Chapter 8
Of Maestros and Muscles: Expertise and Practices at Work

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Introduction: Getting Stuck In(to) It

On the penultimate page of his novel, *Maestro*, Peter Goldsworthy's main character reflects on his life as a classical musician:

> Now I was faced with myself for the first time: Paul Crabbe, greying, dissatisfied, fast approaching mid-life, my backside stuck fast to a minor chair in a minor music school. Able to dupe my audiences at the odd school concert, and even the critics – no, *especially* the critics – but never for one moment, even at my most unguarded, deluding myself. (1989 p. 148)

Crabbe seems to have failed to work up to what he expected of himself as a pianist, be that artistic expertise, creative accomplishment or professional acclaim. He has not become a *maestro*. His workplace, the concert grand in the music school, just does not afford the high achievement for which he has striven over decades.

Yet, in one crucial respect, Crabbe is a success. He is candidly self-aware – he sees himself, as 'dissatisfied', and also with great moral clarity: he is, now, never deluded.

Musicians, like most creative artists and many sportspeople, often illuminate important aspects of all human experience for us all, because they commit, single-mindedly, to the pursuit of high, but narrowly defined, achievement. The excellence to which they aspire is constructed through robust and sustained agency: 'I can get there' or 'anyone can achieve what they dream' are common mantras in the Western world. Jessica Watson, who, in May 2010, completed a yachting circumnavigation of the globe, alone, at the age of 16 years, stated exactly that when back in Sydney.

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Watson, still a teenager, and Crabbe, crabbed and grey and going in to middle age, are each lifelong learners, by which I mean they are each aware of how their experiences (over time and space, at the workplace of a piano or in a tiny yacht) have made them more aware of their own learning. Moreover, their exertions have been muscular – severe, committed and strenuous. Although Crabbe seems to have failed, he has succeeded in becoming self-aware through his own efforts, that is, agentively. And Watson has succeeded, but in doing so has, naively, located her success within her own agentive capacity, as if her success was entirely due to her efforts.

The construction of our Selves (our identity), at and through our work, is then, traditionally, thought to be up to each individual. We make our Selves through what each of us, more or less strenuously, strives for, in a workplace (but not only in a workplace: families, communities, ethnicities and nations, and so on, are essential too, but outside my scope here). Through single-mindedness, as shown in the more prominent achievements of artists and sportspeople, in their respective workplaces, we too can 'make something of ourselves'. But such singularity is not sufficient.

This chapter will unpack what this means beyond the ascription of individualistic agency. It takes issue with the simplistic attribution of agency to workers and instead shows how socio-culturally located relations arise in, or emerge from, common work practices, over time. It does this by, first, analysing the temporality of agency in the *present* time (the current interest in Aristotelian practical judgements), then, in the second section, by analysing *future* time (exploring the practical and educative prospects of the *projective*). Humans can indeed 'work up to something', and in the third section, I show how workplace *learning* can build expertise through socio-culturally located agency.

Bear in mind however, that although I will de-centre traditional individualistic agency, I do not wish to subsume it in greater or wider phenomena. Of course, we need to acknowledge and preserve singular ways people can make something of themselves, as have Crabbe and Watson, solo performers in the pursuit of excellence. But in this era of lifelong learning, what must be added to the ascription of singular agency to the construction of the self – to identities – is a sophisticated acknowledgement of the ways adults learn at and through workplaces where collective, socio-culturally significant experiences are omnipresent.

