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From ideal into practice : an illuminative evaluation of a learnership in the insurance and investment sector.

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2012-02-15
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/11318

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CHAPTER 3: ANCHORING A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the theoretical framework for the research is developed. Filtered through a postmodern lens, the theoretical framework of this study is anchored on three of Fenwick's (2003) broad classification of the main current perspectives on experiential learning, which for her encompasses workplace learning. I have chosen from Fenwick's broad classification the constructivist, the situated learning and the critical reflection and transformative learning (experiential learning) perspectives. As Fenwick (2003) explains, this classification is an artificial construct intended to organise the field for better understanding.

According to Kolb (1984), experiential learning has its intellectual roots in the work of Dewey (1938) and Piaget (1936) and focuses on the role that experience has in the learning process. This focus separates experiential learning theory from cognitive and behavioural theories of learning; the first focusing on manipulation of abstract symbols and the latter denying a role for subjective experience in learning. Kolb explains his purpose for a theory of experiential learning as a 'holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behaviour' (1984). These elements seem to be an intrinsic part of the learning within a learnership.

In contrast to the liberal progressive views of authors such as Knowles (1980) and the emancipatory approach of Freire (1970), the theoretical framework for this research is rooted in a more humanist philosophy of adult and workplace education as described in Merriam and Cunningham (1989), which also incorporates the constructivist 'personal growth' theory of Mezirow (1991) in terms of looking at transformation through learning, as for example in the development of an alternative identity in the workplace.

The principles of workplace learning and experiential learning – distilled from a variety of authors such as Fuller and Unwin (2003, 2004), Beckett and Hager (2002), Merriam and Cafarella (1999), Billett (2004, 2003, 1994), Schön (1987), Brookfield (1986), Boud (1985), Kolb (1984) and Mezirow (1981) – are important theoretical considerations in the illumination of this learnership.

Later in this chapter I discuss these authors, from the origins of the experiential learning in Dewey's (1938) and Piaget's (1952) works, to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, as well as Argyris and Schon's (1974) view of role of theories in action versus espoused theories in learning. Here, Schon's (1983) focus on reflection and action does not bring out the value of dialogue in experiential learning and this is provided by Mezirow's (1981) transformative learning theory.

I see a learnership as a community of practice environment where novices moves from the periphery toward the centre and mastery, so Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning in communities of practice perspective is very valuable in exploring learning and the formation of a workplace identity. Their perspective on social learning, and the dialogue that is a natural part of this process is relevant, where 'learning entails both a process and place…a process of transforming knowledge as well as a context in which to define an identity of participation', (Wenger 1998, p. 15). This study explores a learnership as such a process and place.

These theories, together with the principles of outcomes based education and critical cross field outcomes – implicitly legislated into the delivery of learnerships in South Africa, and Grant Wiggins' model of understanding – facilitates an attempt to weave an understanding of workplace learning that will illuminate the many-faceted reality of this learnership event. Some questions are posed at various points in this chapter that are useful in helping to operationalise the theories for this study, and although not all questions may be answered, it is hoped they will be useful to other researchers.

3.2 A Postmodern Lens

Postmodernism challenges the powerful and taken for granted view that there is a determinate world which can be definitely known and explained. As Bratton, J., Denham, D. & Deutschmann, L. (2009) explain: 'A legacy of Nietzsche's philosophy in postmodern thinking is that truth exists only from a particular standpoint or perspective, truth being always contingent'; there are no meta-narratives. For Nietzsche's postmodern philosophy, 'nothing is true' (p. 206).

A selective postmodernist lens was chosen for this study of a learnership. What Beckett and Hager (2002) define as ’strategic postmodernism' seems appropriate for framing this illumination of a learnership (p. 7). Beckett and Hager (2002) identify strategic postmodernism as celebrating the particular and the local; what Lemert (1997) describes as one of three approaches to postmodern theory, one characterised by an ’openness to seeing the world as transformed‘. This in contrast to radical postmodernism which considers modernity to be exhausted, and radical modernism which acknowledges change but refuses to see this as the end of modernity (as cited in Heaphy, 2007, p. 59).

Postmodern thinking argues that all research is therefore a product of certain kinds of social, historically located practices. Knowledge is always shaped by language and discourse, always situated within specific cultures, which provide meaning and significance. Knowledge is never absolute and universal. In this respect the influence of power relations negates the notion of disinterested research.

