Exploring Pedagogies of Work Based Learning

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Scope of presentation

The Institute for Work Based Learning at Middlesex University is awarded by HEA ESCalate to carry on a project on pedagogies of work based learning.

"WBL Pedagogies and Academic Development" is a 12 months project commenced in January 2011 and will end by the end of December 2011.
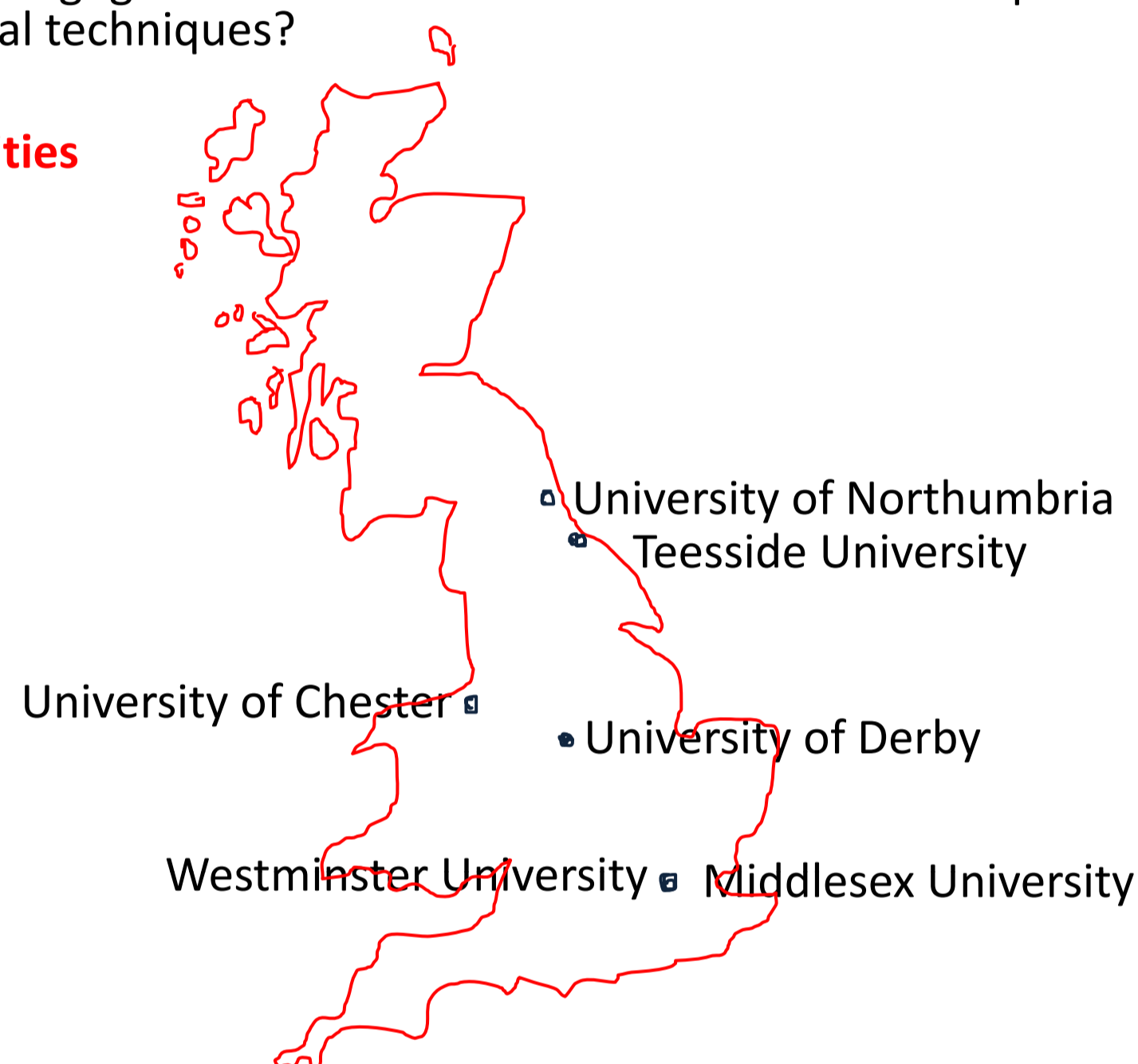
Aims of the project

- to examine the pedagogical practices of tutors working on work based learning (WBL) programmes in HE.
- to contribute to an emerging literature on WBL pedagogies
- to address a potential barrier to the successful delivery of WBL programmes in HE, which is the availability of adequately prepared staff to act as WBL advisers.