Agency and Time: The Present

In an important and comprehensive overview of the concept of agency, at least as it has been regarded in sociological theory, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) define it as:

> …the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit [the past], imagination [the future], and judgment [the present], both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations. (p. 970)

I have inserted in this quotation the three indicators of this temporality to make it plain how Emirbayer and Mische construct agency: there are actions we recount and justify, in the *past*, and actions we contemplate and foresee, in the *future*, which are held together in the an account of the *present*, in which we weigh up what is to be done in the here and now. Their account of the *present* is broadly Aristotelian, where *phronesis* (practical wisdom or prudence) is widely exercised in human conduct:

> In Aristotle's view, practical wisdom can refer variously to means or to ends; it can be either strategic and calculative – in which case, he says we can speak of persons as being clever, crafty, or cunning – or it can be concerned with broader questions of the good life itself… Aristotle sees practical wisdom as intrinsically communicative in nature: that is, it entails a deep involvement and participation in an ongoing community of discourse. Far from being purely individual or monological, it remains open to dialogue and persuasion, and is profoundly implicated in common values, interests and purposes. (p. 995)

In adult, and lifelong, learning scholarship, practical wisdom has become a central interest, largely because, in most workplaces, time has intensified the work itself. We have 'just-in-time' training, 'windows' of time to enact opportunities for change, 'learning trajectories' which imply motion from less to greater states of knowing over time, and 'seizing the moment' which implies that we can atomise time and recalibrate it more productively through chunking work differently. There are many issues and controversies inherent in this analysis (such as the behavioural nature of reductive 'competencies' systems of working and assessing performance see e.g. Beckett 2004), but, in general, closer attention to how humans act in the contingencies of the present, in workplaces, is worthwhile. I turn to this now.

The Present as Making Practical Judgments

Beckett and Hager (2002) argued for the centrality of practical judgements, as a *relational* way of advancing a new epistemology of practice, one which decentres the traditional Cartesian, and even Platonic, *atomistic* epistemology (where, for example, an 'atom' of learning, that is, a proposition – from a book, or in libraries – is digested and regurgitated in written form to show how the mind, as memory, has been modified). Educators in the Western tradition have assumed that coming to 'know' something is to arrive at a state of the mind as evidenced in accounts of what is cognitively the case – this is about whether the propositions are in place in an individual's memory. Yet, across the human life-span, humans learn best when their experiences are taken seriously. The lowly academic status of the 'tacit', the intuitive, the reflective, the phenomenological, the embodied and the socially efficacious leaves much human experience out of the educational vision, wherever it is, but especially for adults – and especially in the adult workplace.

In this twenty-first century, the greater prominence accruing to lifelong learning comes partly from taking seriously the holistic nature of particular everyday

experiences, such as those of the workplace and the pedagogically diverse classroom (e.g. Hager and Halliday 2006; Beckett 2010). Adult educators, whether they are practitioners (who have real expertise in inclusive learning strategies) or researchers (who have interests in relational practices), can find philosophically rich ways through the messiness of adult learning.

I want to discuss two pieces of empirical research where the relational messiness of work is made epistemologically significant. There are real knowledge claims being made here, and they arise from agency within socio-culturally located, temporally emergent practices. They each explicitly use Aristotle's practical judgments, or wisdom (*phronesis*), as the form of knowing that emerges through such agency.

In the United Kingdom, Alan Bleakley, in a series of empirical studies of the 'micro-politics of practice' in operating theatres, draws on *phronesis* as a virtue ethic which has a 'distributed quality that may be constituted through intentionally collaborative practice, or is an emerging property of a complex, adaptive system' (Bleakley 2006: 305). Simply, where surgeons, nurses and other staff co-operate around an operating table, then

> the driver for good communication in the team need not be located in personal agency, but rather in sensitivity to an environmental imperative. Through "education of attention" of team members by the clinical field – the practice context and micropolitical structure – an ethical imperative is addressed. (p. 307)

For Bleakley, the hospital environment is, literally, a 'hospitality' environment. Teamwork in the operating theatre is not just then a useful adult learning skill, but more profoundly a micropolitical practice, tightly contextualised to an ethical perspective that is in fact the imperative of that practice: patient well-being and health, to be blunt. The unit of agentive analysis for Bleakley in such a setting is the socio-cultural, where the collective is not the aggregation of the individualities of those around the operating table. Rather, to be around the table in the first place, individuals have found themselves, albeit willingly, immersed in an 'environmental imperative', in this case, hospitality or caring for the Other.

