "transfer" or is dismissed by workers as simplistic, theoretical, or out of touch with real-world dilemmas. Or, managers impatient to get productive workers force short-term training and accountability measures that do not fit the deep change processes that workplace educators try to facilitate. This is a question of how people actually learn to participate meaningfully and productively in ever-changing situations. Throughout the 1990s, theories combining consciousness, place, culture, and indeterminacy have been developed to address this very issue. These "situative" learning theories encourage us to relinquish traditional divisions between human minds, actions, and environments, and instead appreciate how elements in a system construct change together. A relatively brief glimpse of this strand is offered here, focusing especially on a view of learning called "situated cognition."

Third are educators' struggles with conflict or resistance among workers and managers. It can involve suspicion, fighting for control, exasperation with apparent contradictions, or resistance to teamwork, mutual trust, and open dialogue. These conflicts are often framed as "resistance to change." They can quickly undermine learning efforts, growth, and effective participation towards building a better work community. Pulsing through these conflicts are power and culture issues. Cultural studies provides concepts and questions that help illuminate dilemmas of cultural politics, language, and difference. Many fields of critical cultural studies, including feminism, anti-racism, and post-colonialism, start from the assumption that politics are central to understand human activity, identity, and meaning. Some broad dimensions raised among these fields are presented here in the form of a method of analysis. The hope is that if educators better understand the influences and responses between workplace culture and the paths of human development comprising it, they can better conceptualize a role for themselves as cultural workers. Each frame is summarized in an introductory way. The rich arguments and fine distinctions omitted for space considerations are readily available in the sources referenced.

### Perspectives on Self and Identity

Recently there has been renewed interest and ground-breaking work towards understanding self and identity in fields beyond developmental psychology, including cultural anthropology (Cohen, 1994), curriculum theory (Pinar, 1994; Grumet, 1992), many fields concerned with politics of identity (including feminism, cultural studies, and so on), as well as adult education (Edwards and Usher, 1996; West, 1996). Most concede that adults' continual struggles to understand and express a self are integrally woven with their impulse to learn and develop. In today's workplaces of whirling change, Giddens's (1991) argument about self and anxiety is especially relevant. He claims the self's problem is maintaining its security in a culture that threatens referent points basic to its existence. But the self has the power of self-reflection, which is its key to self-sustenance (Giddens, 1991).

My own study of women's workplace learning suggests that questions of self underlie women's development through their work experiences. Struggles of identity affected their daily work choices, the levels of energy and creativity with which they participated, the relationships they cultivated, and the knowledge and values they claimed to have developed (Fenwick, 1998). Many insisted their most valued workplace learning was coming to name, appreciate, and recover the power of their "authentic self." They talked of learning to trust the inner voice of this self, of breaking free of workplace structures that repressed this self, and above all learning how to compose a coherent, strong self amidst the chaotic environments of workplaces.

Some argue that belief in a single self is restrictive. The humanist notion of "the self" is, in the poststructuralist worldview, entirely constructed in language. Self cannot be "fixed" but slides, as meaning changes from one moment in a particular community to another. Usher (1995) argues that people should let go of their fixation on a "central" definable self, and celebrate the shifting layers of their multiple selves. Such a view opens identity choices and playful experimentation for those who feel oppressed by the limited, conventional options defining self in the workplace according to hierarchies, competencies, and job descriptions. For those mourning the loss of an "identity" rooted in a particular position or knowledge that the organization has discarded, this view opens a way to think about self as fluid, creatively reinventing itself to adapt to life's changes. Instead of feeling helplessly buffeted by change, people can learn how their own interpretations of experience emanate from a self which itself is "a constantly changing reflexive project, constructed and manifested through images, consumption choices, and lifestyles" (Edwards and Usher, 1996, p. 223). Answers to the questions, "Who am I and what is my purpose?" are not ultimate truths waiting to be revealed, but are continually emerging as we work through one situation after another.