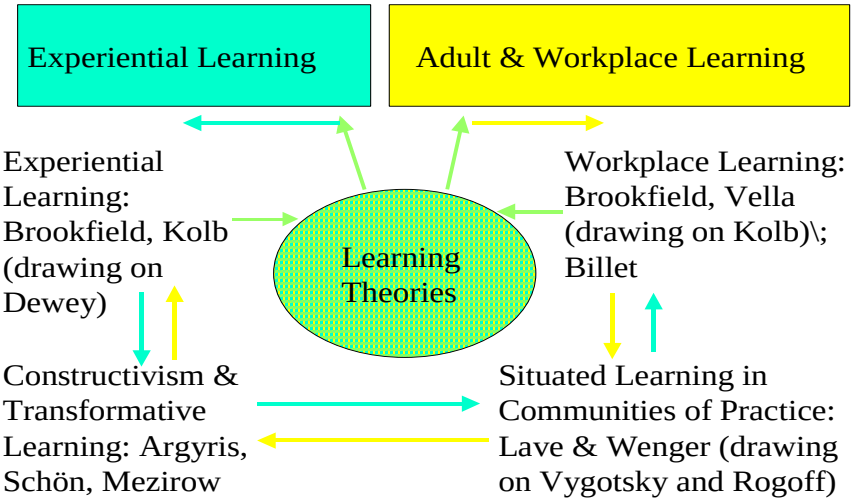
Postmodernism regards knowledge as culturally and socially shaped, reflecting power relations as much as it rejects notions of one objective truth. For Usher et al. (1997), researchers in the postmodern era have a social autobiography which plays an important part in shaping their research, so that meaning is not a representation of an independent objective world, and ’it is impossible to separate subjects and objects, the observer and the observed, the interpreter and the interpreted, researcher and researched, background and method, science and culture' (p. 183).

In the sense that Brookfield (1986) sees education as never innocent, for Usher et al. (1997) there are always aspects of power surrounding research and this ’challenges the possibility of disinterested research and value free knowledge‘ (p. 203). For them an advantage is that it foregrounds the ‘illuminative’ and insightful possibilities of research.

For these reasons this research tells a contextual story of the local not as a mirror ’held up to the world.' (Usher et al, 1997, p. 204) to reflect an independent external reality, but as a complex, Picasso-like self-portrait depicting the researcher’s perception of reality as well the participants’ perception of reality.

A weakness of postmodern philosophy is that it offers no alternatives. It questions, but seeks to find no answers, leaving all thinking possibly suspended in relativism. This is why the selective 'strategic postmodernism' of Beckett and Hager (2002), where a transformed world is possible, provides a more focused and practical approach to research, where it is possible to draw some level of actionable recommendations.

3.3 Learning Theories



Adult learning is also about experiential learning. According to Kolb (1984), 'Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it. (pp. 38-41). In his view, the process of experiential learning has a four-stage cycle with four learning modes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. For Kolb (1984), experiential learning occurs best when all four modes in this cycle of learning are completed (p. 9).

Vella (2000) drew heavily on the work of Kolb while she developed theoretical underpinnings for the creation of workshops for adult learners. Vella (2000) indicates that any effective design for experiential workshops has to have four components (p. 33):

- A learning task that connects learners with what they already know and with their unique context;

- A learning task that invites them to examine new input (concepts, skills, or attitudes) – the content of the course;
- A learning task that gets learners to do something directly with that new content, somehow implementing it;
- A learning task that integrates this new learning into their lives. Menendez and Vella called this model the four I's: Inductive work, Input, Implementation, Integration.

3.3.1 Experiential Learning

Brookfield (1983) distinguishes two contrasting aspects to the concept of experiential learning (p. 16). Some authors use the term to talk about experiential learning as the acquisition of knowledge, skills and feelings applied in an immediate and relevant setting, such as the learning in a learnership; a 'direct encounter'. The second kind of experiential learning is learning that is achieved through reflection upon everyday experience, in the sense that Houle (1980) talks about (p. 221). This is learning that takes place in a person's everyday life environments, including his or her 'community of practice', where broader experiences blend with specific institutional ones. From both points of view experiential learning provides an ideal theoretical perspective to help illuminate this case study.

The work of Kolb (1976; 1981; 1984) and his associate Fry (Kolb & Fry, 1975) provides the central reference point for discussing experiential learning. They represented their ideas in the famous model of experiential learning; a cycle containing four elements: concrete experience, followed by observation and reflection, followed by forming abstract concepts, followed by testing in new situations, following Lewin's view (1942).