He goes on to explore the 'consolidation' of this collective practice as an ethic of care. Using Levinas and Aristotle, he argues that, like a home where a guest is welcome (not 'Othered'), '[i]n the household of the operating theatre, ethical practice is characterized by suspension of personal desire for the safety and care of the patient as special Other or Guest – an act of hospitality and a gesture of friendship' (313). Surgery is indeed a form of intensely micropolitical practice, much amenable to an Aristotelian analysis, but so are slightly less intense workplaces, as I now discuss.

In South Africa, Mignonne Breier and Alan Ralphs (2009) report fieldwork which shows that

> greater understanding of the Aristotelian concept of phronesis, or practical wisdom would make an important contribution to the conceptualization and implementation of Recognition (Assessment) of Prior Learning (RPL/APL) in formal education contexts. (p. 479).

The problem they confront is that typically RPL is *given* for achievements in practical workplace settings, where the tacit and the intuitive are essential, but that

the RPL is then *used* for formal education studies where knowledge is often abstract and propositional:

> …there is an underlying contradiction inherent in the concept of RPL…RPL was intended to assist those who had missed out on formal education yet it required candidates to compare their learning with formal outcomes…RPL has proved to be most effective when the knowledge to be recognized is of a practical nature and can be demonstrated physically. For example, a cabinet-maker….
>
> However, where the knowledge is less tangible – as in the case of most university courses – …it is difficult to match the formal learning outcomes.
>
> The form of knowledge that is at stake in the RPL context, then, is primarily that which is associated with formal education. This raises the question: what type of knowledge is the adult without formal education likely to bring to the formal education table? (483)

Breier and Ralphs answer this with *phronesis*: 'While epistemic [university] knowledge is manifested in propositions and principles, technical [workplace] knowledge in products or artefacts, *phronesis* is manifested in ethically motivated deliberations, judgments, actions' (485). So, what does this look like when assessing for RPL?

One of the cases, Ms M, is a Xhosa-speaking woman in her 30s. The less-intense but sustained temporality of Ms M's agency at work was shown in her submitted portfolio of accounts of how her career as a poorly qualified teacher nonetheless enabled her to gain promotions in some of the most difficult schools in the area. On that basis, she was interviewed and related:

> …I gained experience of dealing with traumatized children, having to understand where they were coming from, like they were old in age because they were dealing with this, that kind of stuff…You have to understand where they are coming from, and that also, it creates compassion and patience with learners, you have not to rush them with anything…
>
> So it has been a struggle throughout the years. But it gave us strength and experience to continue. (486–7)

The authors claim this suggests a woman who is practically wise:

> [O]ne who is able to pursue a goal [over time] that is in both her interest and that of the wider community… [in the] education of pupils in a manner that is both ethical…and also involves a flexible relationship between general rules (her formal knowledge of teaching methods) and particular circumstances (traumatised children, lack of equipment). In the process, she acquires the 'strength and experience' that is characteristic of a person with practical wisdom. (487).

Ms M's career path is marked by her daily immersion in 'ethically motivated deliberations, judgments, action', which is *phronesis*. Similarly, Bleakley's operating theatres are marked out by *phronesis* as an ethic characterised as a 'distributed quality that may be constituted through intentionally collaborative practice', during surgery.

Notice that in both contexts, agency emerged through intentional activities – practices – over time, but also 'in the moment' and that these practices were ineluctably socio-cultural. The temporal intensity of the theatre condenses the ethical attention to the micropolitical; the temporal extension of Ms M's work in schools expands the ethical attention to the macropolitical: it is very much her emergent sense of 'where the children are coming from' which shapes what 'gave us strength

and experience to continue'. Despite the urgency and stringencies of such daily challenges in many schools in South Africa, Ms M knows what to look for in children: 'you have not to rush them with anything', which shows she has been (self-) 'educated in attention' (as Bleakley describes the learning of team members in the clinical environment of a hospital and a theatre within it).