Some deplore this celebration of the self's dissolution as tantamount to recommending mass psychosis. Flax (1990) insists that the floating self view ignores the basic cohesion allowing us to experience fragmentation without dissolving completely, losing all boundaries between self and everything else. West (1996) concurs, writing that "a dynamic struggle for selfhood—for some coherence, integrity, authenticity, inner security, and integration . . . may be a survival imperative" (p. 190). West (1996) develops workplace programs encouraging people to create, through autobiographical stories mirrored and supported by rich relationships, a coherent sense of self which can survive change.

From a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, learning is our daily strategies of crafting the meaning of self in the world (Britzman, 1998). Our lives are a series of psychic events that we often repress: anxieties and fears, disruptions and mistakes, vicissitudes of love and hate. The ego invokes multiple defenses against threats to itself presented by change, new beliefs, or insights into its own weaknesses. Development is understood as working through the conflicts of all these psychic events and gradually coming to tolerate the self and its desires.

Here is a way to understand, honor, and respond to workers' anxieties, resistance, cynicism, and sadness. According to the psychoanalytic view, the unconscious can-

not be known directly but its workings interfere with our ordinary perceptions of experience. Despite our habits of ignoring inner conflicts, the unconscious offers us sudden awareness now and then of difficult truths about ourselves. These insights come through paradoxes and contradictions in our daily experiences, certain uncanny breaches between our acts, thoughts, dreams, waking, wishes, and responsibility. Truths are revealed in these breaches, what Britzman (1998) calls our "lost subjects": those parts of our selves that we resist, then try to reclaim and want to explore, but are afraid to. For the self to be more than a prisoner of its own narcissism, it must "bother itself," notice the slips and discontinuities, and overcome the ego's resistances to learn from them.

These writings about self suggest that inquiry and practice in worker development must listen closely to the complexities of individual human lives and the identities being worked out through people's joint experiences in work activity and communities. People long for authentic selfhood and personal meaning integrated into their work. Different perspectives suggest different educational approaches. Britzman's (1998) psychoanalytic view calls for education that helps people come to know and value their self's dilemmas as elegant problems to be worked through. Autobiographical views (Slattery, 1995; Pinar, 1994; Grumet, 1992) argue that education must center on learner's lives and building relationships through shared experiences. Educators help individuals recover and reconceptualize their own histories and futures. Autobiographical stories, shared in community, make meaning from the fragments of perplexing experience, broken communities and frightening insecurities that create much worker distress, despair, and resistance. Worker development programs shift from urgent upskilling to helping people articulate questions of emerging self and supporting a creative journey through the inevitable conflicts therein: What is the "I" which has meaning in this work? Who are the lost "I's"? What struggles am I working through this moment? What is my passion here, and what can be my contribution in this community?

### Perspectives on Situated Learning and Development

The context of learning has become a central issue for theorists of adult learning, especially those concerned with worker development and everyday experience. Most agree with Jarvis's (1987) assertion that adult learning does not occur in splendid isolation, but views vary widely about the way human beings and their environments interact and how change emerges from this interaction.

Worker development programs built on the "acquisition and transfer" model assume that people internalize certain principles in a dose of educational activity delivered in one context (like a classroom or on an adventure retreat), then apply these later in another context, like an everyday workplace situation of problem solving or communication. This model presumes that knowledge is like a substantive property, mental structures of meaning that people acquire or create through training or reflection on experience, then can represent or generalize to new contexts. Even constructivist views of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991; Boud and Miller, 1996; Schön, 1983) consider learning and doing as separable processes.

Individuals are viewed as essentially separate from each other and from the tools and activity in which they are involved. Lave and Wenger (1991) point out that context is frequently portrayed as a container into which individuals are dropped. The context affects the person but the person is viewed as an agent of knowing with his or her own cognitive systems, which are fundamentally distinct from other systems of the environment.