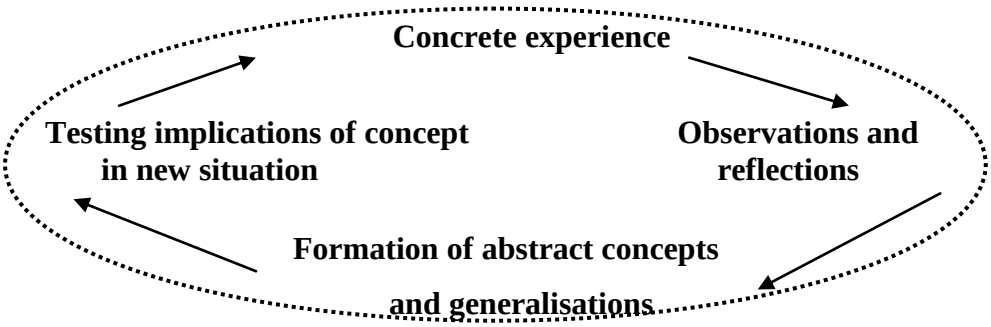


Figure 1: A representation of Kurt Lewin's view of experiential learning

Kolb (1984) also borrowed from Dewey's work to develop his cycle (p. 22). In Dewey's (1938) own words, purposeful action

> …involves (1) observation of the surrounding conditions, (2) knowledge of what has happened in similar situations in the past, a knowledge obtained partly by recollection and partly from the information, advice and warning of those who have had a wider experience, and (3) judgement, which puts together what is observed and what is recalled to see what they signify. A purpose differs from an original impulse and desire through its translation into a plan and method of action based upon foresight of the consequences of action under given observed conditions… (p. 69).

In Dewey's model, progressive circles are used to represent experiential learning:

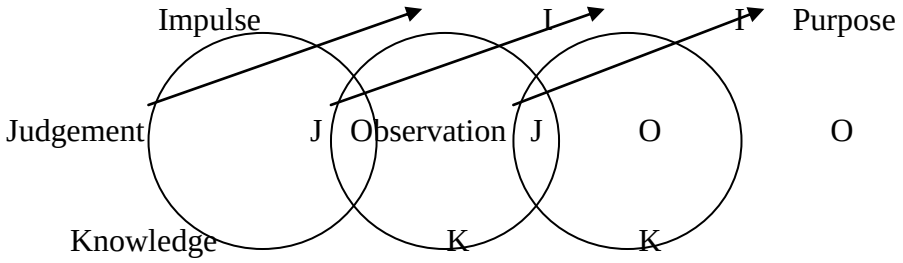


Figure 2: A representation of Dewey's view of experiential learning

For Dewey, the impulse of experience gives ideas their moving force; ideas give direction to impulse, but observation and judgement must take place before action, which then follows to achieve purpose. Experiential learning integrates impulse, ideas or concepts, observation, judgement and action.

Kolb (1984) also borrowed from Piaget's theory. He explains that, for Piaget, development from infancy to adulthood 'moves from a concrete phenomena view of the world to an abstract constructionist view, from an active egocentric view to a reflective internalised mode of knowing' (p. 23). The learning process by which this development happens is a cycle of interaction between the individual and the environment similar to Dewey's theory. The key to learning lies in the mutual interaction of the process of 'accommodation of concepts or schemas to experience in the world and the process of assimilation of events and experiences from the world into existing concepts and schemas' (p.23). Schemas are the representations in the mind of a set of perceptions,

ideas and actions which go together. Intelligent adaptation (learning) results from balanced tension between the two processes of accommodation and assimilation. When accommodation dominates, there is imitation, the moulding of oneself to the environment. When assimilation dominates, there is play, the imposition of one's concepts and images without regard for the environmental realities.

From these roots, Kolb (1984) indicates three propositions that characterise experiential learning:

1. Learning is best conceived as **a process** and not in terms of outcomes.
   Bruner (1966, p.72) points out that the purpose of education is to stimulate inquiry and skill in the process of acquiring knowledge, not to memorise a body of knowledge, that 'knowledge is process, not a product' (as cited in Kolb, 1984, p.27).

2. Learning is a **continuous** process **grounded in experience.**
   For Kolb (1984), this indicated that all learning is re-learning, for 'everyone enters every learning situation with more or less articulate ideas about the topic at hand' (p. 28). In this respect, Argyris and Schön, (1974) 'wondered whether the difficulty in learning a new theory of action is related to a disposition to protect the old theory in use' (p. viii) ((as cited in Kolb, 1984, p. 29)).