In both the UK and the South African examples, we can acknowledge the power of agentive practices, which, as Emirbayer and Mische (1998) put it, following Aristotle, 'sees practical wisdom as intrinsically communicative in nature: that is, it entails a deep involvement and participation in an ongoing community of discourse' (p. 995). There is an immediacy about the 'What to do next?' in most workplaces which both draws upon the past, and also looks ahead. Emirbayer and Mische locate agency in the 'temporal-relational contexts of action', where time, communicability and participation 'interplay'. In developing this, I now turn to the 'projective' – the future – as it contributes to socio-cultural agency in workplaces and therefore as a crucial element in the construction of expertise.

Agency and Time: The Future

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) build their approach to the future upon the past, as they explain:

> [In contrast to Bourdieu and Giddens]…we maintain that human actors do not merely repeat past routines; they are also the inventors of new possibilities for thought and action'. [Actors] 'distance themselves' [from the past, using capacities] 'rang[ing] from the strongly purposive terminology of goals, plans and objectives to the more ephemeral language of dreams, wishes, desires, anxieties, hopes, fears and aspirations…[W]e term it the *projective* dimension of human agency. (p. 984)

Reaching beyond the present is a prominent feature of workplace experiences for most of us today. Neo-liberal management-speak is redolent of the projective, even at its most banal, such as in the mission and vision statements, the strategic planning, the quality assurance cycles and the process re-engineering discourses now organisationally and institutionally ubiquitous. Emirbayer and Mische take a more generous view:

> It's potential inventiveness can yield responses as benign and mundane as the projects to grow a garden, to start a business, or to patch up a family relationship, or as sweeping and destructive as the project to establish a 1,000-year Reich. (p. 985)

The projective involves *projects*, and

> …the formation of projects is always an interactive, culturally-embedded process by which social actors negotiate their paths toward the future, receiving their driving impetus from the conflicts and challenges of social life. The locus of agency here is the *hypothesization* of experience, as actors attempt to reconfigure received schemas by generating alternative possible responses to the problematic situations they confront in their lives. Immersed in a temporal flow, they move "beyond themselves" into the future, and construct changing images of where they think they are going, where they want to go, and how they can get

> there from where they are at present…Projectivity is located in a critical mediating juncture between the iterational [the past, the habitual], and practical-evaluative [the present, the judgmental] aspects of agency. (p. 984)

How time is understood is thus essential to grasping the potential of the projective. Where it is time to be served, undergone, endured and chunked towards retirement, it passes slowly and as a burden. But work experienced this way probably reveals a workplace where agentive opportunities are minimal or non-existent. Crushed or bored by ennui, inertia or oppression, people deny, or remain oblivious to, their individual and collective agency or at best merely react to the agency of others and other groups.

By contrast, what fires up agency of the more developmental and invigorating kind are the projective possibilities of the work. Where groups can plan, implement and evaluate shared activities, there is a greater sense of commitment and indeed overall workplace engagement.

The Future as Working Up to Something

My claim is that the malleability of time arises from agentive work experiences and that the experiences which best achieve this malleability are *projective.* More technically, citing the quotation immediately above, '[t]he locus of agency here is the *hypothesization* of experience, as actors attempt to reconfigure received schemas by generating alternative possible responses to the problematic situations they confront in their lives'.

Workplaces generate this hypothesisation of experience when workers grapple with organisational change, or when in the very nature of the work, daily practical judgments require projective activity. Teamwork in professional settings is a prominent example of this latter 'hypothesisation': 'what can we imagine being an effective way forward for this client, or learner, or patient?' is a powerful question, because it assumes an agentive capacity in those who ask it. In working up an answer, there is an assumption of skillfulness, decisionality (or judgment-making) communicability and an 'attention' to the ethical particularity of the 'problematic situation'. Each of these was a characteristic of experience in the operating theatre in the United Kingdom and of Ms M's claim on RPL in South Africa. But now, I need to explore how the projective is apparent in establishing an effective way forward, where workplaces are faced with 'problematic situations'. Here is one such situation, coming from an accountant (fieldwork data: UTS-UM research 2003):

> It's a question of experience. You remember that the past figures were very different. So it raises doubts in your mind. I remember once I was working on a project and there was something I didn't know about it – had something funny about it. At 3 o'clock in the morning I woke and said, 'That's what's wrong with it.' I found it at 3 o'clock in the morning in my subconscious. The decision wasn't a conscious decision. It was working in the back of my mind.