An alternate view is proposed by the situative perspective (Brown, Collins, and Duguid, 1989; Rogoff, 1990; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Situated cognition maintains that learning is rooted in the situation in which a person participates, not as a collection of concepts in a person's head. Knowing and learning are defined as engaging in changing processes of human activity in a particular system. In other words, knowing is not a substance but a process of participation in interaction with systems. A system is not containable nor clearly separated from its individual actors, but is a flow of energy, action, and relationships, including the work and learning of its participants.

Lave and Wenger (1991) maintain that people's knowledge in a particular situation is intimately entwined with the particular tools, the particular community, and the particular activity of that situation. The individual participates in the system by interacting with the community (with its history, assumptions and cultural values, rules, and patterns of relationship), the tools at hand (including objects, technology, languages, and images), and the moment's activity (involving particular objectives, norms, and practical challenges). Knowledge emerges from these elements interacting. Thus knowing is interminably inventive and entwined with doing. As Wilson (1993) argues, adults do not learn from experience, they learn in it. He writes, "If we are to learn, we must become embedded in the culture in which the knowing and learning have meaning: conceptual frameworks cannot be meaningfully removed from their settings or practitioners" (p. 77). This means that training in a classroom only helps develop learners' ability to do training better. A worksite is a different context that evokes different knowings through very different demands of participation. What is learned in one site is not "portable," but is transformed and reinvented when applied to the tasks, interactions, and community dynamics of another.

The situative view addresses assessment in ways perhaps more authentic for workplace requirements than measurements based on notions of "intellectual capital" or "portable skills" assessing against competencies imposed externally. Knowledge is not judged by what is "true" and "false," or what is "erroneous," but by what is relevant, what is worth knowing and doing, what is convenient for whom, and what to do next in this particular situation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The emphasis is on improving one's ability to participate meaningfully, both personally and socially, in particular practices of particular systems.

Further, situative views focus not on conceptual knowledge but on embodied knowledge which is fundamental in worker development of relational skills, technical skills, cultural know-how within the organization, and aptitude for anticipation and solving the problems of that organization. Pile and Thrift (1995) remind us what many workers already sense: embodied knowledge is beyond consciousness and worked out in "joint action" with others, through shared understandings of what is real, what

is privilege, what is problem, and what is moral. Understanding is created within conduct itself, which flows ceaselessly, is adaptable but not often deliberately intentional, and is always future-oriented. Clandinin and Connelly (1991) link this situative perspective with development of self-understanding in their concept of personal, practical knowledge. This views people's development in their work as improvisation that cannot be considered separately from a sense of self, intuition, intention, body, relationship, history, values, and perception of present context.

Writers exploring enactivism (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, 1991; Varela, 1995) offer useful theoretical tools to explain how individual change is gradual, entwined with the people around them, and immersed in the changing systems of the organization. Enactivists describe knowledge as the co-emergence of a person and his or her world. An individual "lays down a path while walking" (Varela, 1995). Change occurs from emerging systems affected by the intentional tinkering of one with the other. Cognition and evolution interact in spontaneous, adaptable, and unpredictable ways that change both systems, resulting in "a continuous enlargement of the space of the possible" (Sumara and Davis, 1997, p. 303). In other words, we participate together in what becomes an increasingly complex system. New unpredictable possibilities for thought and action appear continually in the process of inventing the activity, and old choices gradually become inviable in the unfolding system dynamics. Constant change means nothing continues to exist in its present form. Therefore, understanding form and function of particular elements, such as the development of an individual worker, are less important than tracing and supporting the exchanges of energy.

Because situated views of development refuse to separate learning, activity, and context, they offer a leap out of the workplace educator's interminable dilemma of how to keep redeveloping workers in response to organizational needs. The educator's role is not to develop individuals, but to help them participate meaningfully in the practices they choose to enter (Lave and Wenger, 1991). What constitutes meaningful action for a particular individual in a given context? How is the development of knowledge constrained by or created by the intersection of several existing practices in a particular workspace? Each worker develops, from this particular nexus of context, strategy, and interpersonal encounters, strategies that work for the moment. The moment is shaped by particular social, cultural, and historical patterns that affect its meaning in a particular space among particular actors. The educator's role might be, first, a communicator: assisting participants to name what is unfolding around them and inside them, to continually rename these changing nuances, and to unlock the tenacious grasp of old categories, restrictive or destructive language that strangles emerging possibilities. Second, the educator as storyteller traces and meaningfully records the interactions of the actors and objects in the expanding spaces. Third, the educator as interpreter helps all make community sense of the patterns emerging among these complex systems, and understand their own involvements in patterns or systems that don't fit new situations. Naturally, educators must be clear about their own entanglement and interests in the emerging systems of thought and action.