3. The process of learning **requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world.**
   For Dewey (1938), the conflict is between the impulse that gives ideas their moving force and reason that gives desires a direction. In Piaget's (1952) framework, the processes of accommodation of ideas to the external world and the assimilation of experience into existing conceptual structures are the moving forces of cognitive development (as cited in Kolb, 1984, p. 29).

   Thus Kolb (1984) conceives that to learn is not the special province of a single specialised realm of human functioning such as cognition or perception. 'It involves the integral functioning of the whole organism: thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving' (p. 31). Here the spiral movement from Dewey's model is relevant. This concept of holistic adaptation is perhaps what can be

used to highlight the difference between the OBE, criticised for its strong links to behaviourism and specific outcomes, and the OBE enacted in the learnership setting of a community of practice.

3.3.2 Constructivism and Transformative Learning Theory

Argyris and Schön

Gravett (2005) borrowing from Biggs (1996) offers a good summary of what the learning process entails from a constructivist perspective.

> Learners arrive at meaning by actively selecting and cumulatively constructing their own knowledge, rather than by receiving and storing knowledge. The process of construction occurs through both individual and social activity. The learner brings an accumulated baggage of assumptions, motives, intentions, and previous knowledge to every teaching-learning situation, which forms a framework that envelops the immediate situation and determines the course and quality of learning that may take place**. …** The Construction of meaning is an individual process, and personal responsibility, a social process which leads to shared meaning or the co-construction of knowledge.
>
> Gravett (2005, p. 19-21)

This illuminative evaluation takes the form of a case study about a group of young people with no work experience constructing new meanings in a workplace context. It is a social process about learning from others more experienced than themselves. It is about observing, practicing, thinking and developing a new work identity.

Argyris and Schön's (1974) work on reflection and learning started from the point that people have mental maps with regard to how to act in situations. This affects the way they plan, implement and review actions. The authors asserted that it is these maps that guide people's actions rather than the theories they explicitly espouse. In this regard they suggested that two *theories of action* are involved. The first, *theories-in-use,* is what we actually do. The words we use to convey what we would like others to think we do are called *espoused theory*. This is an important distinction useful when exploring questions around professional practice and the learning of it in the workplace.

Argyris and Schön (1978) then describe the process of single loop and double loop learning as follows:

> When the error detected and corrected permits the organization to carry on its present policies or achieve its present objectives, then that error-and-correction process is *single-loop* learning. Single-loop learning is like a thermostat that learns when it is too hot or too cold and turns the heat on or off. …*Double-loop* learning occurs when error is detected and corrected in ways that involve the modification of an organization's underlying norms, policies and objectives. (p. 2-3)

As Usher and Bryant (1989) explain, single-loop learning can be present when values, frameworks and strategies are taken for granted (p. 87). The reflection is on making existing practice more efficient. Double-loop learning, in contrast, involves questioning and change.

The notions of reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action were central to Schön's later work. Reflection-in-action is 'thinking on our feet'. It involves looking to our experiences, connecting with our feelings, and attending to our theories in use. It entails building new understandings to inform our actions in the situation as it is unfolding. Schön's work on reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action links to double-loop learning. These concepts were observed in practice during lesson activities. This will be discussed in the findings.

Schön's (1973) thinking around learning systems within communities has also been helpful in this study.

> If government is to learn to solve new public problems, it must also learn to create the systems for doing so and discard the structure and mechanisms grown up around old problems (p. 109).

The opportunity for learning, Schön suggests, is 'not in the nexus of official policies at the centre' (Ibid. p. 165), but often in the periphery.

Because of the focus on reflection on action (Schön, 1983), a criticism is that this focus on emotions, which is internal, might be limiting. As Cinnamond and Zimpher (1990) put it, by focusing on the mental aspect it excludes the element of 'dialogue with others involved in the situation'. (p. 67). The value of dialogue is brought into this study with Mezirow's (1981) transformative learning, and the value of communities of practice as places of social interaction and dialogue.

Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) address emotions in their approach to experiential learning and reflection. They developed three concepts that experiential learning involves: returning to experience; attending to or connecting with feelings; and evaluating experience. Experiential learning also involves integrating this new knowledge into one's conceptual framework (Boud, et al. 1985, pp. 18-31). Boud suggests a variety of ways through which reflections can be integrated into the learning process, including learning partners with whom to discuss and reflect on ideas, and learning contacts, which require reflection or self- assessment (Boud & Knights, 1996, p. 24).

Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory is a constructivist theory, in which leaning is based on a reflective interpretation of experiences to construct 'a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action' p.12). Here Mezirow (1991) goes further than Schön (1983) in that transformative learning requires more verbal interaction or a dialogic process than internal reflection.

Learning towards a vocational qualification and mastery of a job role in the workplace brings learners in contact with the unfamiliar, where they are confronted with, and expected to integrate, new and different ways of thinking about work, life, and new ways of interpreting the world. This entails a perspective transformation: 'the process by which adult learners come to recognise their culturally-induced dependency roles and relationships…' (Mezirow, 1991, p. 7). Thus critical reflection, which Brookfield (1987, p. 1) describes as a process leading to our being ready to act and think differently on the basis of the critical questioning of the way ideology controls us and frame our learning, is part of transformative learning. In the case of this study, this included opportunities for discussions with peers and facilitators as well as representatives of the organisation able to impart norms and values. This is particularly important when the goal of learning is to effect profound change in the learners' ways of thinking and doing, as is the case in learnerships. Transformative learning is a part of the process where new identities are developed, as they are also developed in a community of practice with its socialising elements.

However, for Usher et al. (1997), postmodernity requires ‘ideology free’ individuals, who have understood the construction of, and have deconstructed the text of their reality, and are ’individuals with agency, flexible, motivated, with disposition for change‘ (p. 85). Here a tension is possible because the process of identity development in the workplace cannot be ’ideology free‘. While constructivist workplace learning seeks to mould identities, the postmodern environment requires flexible ideology-free individuals.

This study of a learnership focused broadly on investigating benefits and challenges and did not focus on learning processes at this deeper, more specific level. It did not focus on the effectiveness of learning processes aligned to prescribed ideals of transformation at a personal level. Therefore, asking the following questions relevant to constructivist transformative learning is appropriate for my research:

- Can Brookfield’s four components of critical thinking: identifying and challenging assumptions; recognising the influence of context on thoughts and actions; considering alternatives to existing ways of thinking and living; and developing reflective scepticism be identified in the learning?
- Are facets of transformative learning, a triggering event; imbalance; articulation of unconscious assumptions: questioning; constructive discourse; revision; and planning a course of action, evident features in the learning?

3.4 Workplace Learning

3.4.1 Principles of Adult and Workplace Learning

Brookfield (1986) summed up principles of adult learning to include that adults exhibit diverse learning styles, learn in different ways at different times, for different purposes, and prefer their learning activities to be problem centred for immediacy of application (p. 31).

Billett (2004a) proposes that, unlike schools and institutions, workplaces are ideal learning environments for the integration of structure, expectations and socialising

norms on the one hand, and the learners' choice to act independently on their own preferences and goals on the other.

Can a well designed and managed workplace learnership, properly supported by the current government structures, and delivered in the SAQA preferred Outcomes Based Education methodology, be an ideal place to foster new paradigms which bring together individual and business growth through focused vocational education?

3.4.2 Situated Learning and Communities of Practice

Situated learning theorists like Lave (1993) propose that actions including skills and ideas only gain meaning in their particular context, which are often impossible to abstract, and therefore to move from general to specific (p. 22). Thereby they position situated learning theory as a constructivist theory. It has elements, which harmonise with transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), and offers a valuable point of view from which to illuminate a learnership.

Situated learning theory has its roots in the work of Vygotsky (1934) (Rogoff, 1990, p. 13), who viewed learning as socially mediated through people and social artefacts, such as language (p. 108). In the 1970s, social psychologists were exploring the implications for cognition and learning, among them Barbara Rogoff and the social anthropologist Jean Lave. 'Rather than examining context as an influence on human behaviour, I regard context as inseparable from human actions in cognitive events or activities' (Rogoff 1990, p. 27). Here, an important concept relevant to workplace learning is Rogoff's view that, for the learner, a vital element of the 'context' is the presence of 'partners who have relatively greater skills and understanding', and who provide 'bridges' from existing to new knowledge (p. 39). These would be mentors and colleagues. Such 'partners' have tremendous power to impact on the transfer of knowledge and skills, as well as values and attitudes, which may help develop new identities in the workplace.

The term ’Situated Learning Theory‘ emanates from the publication of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) work, in which they discuss a model for understanding learning in apprenticeships or as a newcomer in a situation, which they deem a ’community of practice‘. They argue that situated learning involves the whole person (p. 53). This implies not only a relation to specific activities, but also a relation to social communities. It implies becoming ’a full participant, a member, a kind of person… To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities (p. 53)’.