Accountancy is a profession traditionally shaped by competence which is readily reckoned: you count, you calculate, you assess and so on. Yet in the little anecdote above, our sleepless accountant is stirred by something else. His technical expertise is not in doubt, but his reliance on hitherto strange psychological experiences is indeed curious. What is he drawing upon to make a professional decision or judgement? Further, notice the experience is both vivid *and* elusive! He awoke and something decisive resulted, yet he was not aware of how this worked for him.

On one level, there is nothing more remarkable going on here than the individualistic account of agency with which this chapter began: a solo sailor (Jessica Watson) or a dispirited middle-aged musician (Paul Crabbe), taking it all upon themselves.

But on another level, in the world of the accountant, if we get past the Cartesian ontology – where the insight emerged from 'the back of my mind – something more interesting is apparent. Experience is drawn upon, and practical decision-making is the 'light-bulb' moment. The accountant's expertise is manifest in the confidence with which he tells the story. He infers from his past that this insight sets out the way forward. As I have detailed elsewhere (Beckett 2010), this is an instance of 'inferentialism': where a practitioner can move from a puzzle, back into the past to help make sense of it and, then, move confidently forward by inferring from the past and present what needs to be done in the future.

The 'light-bulb' moment is expressive – as we have just read. It presents a way forward. I rely here on the philosopher Robert Brandon (2000). Brandom's expressivism sees the mind not as a mirror (which would re-present, in a Cartesian ontology, what is inner and is outer), but, instead, and similar to a lamp,

> …making explicit what is implicit. This can be understood in a pragmatist sense of turning something we can initially only do into something we can say: *codifying some sort of knowing how in the form of a knowing that.* (p. 8: emphasis added)

My claim is that these instances of individualistic agency are more often, at least for practitioners, embedded in public codifications of 'know-how', which become propositional. That is, they become part of the knowledge base of good, and ultimately expert, practice, such as in accountancy.

Let me unpack that a little. In this case, the accountant needs to give public justification for his practices – as do we all – and when he does this, he is turning what he has *undergone* (in an epiphany) into what he *does* (such as with a client) which may then involve what he *says* (to his colleagues). This is making explicit what is implicit in his practice; it codifies what we *do* by articulating it – it emerges as what we *say* (to our peers, the public, our assessors etc.).

If expertise is shown in what in particular contexts (such as in a profession, amongst one's peers) by agreed 'best practices', then what we know *best* is thus an emergent, publicly justified and therefore accountable achievement. Expertise is a collective achievement, within which an individual's practices can be calibrated. As other epistemologists, DeVries and Triplett (2000) summarise:

> …we know first the public world of physical objects. We can extend that framework to include persons and their language. What we know best, however, are those beliefs that are

> the most well-supported pieces of the most coherent, well-substantiated explanatory framework available to us…our best knowledge will be provided to us by the efforts of science. The picture of knowledge created is that of a *communal, self-correcting enterprise* that grows from unsophisticated beginnings toward an increasingly detailed and adequate understanding of ourselves and the world. (p. xlvi) [emphasis added]

This suggests a way forward for the challenge presented in the last few pages of our book (Beckett and Hager 2002) where we claimed:

> Instead of asking how the learning (through training for example) is represented to the learner – "Has there been a change in the state of the learner?" – the more profound question is: "What inferences can now be articulated by the learner?" (p. 192)

Expertise is shown in the agentive practices which are subject to the public articulation of inferences as a 'communal, self-correcting enterprise' (as DeVries and Triplett stated). We may claim that vocational expertise, in respect of certain generic capacities, such as problem-solving and conflict resolution, for example, *emerges from practices*.