For situated theorists, Greeno (1997) explains, improved participation results partly from becoming more attuned to constraints and affordances of different real work

situations. When the learner attends to how specific properties and relations influence possibilities for acting in one situation, the learner can more easily transform that activity through interaction with other systems and thus develop ability to participate meaningfully and consciously in a wider range of situations. This focus on participation shifts educators out of the worker-in-deficit model, which imposes urgent, unrealistic expectations, unworkable conditions, and the interminable "how to transfer" problem. Situated perspectives turn us towards helping workers really see and listen to what they encounter in the contradictory situations and communities in which they participate.

### Perspectives on Critical Cultural Analysis

Any work organization is a complex site of competing cultures around which the organization strives to establish its own overriding culture and produce citizens who enact this culture. To understand human development within that culture we must, from a critical cultural perspective, analyze the structures of dominance that express or govern the workplace's social relationships, its communication forms and its cultural practices. Writers in critical cultural pedagogy (Giroux, 1992; Giroux and McLaren, 1994; Kellner, 1995) claim that when we learn to name the mechanisms of cultural power we can find ways to resist them. We open unexpected, unimagined, uninvited possibilities for considering work, life, and development. The problem with some situated views and systems-theory perspectives is that they ignore inevitable power relations circulating in human cultural systems. In work organizations driven by the bottom lines of a global marketplace, a purely-applied systems view free of pesky historical, political, cultural, and gender concerns makes workers vulnerable to those intent on sustaining the discourses and practices that ensure their own power. Thus, critical cultural analysis is worth exploring as a conceptual framework opening new understandings about worker and workplace development. Power is centered as a core issue.

Power, as Foucault kept reminding us, is not necessarily a negative dominating force. Critique helps show the moment-to-moment interplay of power and dispels the notion that "normal" or irrevocable huge forces determine work life and development. Critical cultural studies offer tools for tracing these complex power relations and their consequences. The field is wide and certainly not monolithic, embracing such areas as gender issues, ideology and discourse analysis, media analysis, postcolonialism and subaltern studies, queer theory, race and identity, and technoculture theory. Obviously conflicting perspectives and emphases are involved. For the purpose of this brief section, no distinction will be made among these perspectives, although their heterogeneity should remain understood.

I suggest educators can apply these insights to better understand beliefs competing in workplace culture, and analyze how some ideologies mobilize sentiment, affection, and belief to induce consent for certain dominant assumptions about work life and values. This critical cultural analysis may open new clarity for those contradictions, identity struggles, and patterns of dominance and resistance that can threaten workers' liberty and dignity, and tear apart work communities in destructive conflict. When the dominant rhetoric is examined closely to see how it creates converts and shapes action, alternatives can be imagined and enacted by educators.

Determining a single site like "workplace culture" is somewhat misleading. Any space or group one chooses to examine is inevitably torn with contesting "groups" and interacting cultural flows. A "site" could be a group of workers circumscribed by a particular geographic or temporal space. It could be an organization or set of activities which organize people's work around particular purposes. One could consider subgroups belonging to such an organization or, alternatively, examine a piece of workplace culture such as a program, policy, guru, a trend, or practice as the site of a particular ideology and its adherents related to work or workplace education.

