

Book Review

Working Knowledge

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Working Knowledge: Work-based Learning and Education Reform, by Thomas R. Bailey, Katherine L. Hughes, and David Thornton Moore (New York and London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004), 256 pgs. ISBN 0-415-94566-6 (pbk.) \$28.95; 0-415-94565-8 (hbk.), \$95.00.

A Nation at Risk was published over twenty years ago, and many identify it as the spark for school reform in American education. One result of this study was the reexamination of school and work. Norton Grubb in “The New Vocationalism”¹ identifies five models in reforming vocational education and gives an overview of the attributes of each model. However, in this short essay he only touches on the pluses and minuses of each evolving approach. One approach includes the School to Work movement (STW). Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, STW, which started with the 1994 School to Work Opportunities Act, has been evolving, and supporters have hailed its achievements while those opposed to it have asked to see data that would support it. *Working Knowledge* by Thomas R. Bailey, Katherine L. Hughes, and David Thornton Moore is an excellent response to the critics of STW, which is refined in *Working Knowledge as Work Based Learning* (WBL).

Working Knowledge is about the application of WBL to school reform. It is a study that was inspired by Stephen Hamilton’s highly influential book, *Apprenticeship for Adulthood*.² However, unlike the Hamilton study, *Working Knowledge* delves deeply into three important questions that will justify WBL as a valid part of the reform movement in public school education, especially on the high school level: Can the school develop enough quality internships to make WBL a significant educational strategy? Are the theoretical claims of the educational benefits of WBL supported by research? Do we have an “on-the-job” pedagogy? These questions are answered in the plethora of data provided throughout the book.

The first chapter of *Working Knowledge* gives an overview of the need for WBL and its value to all students, not just those who do not plan to attend post-secondary education. The supporters of WBL suggest that it goes beyond the skills and knowledge needed to get a job after high school into job exploration, career choices, and the skills all young people will need to make it in the adult world. The chapter ends with the authors establishing the focus of the book to address the WBL critics and to clarify what WBL is all about. For example, can WBL replace academic skills? If it can, which ones? Should WBL be primarily concerned about career education or youth development?

The second chapter discusses the questions that need to be answered if we are to embrace WBL in the schools, and as a part of the reform movement. This chapter provides an excellent overview of learning theory and its relationship to WBL. It begins with Plato, and mentions Descartes, Locke, Watson, Skinner, Durkheim, Parsons, and Dewey among others. This chapter is outstanding and for future teachers is invaluable in showing them how the different learning theories are and are not related to WBL. It concludes with the position that defines knowledge from a constructivist perspective. The chapter then notes how chapters 3–8 will examine the “new modes of thought” that are put forth by the supporters of WBL.

Chapter 3, which is the only chapter not written by Bailey, Hughes, and Moore but by Joshua Haimson and Jeanne Bellotti, discusses students participating in WBL experiences. The principal focus is on student internships, although other school-based work experiences are mentioned.

Also, there are data that examine paid and unpaid internships found through the school, school-based enterprises, and job shadow or worksite tours.

In *Working Knowledge* a major problem of WBL is identified: the cooperation and education of employers. This major issue is thoroughly examined. The problem of employer involvement and education is not insurmountable according to the authors but cannot happen unless employers, parents, teachers, and students are convinced of the value of WBL.

The connection of WBL and academic skills, learning skills and careers, youth development, and “new modes of thought” are examined in chapters 5 through 8. Each section is thorough regarding the negative and positive aspects. The authors explore in chapter 8 what a student will gain in a WBL environment that in most cases may not or cannot be learned in a classroom. The chapter explores new ways of thinking which fall under the notion of contextual learning and that are a result of WBL. Some of these new modes are problem-formation, flexible modes of solution, using the environment, effort-saving, cognitive teamwork, and higher-order thinking. Each new mode is examined and supported by data.

Two chapters are devoted to pedagogy in and outside the classroom. The authors point out the significance of the social organization and the unique knowledge-use of each organization and the difficulties that can be involved.

There is also a discussion of various pedagogical activities that teachers can do in their classes to support WBL experiences and the belief that school-based learning (SBL) needs a school-based component.

The conclusion of *Working Knowledge* is that educational reform is a constant imperative and that with the pressure of NCLB and other standards movements WBL may be in jeopardy. Yet surveys suggest that students are just *making it*. Regrettably, only half of our nation's minority students graduate from high school. WBL may not be *the* answer but rather one answer to addressing these problems.

My one reservation is that *Working Knowledge*, in attempting to be fair and balanced, creates a dualism that forces the WBL pedagogue to strike a balance between the functionalist (transmissive) model and the critical (transformative) model (p. 210). Although much of the research on vocational education is usually divided into either the transmissive model, which asks what schools need to do to prepare students for work, or the transformative model, which is more concerned with empowering students to change work environments, *Working Knowledge* does not take a position on this issue.

Nevertheless, *Working Knowledge* is an excellent study of the data and activities available in the School to Work movement over the past twenty years, and offers an honest examination of what has been done, what is being done, and what needs to be done. It should be required reading for all teachers and future teachers.

Notes

1. Grubb, W. N. (1996, April). "The New Vocationalism." *Phi Delta Kappan*: 535–546.
2. Hamilton, S. (1990). *Apprenticeship for Adulthood*. New York: Free Press.

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