My argument in this section has been that inferentialism – the 'communal, self-correcting' justifications given by an individual at and through his or her work of why she or he acted thus-and-so – provides an epistemological basis for the achievement of expertise. But it can be taken further.

Agency and Workplace Learning

Outside the household, humans' workplaces are mainly, and often intensely, social. Most of us find our paid employment in organisations and institutions where we are parts of groups. Furthermore, we learn significantly 'on the job', that is, through the very doing of the work. And we learn to work *better* this way, too. Expertise in workplace performance is a tricky notion, as Jarvis (2009), who sets out the history and current state of the debates on it, makes clear.

This is not to denigrate the significance of prior or adjacent formal studies or skill-acquisition, but merely to give prominence to the myriad ways in which our daily workplaces are 'communal, self-correcting' enterprises. The 'self-correcting', however, is, in this analysis, ascribed to the sociality of work – to the group(s) of which we are parts: teams, professions, staffing units and so on. The self-correcting is 'communal' in that the relationality of such groups *fuel* that self-correction. For example, as we saw (above), both the UK operating theatre staff, and Ms M, in South Africa, showed how embedded any individualistic agency was in the communal self-correction of, in the first case, surgery, and in the second case, in a school. These respective normative socio-cultural contexts fuelled the relationality from which expertise emerged. It is these practice settings – surely simply another name for daily workplaces – that shape what is taken as expertise when it appears.

I claim, then, that the sociality of workplaces (sites of practices) both generates and identifies expertise. These are not two stages in a linear progression, where first

expertise is generated, and then its emergence is identified after that. Rather, serious and consistent attention to relationality will establish that it is amongst their very practices that workplaces will embody expertise. The ascriptions, indeed, the *inferences* of practices as more or less 'expert' arise primarily in the sociality of the workplace. From these communal inferences, expertise may then accrue to the achievements of an individual practitioner within it. But an expert practitioner or especially a 'mal-practitioner' is derivative upon communal self-correction which has melded experiences of expert practices with the very identification of it. And this reflexivity between what is communally undergone (around an operating table or in the staffroom or classroom in a school) and what is acknowledged as expert in that undergoing constitutes socio-culturally located expertise. My claim is that *relational practices fuel the emergence of expertise*.

Can we 'bring on' these practices? Can we use the conceptual approach I have outlined to bring these practices to greater prominence as, and when, they occur at work?

'Bringing on' Projective Learning

In considering these questions, it is helpful to peruse a list of some adult learning practices, and a list of some assessment practices, in light of the main focus of this chapter, which is how socio-culturally located agency can underpin practices and expertise, in the service of better learning – at least through and for adults' work.

In Section 2 (above), the case was made for the 'hypothesisation' of experiences (cf Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 984), which plays out in the future, as the 'projective dimension' of time. I argued that team-based activities lend themselves to projective experiences, because quite often it is, literally, a 'project' which is the reason for a team's existence: there is a problematic future which requires some resolution. What is agentive here is socio-culturally located – within the team, that is to say, relationally. Relational practices of this kind (for example, in the ubiquitous adult workplace) are typically focused on the future. Importantly, these are, I am now claiming, *projective and agentive* practices, and they are constituted and fuelled by socio-cultural experience, not by individualism.

So, the two lists here (from Beckett 2009) deserve careful attention for the prospects on offer in many of these relational adult learning and assessment practices for:

- The socio-culturally located
- The emergent and projective
- And, therefore, the agentive.