Kellner (1995) reminds us that cultural analysis must be cautious and observe the following guidelines. First, the cultural text or site under scrutiny must be situated in its historical context and read within the actual contemporary sociopolitical struggles in which it unfolds. For example, to critically examine a popular phenomenon like the concept "learning organization," one should look at contextual factors such as the economic struggles, changing labor relations, and globalized competition giving rise to general anxiety and Total Quality Management, blended with the entrenchment of the New Right and the growing societal focus on recovering family and community (Fenwick, 1997). Second, Kellner cautions analysts not to suppose a monolithic "dominant ideology" which is inherently manipulative or evil, and to remember that people are not a mass of passive, homogeneous, non-critical victims of a dominant ideology.

For tools of analysis I have selected five dimensions from critical cultural studies, posed as questions for educators interested in exploring how a site of work culture is practiced and made, and how it leads different groups to struggle for cultural domination. To select these five dimensions, I began with Kellner's questions (1995), then selected issues of concern that emerge frequently across different branches of cultural studies and that appear useful to understand power in workplace cultures. These are not intended to essentialize the field, elide differences, or to suggest the importance of one dimension over any others.

***In a Workplace Culture, What Discourses Are Most Visible and Accorded Most Authority by Different Groups in This Site?*** Within these discourses, examine the semiotics (the signs, codes, and texts) and unwind the relationship between these semiotics and the cultural rules. Attend especially to those "resonant images" that stick in the mind or draw the biggest audience, and that seem to have greatest leverage in mobilizing thought and behavior in a particular time and place. Which discourses are accorded the most official power (and thus leverage the greatest resources), and which group controls these powerful discourses? Young (1990) urges us to examine the historical forces and mythologies that have shaped discourses, including the experiences and contributions of both "winners" and "losers," as these are defined by the discourse. Finally, examine the contradictions between various discourses afoot in the organization.

In the North American workplace, discourses of human performance technology, "multiskilling" and "knowledge capital," have been consolidated in the hands of human resource personnel as management tools. Townley (1994) deconstructs how these HRD discourses distort learning and work life, and catalyze workers' resistance in their attempts to discipline and regulate the worker-subject as a "resource." The organization's

shortcomings become contained in the bodies of the workers. Their supposed knowledge and skill deficiencies deflect attention away from ideological and structural contradictions embedded in coexisting discourses: worker empowerment with authoritarian imposition of reengineering; rosy ideals of warm, trusting work community with dark realities of downsizing; internal competition to keep jobs with the mandate to collaborate in teams; and educational commitment to support and nourish people with organizational concerns for subverting people to its competitive advantage.

***What Representations of People within the Cultural Texts Are Prominent in This Site?*** What dualisms have created labels that depersonalize human beings? Identify the identity categories, looking at who is represented as Other to the "norm," and how these representations of Other contain, define, and control behavior and relations, explain historical patterns, and position authority and resistance.

For example, in many worker development initiatives, full-time, knowledge-reliant workers committed to continuous learning—the technocrat, professional, managerial elite—are often represented as the norm. The deviant Other is defined chiefly by lack of willingness or capability to change or to learn what the organization specifies. "Others" are also categorized as part-time, contract, semi-skilled, or unskilled labor—all groups growing rapidly in numbers. Workplace "diversity" efforts have also categorized Others as minority groups requiring special management (Dubrin, 1998). Dualisms such as man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, skilled/unskilled, manager/worker, and formal education/informal learning continue to create patterns of exclusion and determine distribution of authority and resources. These categories maintain hierarchies, stereotype norms and expectations, legitimate forces that repress certain groups, and generally limit possibilities for identity.

***What Borders Are Understood to Define Territories in This Site?*** What identity is constructed for people within certain borders in this workplace, what are its markings, and what consequences ensue for those who transgress? Who are the Others viewed as "outside" and who the "immigrants"? Perhaps the diaspora space, analyzed by writers like Chow (1993), should also be addressed in studying cultural sites related to work. Discern tensions created by the resulting "ethnic mixes" and flows of culture in this site. Where are "border crossings" occurring? What "blurring" of boundaries are becoming evident?