Wenger‘s (1998) perspective on communities of practice as a social learning theory sees peripheral participation as a process of developing an identity as a member of the community and of becoming ’knowledgeably skilful‘. For him, these two things are part of the same process. He sees learning as transforming who we are and what we can do as an experience of identity. ’It (learning) is not an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming – to become a certain person or, conversely, to avoid becoming a certain person‘. It is in the formation of an identity in a social context that learning becomes a source of meaningfulness and ’of personal and social energy‘. Thus as an expression of identity, ’learning entails both a process and place…a process of transforming knowledge as well as a context in which to define an identity of participation‘ (p. 215).

Eraut’s (2004) research about work and informal learning concludes that the transfer of knowledge from education to workplace settings is ’much more complex than commonly perceived‘, involving five interrelated stages: the extraction of potentially relevant knowledge from context and previous use; understanding the new situation, which depends on informal social learning; recognizing what knowledge and skills are relevant; transforming them to fit the new situation; and integrating them with other knowledge and skills in order to apply in new situations (p. 6).

This way of thinking about the learning, of seeing the learnership environment as the community of practice providing opportunities for the ‘dilemmas and discourse’ necessary for transformation, makes these two theories, constructivist transformative learning and communities of practice compatible companions and useful tools for framing this illuminative evaluation study. This view of learning as constituted in the

social processes of communities of practice also seems to complement the postmodern idea of the diversity of 'knowledges' valued for utility and consumed for different purposes, by individuals who develop the diversity of identities possible in post–Fordist societies. As Usher et al, (1997) explain: 'The emergence of postmodern identities is also due to the "valorisation of difference and the recognition of the significance of the particularities of differences"' (p. 5).

This is relevant to the theoretical and practical component of our South African learnerships, and to investigating learnerships as communities of practice as well as places of perspective transformation.

Wenger's theory adds the notion that varied identities are essential to the varied roles they play in living in the postmodern world. Therefore for the same reasons and in addition to the questions detailed in the previous section, further useful questions to this study are:

- Does the learnership provide such a community, a process and a place?
- In the workplace, as the site of learning, do learners encounter tensions between expressing individual diversity against the need for assimilating a corporate identity and, are such individuals, who are able to cope with the demands of the postmodern, likely to emerge from learnerships as communities of practice?
- Are learnerships such communities of practice affording learner's opportunities for dialogue, space for transformative learning, the transfer of knowledge and skills and the development of workplace identities?

3.4.3 The Role of Mentoring in Workplace Learning

Within a constructivist perspective, Billett (2000) found that learning through work activities is more effective when learners receive frequent guidance from a mentor than when left to work on their own (pp. 283-285). He found that modelling, questioning dialogue and the use of diagrams were useful guidance strategies. He further found that effective learning was dependent of interest and engagement 'in learning in a concerted effortful way'.

Mentorship is a key component of the learnership in this study. A clarification of the concepts of mentoring and coaching is useful at this point. Within the realm of learnerships in South Africa, the use of the term ‘mentor’ or ‘mentoring’ is understood to mean the intervention of an experienced, more senior employee, usually a supervisor, in guiding novice employees/learners to acquire the range of knowledge, skills and behaviours required in a work role. Yet in a context in which the goal is tightly focused on specific learning in the workplace, perhaps the term ‘coach’ or ‘coaching’ is a more appropriate one.

The International Mentoring Association sees the difference between coaching and mentoring as one where coaching is but one strategy within the bigger concept of mentoring. For them, coaching is one aspect of mentoring, which focuses on technical support, on building technical, work-related skills. Mentoring is the all-inclusive description of everything done to support a protégé’s orientation and professional development. According to this approach mentors must use open-ended questions to help the other person more objectively see their own patterns of behaviour and to prompt reflection, goal setting, planning and action to increase the desired results.

The Centre for Coaching and Mentoring in Bartlesville, Oklahoma expresses the differences in the useful table below, compiled from results of a survey among businesses using both processes:

Table 2 Differences between Mentoring and Coaching		
	Mentor	**Coach**
Focus	Individual	Performance
Role	Facilitator with no agenda	Specific agenda
Relationship	Self selecting	Comes with the job
Source of influence	Perceived value	Position
Personal returns	Affirmation/learning	Teamwork/performance
Arena	Life	Task related

Table 2 Differences between Mentoring and Coaching

With this clarification in mind, the term ‘mentoring’ is used in this report to denote the coaching which took place during the workplace experience component of the

learnership. From observations made during the study, coaching is more in line with, and encompasses, the more limited parameters of the definition, though some elements of mentoring were also present.