At one level, and regarding these practices traditionally, they represent training (in contrast to education). That is, they are redolent of skill-acquisition and susceptible to a behavioural account of learning (see Beckett 2010). But training can be

Some Adult Learning Practices

Technical training by repetition (e.g. how to fill out forms)
Problem solving/workshopping
Learning-to-learn/double-loop questioning
Critical thinking/evaluation exercises
Negotiation/collaboration/interactivity/interpersonal skill formation via groupwork
Formal theory and knowledge inc regulations (e.g. OH&S)
Literacy and numeracy through real-life excursions/reporting
Case studies/informal presentations
Simulations/role playing
Reflection/journalling
Work placements – real on-the-job learning
Expert instruction/guidance ('coaching')

Some Adult Assessment Practices

Observations of Performance to Standards
Skills Testing to Competencies
Projects/Assignments
Oral questioning/Written questions/Multiple Choice Testing
Evidence from Prior Learning
Log Books
Records of Achievement/Portfolios
Role Play
Visual Presentation
Third Party Reports
Self/Peer Reports

re-cast more holistically to include not merely the bodily activity known as 'behaviour' but richer, more fully human experiences. As Luntley (2008) puts it:

> If the activities in question in pointing, using an example, saying things like 'and so on…' are intentional activities, they are activities that exhibit understanding…that are conceptually structured…it is not training that provides the platform of resources to respond to reasons. That platform is supplied by the prior conceptual understanding manifested in the pupil's [or any age learner's] *capacities to undertake a variety of intentional activities*. Training will have an important role to play as we exercise the activities that manifest such understanding. But that is simply to note that when we 'work out' intellectually, the moves we

make need not be restricted to the silent moves made within an inner language of thought; they can include the moves we make in those bodily activities in which we express our intentionality' (702–3; emphasis added)

Pointing and saying 'and so on' are ways of showing the *projective*. So is puzzling about the problem and trying to find a resolution of it. My interest in the various practices on these lists is in the extent to which they *socio-culturally* enable the projective (not *individualistically* enable the projective, which is the traditional view which behavioural training instantiates).

Facilitators of practices such as these frequently start with the dynamics of the group with which they are working and seek to engender a sense of trust, ownership of the common good (including respect of diversity) and agreement on the desired outcomes. Socio-cultural location is the point of entry to the learning, but after that it gets loosened up. Many of these practices are commonly regarded as individualistic, such as keeping a journal, or being tested for a competence, but even in those cases, the criteria which will be brought to bear on the success of the learning will usually be socio-cultural: was the journal reflective on the impact the writer may have had on his colleagues? Does the evidence for the performance of a unitary skill (such as taking a foetal heartbeat) include an awareness of the normative nature of the skill (such as the perception in the ante-natal setting of 'bedside manner' of the nurse)?

As we move into more obviously 'projective' practices, such as role play and simulations, then socio-cultural becomes even more prominent. The emergence of expertise can then be facilitated readily enough by reflexive sensitivity to hypothesisations, or 'what if…?' questions and discussion, on the way through. A successful learning experiences will be partly shown by the extent to which participants did feel they were part of, and had gained from, the common 'wealth' of learning. But success will also be partly shown by the emergence of the creative and the serendipitous. This seems to be a prominent feature of accounts of dynamic, group-based learning. Winch (2010) emphasises the significance of systematic, intentional project-based work in expressing fundamental human capacities such as creativity (Chap. 9 passim and fn. 11, drawing on Marx and Simone Weil). Engestrom (2004) in his 'Thesis Five', calls 'negotiated knotworking' the 'defining characteristic of collaborative and transformative expertise', whereby 'the tying and dissolution of a knot of collaborative work is not reducible to any specific individual or fixed organisational entity as the centre of control' (p. 153).

So the unit of analysis – the work-group – is itself an amorphous and fluid entity. Initiatives, and leadership of them, rise and fall as the problems emerge and are themselves dissolved. In sites like this, projective work is usually, but often latent, important learning. I claim that the potential of many of these learning and assessment practices in and for workplaces can be 'brought out' to prominence in carefully structured settings alongside the workplace, if not already embedded in it (as the UK operating theatre and the South African schools clearly were).