Guiding Research Question

What are the pedagogies of WBL and what is the rationale underpinning these pedagogical techniques?

Partner Universities

University of Northumbria
Teesside University
University of Chester
University of Derby
Westminster University
Middlesex University

Methodology

- Interpretive approach to guide the collection and analysis of data in the project.
- Data collection through in-depth interviews with WBL experts in partner universities [The interviewees are selected in relation to their expertise in the field from a range of universities that are known to have expertise in the field]
- Literature review
- Focus groups with WBL academics
- Interpretation of interviews in relation to WBL strategies
- Ongoing dissemination and feedback

The advisory role in WBL and some frequently found differences compared to non-WBL advising

Work-based learning advising	Non-work-based learning advising
3-way relationship: often mediated between student, adviser, work supervisor	Direct 2-way relationship: Student, adviser
Commonly involves parties other than the student, adviser and work supervisor	Less common to involve parties other than the student and tutor
Multi-mode contact	Typically face-to-face
Negotiation of topic and process	May be unilateral
Plan negotiated at start	Plan is more often emergent
Formalised 3 way learning agreement	Learning agreement not common
May be assessed by practitioner	Occasionally assessed by practitioners (depends on course)
Products highly varied, but typically include reflective component	Conventional academic output: reports, etc, may not include reflective component
Learner is an insider and expert in subject area/context	Tutor expert in subject area/topic
Adviser expert in frameworks/levels of achievement	Framework/level of achievement pre-defined for student
Adviser expert in epistemology of practice (including linking knowledge)	Tutor expert in epistemology of discipline
Adviser and learner have distinct areas of expertise	Tutor and learner often in relationship of authoritative power
APEL is usually an aspect of WBL courses and programmes	APEL is less likely to be used

From: Boud, D., & Costley, C. (2007). From project supervision to advising: new conceptions of the practice. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 44*(2), 119-130.

Features of WBL

- WBL is a growing part of HE provision in the UK and internationally;
- WBL provides benefits in terms of engaging with employers and widening participation particularly among adult learners who would not otherwise engage with HE and in many cases lack formal entry qualifications for study at the relevant level;
- Successful implementation of WBL depends on staff being able to act successfully as facilitators, advisers and expert resources, as opposed to working in a more traditional academic role as subject expert;
- Work-based programmes typically employ different structures, approaches and processes from those used in subject-based academic programmes;
- Prior learning claims are generally assessed against the student's overall learning aims, as expressed in a learning agreement or contract, rather than against a predefined field of study.
- Assessment draws on workplace activity and analysis and reflection upon it, and often uses generic criteria in conjunction with students' own learning objectives.
- WBL could be implemented in different models ranging between a degree in work based studies to work placements within a subject-based degree programme.

WBL MODELS	TYPICAL ATTRIBES
Work based studies degree (for individuals)	Content negotiated by learner, P/T degree programme F/T employment
WBL degree in cohorts	Content designed with contribution of employer, P/T degree programme F/T employment
Foundation degree	content designed by HE in relation to employer, F/T or P/T degree programme
Sandwich year	Content designed with employer, 1 year F/T work as a part of a degree programme
In-house training (e.g. NVQ)	Short courses to contribute job roles during employment
Conventional degree programme to support work role (e.g. MBA)	Content designed by HE, P/T or evening degree programme F/T employment
Work placement within a programme of study to integrate aspects of professional life to L&T experience	Specific outcomes to be delivered for the programme of study,

Comments

There are several kinds of learning technologies that are typical of WBL practices and that there are broad philosophical approaches to the role that differ from the more conventional teacher- student relationship. Common WBL strategies could be listed as:

- Accreditation [APEL]
- Planning WBL [Learning agreements/contracts]
- Practitioner-led projects
- Research methodology
- Reflection/reflexivity

In relation to these constituents of the conceptual knowledge and skill base needed for advising in WBL are:

- Work and context
- Learning consultancy
- Transdisciplinarity
- Enquiry
- Reflexivity and reviewing
- Learning strategies used in WBL

The features specific to WBL mean that academics involved in work based programmes have a role that differs from that of most subject-based tutors in several ways. They need to act as facilitators, advisers and expert resources rather more than as teachers and be familiar with using the processes and technologies associated with WBL.

These factors create significant differences in the requirements for inducting WBL tutors from those in inducting other academic staff, and require a culture-change for existing staff who become involved in WBL programmes.

A better understanding of the pedagogical practices in use in WBL programmes, the underlying rationale/s for these practices and how these practices are similar to/differ from more traditional academic programmes will provide the basis for the development of guidelines and resources for new and existing HE staff working in the field of WBL.