

LEARNING TO BE A 'REAL' WORKER

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NICKY SOLOMON

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Discussions around the 'real' and the 'unreal' are familiar ones within educational institutions as well as in talk about educational institutions. Many of these relate to the idea that schools, TAFE colleges and universities are places that prepare people for the 'real' world of work and of life, rather than part of the 'real' world itself. While of course as educators we know that educational institutions are 'real', at the same time, in explicit and implicit ways we are complicit in producing understandings that help to sustain an oppositional binary that suggests that 'real' world of work is out there while what goes on in universities is getting ready for the 'real' world.

I suggest that the impetus to integrate work and learning (the theme of this series of OVAL seminars) sits within a complicated position around this 'real and unreal' binary. It is a binary that we, educators and researchers, problematise as well as work with. But before I focus on this particular binary, it is important to say that it is not the only binary that frames our work, as it seems as educators we engage with many in our practice. Some examples are: education and training; generic and specific skills; theory and practice; process and product; student centred and teacher centred; research and teaching; mode one knowledge and mode two knowledge; academic knowledge and vocational knowledge; public and private. We seem to enjoy the clarity and distinctiveness of meaning around each of the polar categories, together with the consequent power relations set up between them. However we also know that these stark black and white distinctions do not work very well. Indeed our understandings and experiences of the breakdown of boundaries around knowledges and institutions encourage us to find other ways of understanding and working around these educational binary categories.

The focus of this series of papers - the integration of work and learning - is itself a symptom of the blurring of these institutional and disciplinary boundaries and a perceived need to travel across the binary divide of working and learning. It is a binary that works with the idea that working and learning 'naturally' happen in different institutional spaces involving different identities, regulations and practices. However in the contemporary moment we know that this institutional division is no longer sustainable, and indeed as educators and researchers we work within new discourses and names that disturb this clear demarcation between learning and working. For example we work with terms such as *new vocationalism* and *working knowledge* and these terms are manifest in various pedagogical practices that help to bridge a connection between work and learning. Some bridges in our programs help people to travel across institutional sites, as in for example work placements, sandwich courses, project-based learning and work-based learning programs. Others involve knowledge travelling across textual sites, as in RPL processes and the accompanying portfolio development activities (Chappell et al 2003). These pedagogical practices deliberately place the students in learning practices that cross the institutional borders and that involve the student as both a learner and worker, that is a learner-worker (Solomon 2003; Williams 2004).

Another familiar manifestation of the connection between the 'real world' of work and learning in educational institutions can be seen in the use of 'authentic' (real) materials in the classroom. Here the more 'real' these materials are considered to be, the closer the learning experience is to the 'real' thing. This is integral to progressivist and social constructivist methodologies that seek to work with a less visible pedagogy – one that has less explicit rules and hierarchies, and one that focuses on process, the individual and learning in situ.

While the term 'authentic' seems to be not so prominent in further and higher educational discourses, it seems that traces of the 'real' and 'unreal' discourse are increasingly invoked in the contemporary move to further integrate work and learning. Indeed this binary sits well with the call for universities to 'get real' - a call for universities to reposition themselves so that they relate more to the 'real world'. Indeed they are doing so, as they become more entrepreneurial and act like corporate organizations but also as they increasingly integrate work and learning.

These bridges and hybrid practices involve a complicated movement backward and forward between the real world of work and the not-so real world of educational institutions. Interesting these practices make the boundaries around knowledge and contexts both more and less visible. They are less visible because they do not sit within neat disciplinary structures, but they can also become more visible because they are more contested and therefore more open to scrutiny (Boud & Solomon 2001).

In this seminar I will focus on these complexities around the 'real and unreal' binary by reporting on the emerging findings of an ARC research study. This study is investigating various pedagogical approaches to vocational learning across a number of educational and organisational sites. My attention here is on the contradictory terrain of pedagogical strategies that aim to reduce the distance between learning and the 'real' world and thus between being a learner and being a worker. I will focus on one kind of pedagogical practice, that is simulations, by drawing on interviews, focus groups and observations that were carried out in two educational sites. One site is a private educational institution that aims to produce tourism and hospitality managers. The second is a post-graduate Masters program in Information Technology in a university.