What is essential for the socio-culturally located agency I propound here is that facilitators and course designers 'build in' what is to 'brought out', and this building-in needs to include, first and foremost, opportunities for the participants in the group to grapple with 'what if…' situations through intentionally reflexive processes.

All involved should find that they undergo some contributions to 'trying out' or hypothesising what to do next, in the very acts (i.e. agency) of doing it, because that is often what the real world of work is like.

What is reflexive here is the communal engagement with a problem or issue, which provokes skillfulness in resolving the problematic situation, along with the communal identification of the skill or solution as such, on the way through. This sensitivity to the group's learning process would be manifest in questions like: 'What are we trying to do here?', 'What can we bring to the way forward?', 'What should we have done differently just then?', 'How do we make sure we will do this better next time?', and so on.

In this communal engagement, there is to be no divide between attempt (the process) and accomplishment (the outcome). As Thalberg (1972) put it a generation ago, in what he called 'initiatory trying':

> Here no spatial or temporal crevasse divides attempt from accomplishment, as in causal undertakings. If a hiker succeeds in his attempt to scale a precipice, reaching a summit is a *terminus*, rather than an *effect*, of his climbing' (90).

Thalberg's agency is individualistic, but his epistemological stance is relational. Not only space (on the mountain) but also time (spent trekking) is made meaningful if the unit of analysis is maintained at the level of the whole, i.e. non-reductively. The recognition of expertise in scaling a precipice is a recognition of the group's ownership of both its accomplishment, and its agency is achieving it. These are intertwined. Their intertwining is fuelled by the non-reductive relationality of the group, not by the individuality of the various participants.

Conclusion

As has been argued above, building upon an Aristotelian analysis of practical judgement, agency itself needs to be re-thought. If adults – and, indeed, all humans – learn not just individually, but powerfully from each other – then agency as expressed as autonomous self-direction needs recasting.

Building a capacity for agentive change, over time, requires less of 'me' and more of 'us'. 'Working up to something' is not about one's personal achievements (in round-the-world youthful yachting) – or the lack of them (as a greying music teacher). Rather, it is about the completion of shared projects – and about the construction of projective capacity to even *undertake* projects, where such a capacity is situated in the socio-cultural relationality of many workplaces.

Revitalising agentive practices means providing (in training rooms and formal education), and acknowledging and rewarding (in workplaces, and often informally), the myriad opportunities for adult learners to make decisions and judgements in particular contexts which meet the particular purposes of those contexts. I have used two lists of relevant practices which show the diversity of ways adult learning can intentionally 'bring on' socio-culturally located agency.

Such opportunities for practice-based decisionality (practical judgment at and for work) immerses participants in inter-subjective, or, we may often say, interprofessional, relationships. Moreover, this immersion in the *present* takes skill-acquisition seriously – beyond behaviouristic training – and often melds with broad organisational development initiatives. With the help of Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) account of the temporality of agency, I have linked the present with the *future* – the projective.

The projective aspect of such agentive experiences needs to be given greater prominence in accounts of lifelong learning where these accounts involve workplaces. We work up to something over time and with an eye on where we are heading (this eye is itself a 'way of seeing', or attending to, oneself). My claim is that people learn best at work when they see time as malleable, when they see they are free in groups to make something of their shared problems and challenges and that this requires letting the collective imagination to run free. But the freedom is not anarchic. On the contrary, it is shaped by an ethic which participants can find amongst their shared commitments to the nature of their practice, and this can be drawn to their attention and honed for particular contexts, such as an operating theatre or a school.

In this way, redolent of Aristotelian *phronesis*, workplace participants can 'work up to something' ethical, efficacious and innovative, through agency that has at least these twin aspects: the practically judgemental, and the projective. I have shown how these are best constituted by, and, indeed 'brought on' by the relationality found where pairs, groups, teams and peers are the *first* focus of agency, and not merely as the efflux of the agency attributed only to individuals in all their traditional self-directedness.

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