The organization's boundaries control workplace culture. Identity, for example, is bounded by the organization's gaze: the roles it requires people to perform at a particular moment. Learning is considered bounded by the organization's place, time, and purposes: HRD seems not to consider that individuals develop as meaningful participants in many communities of which the work organization is only a small slice. Finally, the work organization draws thick boundaries around itself and its own survival. People are often considered expendable to meet its insatiable needs for higher productivity and expansion.

However, people resist these demarcations by leaving their "jobs" to craft new ways of integrating working and living. Blurrings of boundaries are evident as growing

numbers of self-employed or temporary workers refusing to anchor their loyalties to one employer move in and out of various organizations. Educators might ask how to make sense of and respond meaningfully to these new energies and border-crossings.

**What Pieces of Culture Have Interest and Meaning for Particular Groups in This Site?** Bourdieu (1977) shows how to analyze the cultural capital desired by different groups (ability to “read” and thus appreciate a particular piece of culture). Determine what cultural codes are required to understand and appreciate this cultural capital. Ask what cultural capital in a workplace is accorded dominant status, what values are inherent, and which group supports them.

Ethics of competition, consumption, and expansion define cultural capital in many work organizations. In “learning organization” rhetoric prevalent in workplace educational efforts, increased knowledge is presented uncritically as valued capital. But what interests are defining and presuming to manage workers’ “intellectual capital”? Why is sheer quantity of knowledge and innovation valued so highly? And why does critical reflection receive privileged emphasis?

Belief in the curative power of reflective practice and critical thinking underlies many current thrusts towards worker development through “action learning” (Watkins and Marsick, 1993) and “learning organization” (Senge, 1991) initiatives. Critics such as Michelson (1996) and Sawada (1991) maintain that the critical reflection view is simplistic and reductionist in presuming that through “reflection” knowledge is extracted and abstracted from experience by the processing mind. This view depersonalizes the learner, reifies rational control and mastery, ignores the role of desire in learning, and sidesteps multiple internal resistances in the learning process. It also ignores the possibility that knowledge is constructed within power-laden social processes, that experience and knowledge are mutually determined, and that experience itself is knowledge-driven and cannot be known outside socially available meanings. It perpetuates dualisms drawn simplistically between complex blends of reflection/action, doing/learning, active/passive, life experience/instructional experience, and implicit/explicit.

**What Patterns of Colonialism Are Evident in This Site, of Dominance and Subordination?** What has colonization done to the behaviors and identities of both the colonizers and the colonized, and how does it shape the cultural space? Examine how colonial power has worked to depersonalize and dislocate colonial subjects, what worlds are being created from these oppressions (Spivak, 1988), what patterns of dissent have resulted (violent, pacifist, and withdrawal), and how dissent and resistance have been created by the very structure of colonial power (Said, 1993). Some writers suggest looking at the utopian traces that are inherent in any impulse to colonize others, which may provide clues to possibilities beyond the domination. Bhabha (1994) suggests that cultural analysis explore the new hybrid knowledges and spaces that are developing from histories of colonial dominance and resistance. Very new meanings and visions emerge as possibilities for new futures in these spaces—if they can be discerned by those locked in reasoning patterns of the past.

In the workplace, colonization is evident as the skill-and-knowledge bar is raised ever higher, while urgent expectations to do and learn more become uncoupled from meaningful purpose. Colonization is exercised through the categorization and confessional practices of HRD, demanding open revelation of thoughts and feelings, and people’s surrender to assessment and control of their personal development. Colonization emanating from utopian impulses is also evident in the mass adoption of “learning organization” ideals, which declares emancipation even as it controls and regulates the vision (Fenwick, 1997).

Workers’ deepest life conflicts are scripted as educational needs, disciplined by the educator’s gaze and technologies of intervention. Life experience not planned and facilitated by the educator is declared “informal” or even “dysfunctional” (Marsick and Watkins, 1990). Learning continues to be conceptualized as problems to be solved rather than identities in search. Questions of culture/race/gender, identity, politics and interests, difference, image, and representations refuse such regulation, which erupt in complex real problems for organizations and for individual workers. As Britzman (1998) writes, “the dreary language of excellence, expertise, and competence” (p. 42) obscures the dynamical qualities of love and hate centered in learning a life, and ignores real struggles for subjectivity that catalyze those internal conflicts that are human learning and development.