In a year-long trial of guided learning in a workplace, Billett (2003) explored the demands and benefits of mentoring in the workplace. In this study he brings to light valid elements that impact the mentoring process, such as, for example, the desirable qualities of mentors (Gray, 1994) and whether the sharing of knowledge is a reasonable expectation or experienced by mentors as a threat of displacement (Dore & Sasko, 1989). He also highlights the fact that there are many forms of mentoring; some in the form of guidance throughout a career (Gray, 1994), or, for example, the mentoring of junior sports team members by more experienced ones to guard against risky behaviour, and the mentoring that 'primarily focuses on the development of skills' (Billett, 2003, p. 105), such as is the case in this study.

Different kinds of mentoring have different goals and make different demands on mentors. He explains that, in contemporary workplaces, experienced workers may be concerned with displacement as shown by Bernhardt (1999). He cites Scandura et al., (1996) to bring forward the issue of 'individuals participating in mentoring to secure future allies who are compliant to their needs, with the aim of developing a network of supportive subordinates (p. 107)'. He also points out that mentoring may be viewed with suspicion when it is perceived to be required only in the enterprises' interest. A study in 2003 concludes that the following factors assist or inhibit the mentoring strategy:

Mentoring assisted by	**Mentoring inhibited by**
Training and practice	Production demands
Support from co-workers	Irregularities in production
Experience using strategy	Time constraints
Observing and understanding learners' requirements	Attitude of trainees and guides

Table 3 Factors that assist or hinder mentoring - Adapted from Billett (2003, p. 112)

These additional factors are important for mentoring to be an easier and more fulfilling role for mentors:

- informing learners about the mentoring process to allay concerns;
- adequate preparation time for mentors;
- provision of time to conduct the role;
- support in its conduct; and
- acknowledgement of mentor's role and contribution.

In my study, important questions to keep in mind are:

- What impact did mentoring have in the learnership?
- What factors helped or hindered the effectiveness of the mentoring?
- What is the quality and impact of mentoring in the learnership?

3.5 Outcomes Based Education

OBE is about acquiring skills and applying theoretical knowledge. It places high value on ability to solve problems, communicate effectively and work in groups, as expressed in the Critical Cross-Field Outcomes (CCFOs) contained in the legislation.

With the enactment of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act No. 27 of 1996), the Department of Education introduced Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) as the methodology for teaching and assessment. OBE was further emphasised in Regulation No. R. 1718, contained in Government Gazette Vol. 402, No. 19640, of 23 December 1998, Regulation Gazette, No. 6397, where OBE became a requirement for assessment in the General Education and Training band. Twelve years later, French (2011) in his article about OBE and policy discusses the announcement of the Minister of Education rather dramatically, the death of OBE at the end of 2009. He neatly captured the major criticism of OBE in saying; 'The poverty of content specification, the weak guidance of progression, the lack of resources to make the approach work and the administrative loads in the management of continuous assessment all needed correction' (p. 7).

While Spady himself (2007), considered the father of OBE, wrote that he considered the OBE implemented in South Africa is not the OBE of his philosophy, French does

balance his criticism with some of the good effects that OBE has had on South Africa's education system; for example, that the intake of students entering university, while equally weak as previous intakes in English literacy and mathematics, were more enquiring, questioning and critical and more capable of taking initiative, and that OBE had encouraged more thinking into assessment as well as adding a valuable facet to education for a democratic society in the entrenchment of the critical cross-field outcomes.

In the realm of workplace education and in the Insurance Sector particularly, OBE has had a positive contribution to make. Qualifications designed by an educational expert, with the input of subject matter experts and delivered according to OBE principles of focusing on assessment using backward design, have produced good learnership graduates whom mentors and managers are keen to employ. At industry level, education and training seems to have had good success in following Spady's (1994) philosophy that OBE 'means starting with a clear picture of what is important for learners to know and be able to do, then organizing the curriculum, instruction, and assessment to make sure this learning ultimately happens' (p. 1).

3.6 Critical Cross-Field Outcomes

According to the SAQA (SAQA Bulletin, May-June 1997), CCFOs are an additional mechanism through which coherence is achieved in the NQF. They describe the qualities that are deemed critical for the development of the capacity for lifelong learning and democratic citizenship and they are mandatory. The application of CCFOs should therefore be visible in the learning.