For educators, these tools may help uncover the deeper philosophical struggles beneath the veneer of business as usual. This approach presumes that certain images and ways of talking about things, which may seem “natural” in a work culture, in fact sustain particular beliefs and values that advance the interests only of select groups. The object of critical cultural analysis is to investigate how these beliefs and values are constructed. The purpose is partly to unmask practices of oppression and suppression and its forms of resistance. Analysis may help “find” groups of people and their values who are dislocated in the accepted workplace discourse, and recover what cultural writers call “subject positions” that are lost in rigid narrow identity categories. Cultural analysis also can highlight blurring borders and categories, and draw attention to hybrid knowledges emerging. Finally, cultural analysis acknowledges certain ultimate incommensurabilities of different cultural practices and groups.

Educators then need to make explicit the politics and constraints of workplace training. Adult learners deserve to be shown clearly, in a particular educative context, what knowledge counts, how development is “measured,” who gets to judge whom and why, and the interests that are served by the goals of the development initiatives. Educators can help themselves and others become more aware of their own constituted natures, their own continuous role in power relations and the production of meaning, how representations act to represent and construct reality, and how difference is perceived and enacted. Through critical cultural analysis educators can teach people how what they may experience as personal identity struggles, yearnings and interpersonal conflicts in their work are shaped partly by the cultural dynamics and ideologies of particular work sites.

But the ultimate purpose is to spy out the new energies and identities emerging amidst the culture wars in the workplace. These can enable us to discern new futures

and craft social alternatives that may be invisible through the goggles of current dominant ideologies. As Foucault puts it, "When we undermine their 'naturalness' and challenge the assumptions on which they're based, we can see the possibility for difference. . . . transformation becomes urgent, difficult, possible" (Foucault in Kritzman, 1988, p. 154). These conceptual tools are offered to educators by critical cultural analysis.

## Conclusion

In the introduction I argued that current psychological and human resource management frames guiding worker development are limited and problematic. I have suggested that fruitful conceptual tools for inquiry and educators' practice are offered by three theoretical frames: self, situation, and cultural politics. Understanding these dimensions may help workplace educators unravel certain psychic events, system dynamics, and ideological currents that lurk beneath appealing workplace trends. I have tried to highlight useful questions from each frame for work and development. The further challenge is to explore ways of connecting these three conceptual dimensions and to rethink the sorts of roles educators may assume in the worker development process.

Identity, situation, and politics are in many ways inseparable. As Bateson (1979) pointed out, knowledge, action, and identity are conflated in a circularity. Just as new possibilities for thought and action emerge continually in the ever-expanding dynamic system, so do new identities and possibilities for self-reinvention. We are defined by our participation in events, and by how these situated activities are sewn into our own unfolding being. Jansen and Wildemeersch (1996) point out that cultural studies offer insight into the emergence of unexpected connections among different elements meeting for the first time. Startling spaces have opened and bridges formed among myriad encounters and juxtapositions of practices, languages, and images. New identities, new meanings, and new questions about self and others have opened in these locations and (dis)locations (Edwards and Usher, 1997).

Current psychological and human resource frames governing worker development initiatives do not attend to these possibilities, and they limit educators' capacity to acknowledge and respond to serious problems described in this chapter. Conceptual frames of self, situation, and cultural politics may open more life-giving, compassionate, and graceful possibilities for educative practice among workers and workplaces. Hopefully these frames will move educators towards roles and interventions that help recover the "I" in one's work-learning life, while encouraging more perspicacious understandings of power, and reverence for connections between self and others in our systems of work, learning, and living. Worker development needs to be envisioned through other perspectives besides improving market share. Educators can make moral choices to be advocates and critics: critics of the reductionism and power relations subsuming human learning and development to mass consumption, and advocates for social reconstruction in the workplace through compassion and grace.

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