The reviewed research on learnerships does not explore how CCFOs are translated into the learning that takes place in learnerships. Therefore, asking to what extent CCFOs are evident in the learning is appropriate for my study in order to respond to the research question regarding aspects of the instructional system. See Appendix E for the list of CCFOs.

Observation of classroom learning events and analysis of learning material documents have provided clear evidence of the learning objectives' making explicit links with the

critical cross-field outcomes contained in the unit standard guiding the teaching and learning. Evidence of the learners being able to assimilate and apply the characteristics described in the CCFOs was directly observed.

3. 7 Grant Wiggins's Model of Understanding

For McTighe and Wiggins (2005), the primary goal of education is to develop and deepen students' understanding, and to enable transfer of knowledge and skills. This is also the primary focus in workplace learning. Understanding and transfer, according to these authors, means content needs to be 'unpacked' to identify the big ideas and essential questions. For these authors, understanding cannot be transmitted by 'telling', but is seen when students apply (transfer) their knowledge and skills.

The prescribed methodology of teaching in a learnership requires a 70/30 per cent mix between theory and practice. The prescribed teaching approach is Outcomes Based Education, which employs the design backward methodology of understanding by design upon which this model is based. This will be dealt with in detail in chapter six.

A useful check that learning takes place is provided by McTighe and Wiggins' (2005) six facets of understanding. They conclude that we truly understand when we can explain, interpret, apply, have perspective and can empathize (find value in what others might find odd or implausible); also, when we can perceive (sensitively) and have self-knowledge (prejudices, and habits of mind that shape and impede our own understanding). The experiential learning cycle, especially reflection and action, resonates well with this model.

This concept of facets of understanding was adapted by David Kramer (publication unknown) to describe four tests of learning represented in the model below. Learners can show they know something by answering questions and solving problems, but this alone is not proof that they really understand it. Learners understand when they can reveal knowledge; show insight; demonstrate related skills; and show values and attitudes compatible with the newly developed workplace identity.

The Four Tests of Learning: (SKIVAs)

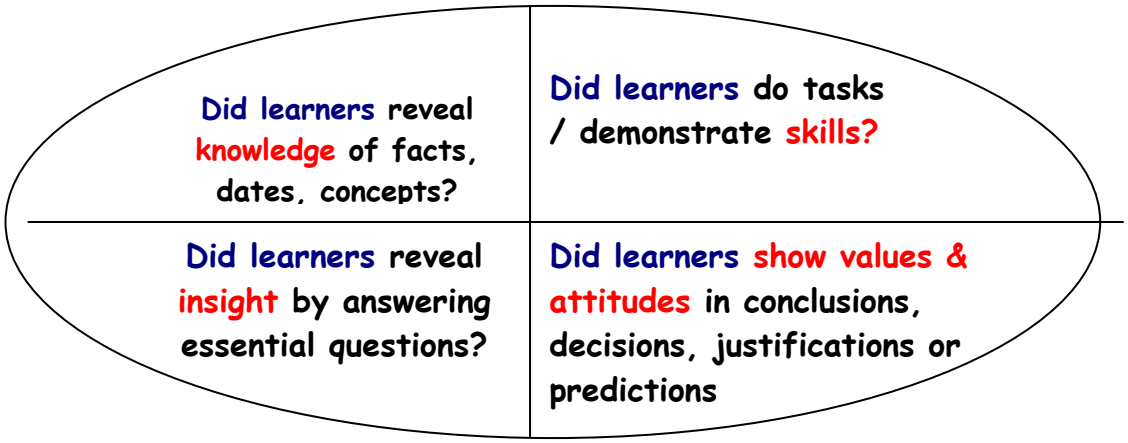


Figure 3: Grant Wiggins' Model of Understanding, adapted by David Kramer

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3. 8 Conclusion

Constructivism and Postmodernism seemed at first to be incompatible companions for framing this study. However, postmodernism itself borrows from modernist discourse to provide ways of thinking, the need for critiquing, a cautioning credulity in grand narratives and a foregrounding of the diversity and contingency of truths, constructed in unique local social contexts. For Usher et al, (1997), 'A postmodern approach to research is not an alternative paradigm, but an injunction to be constantly vigilant, to take nothing for granted in doing research' (p. 208), because qualitative research is both a constructed and a constructing activity, a kind of storytelling.

History indicates there are no perfect enduring answers or solutions to problems. What is possible is for us to aim at a critical awareness of everything that surrounds us in directing our understanding and our actions, in order to record our unique story of how our choice turned out, if well or not well, and why.