The topic of the ARC project is 'Changing work, changing workers, changing selves: a study of pedagogies in the new vocationalism' and the research questions are: How are the new work requirements reflected in the programs? And what kind of workers (learners) are being constructed in these programs? Not coincidentally, both this topic and the questions are symptoms of and contributions to the discourses that continue to emphasise the importance of integrating work and learning. Indeed these discourses and the potential contribution of the project to them provided the rationale in the funding application.

The sites of the research are: workplaces, VET programs in secondary schools, TAFE colleges, community colleges, private colleges and universities, and the two industries are Tourism & Hospitality and Information Technology (IT). These industries were chosen because these are considered to be important areas of contemporary work opportunity, with each having programs available at each of the levels we wished to study. We also chose them because they have significant differences in 'work-skills' and history. Tourism and hospitality, for example, is widely seen as explicitly concerned with 'people skills', while IT is often seen as a sector concerned with technical rather than 'people' skills. Furthermore, IT is a new industry without a long tradition of training; whereas 'hospitality' has remnants of long-standing training approaches.

The view of pedagogy that we are working with sees pedagogy in its broadest sense and refers to all of the technologies deployed in the service of the program. These technologies include but are not restricted to teaching and learning practices: course notes, university, faculty and organisation web pages, the physical environment, indeed the structure of the course itself. All are pedagogic devices designed to effect changes in learners participating in the program (Chappell forthcoming).

FIRST SITE: BONDI BEACH HOTEL SCHOOL

The School was established over 10 years ago and sells itself as the 'oldest fully residential hotel school in Australia'. At one stage the school was a 'real' hotel and its location is a confirmation of this. It sits adjacent to other hotels in the vicinity of many tourist and recreational sites.

The school offers a range of Certificate III, Diploma, and Advanced Diploma awards in the areas of operations and management in tourism and hospitality. When students complete two and a half years of study they will also attain a Swiss Diploma in Hotel management. While attending the school at different points of time in the day and the week, students attend classes as students, they stay in and as such are also guests in the hotel and they are also the

working staff of the hotel. At the completion of a third year of full-time study students gain a Bachelor of Commerce (Hospitality and Tourism Management) conferred by an external university. However it seems that the school is currently seeking its own accreditation as a higher education institution.

The School was established in 1990 and has approximately 200 students aged between 18 and 25 years old, 85% of whom are international students. We are told that many of these students have privileged backgrounds (the cost is approx \$20,000 per year) and many have had little experience in doing many of the housekeeping tasks required in the practical side of the study. As we are told later this means that a lot of work has to happen to develop in the students 'a 7 day a week operating hotel mindset'.

As described in the brochure: 'The School provides a unique learning environment where students live and study on the campus as both guests and staff of a simulated fully operational hotel – XXX – and as students of a school.'

This description of a simulated yet fully operational hotel where learners are students, guests and employees invites a commentary on the tensions around 'real and not real'. My focus in this section is on the School as a 'simulation' in its play with the real and unreal. This play, and my understanding of it, is influenced by Baudrillard's concept of simulation. He uses this concept to describe the creation of a world of hyperreality where the distinctions between real and unreal are blurred. This creation of the real is made through 'mythological' models which have no connection or origin in reality and where the boundary of image, or simulation, and reality implodes (1983: 2). As Baudrillard says '(i)t is not a question of imitation, nor of duplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself.' (1983: 4) it is a place that 'threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false', between 'real' and 'imaginary' (1983: 5).

So this hotel school is a simulation and as such can be understood as a pedagogical site that attempts to override the real and unreal distinction in order to provide a real learning in situ experience. So how is this hyperreality constructed? What are the signs? And what is this simulation actually producing in terms of the identities of the teachers and the students?

Researchers' reading of the signs

This section gives an account of our experiences in the site drawing attention to the various signs that we noted during our observations and interviews with the principal of the School, a teacher of a particular class, and the students in that class.

Our first impression of the School is that it looks like a hotel with typical external signs and a typical set of hotel building and gardens. We follow the Reception signs and enter the building to be greeted by staff at the front desk. Staff at the desk wear reception staff uniforms. We learn that the staff are also the students (learner-workers) and these students are on the front office roster at this time of the day and in their learning program. At other times they wear other uniforms as they engage in the operational work of all aspects of the hotel – including housekeeping, laundry work, waiting in the restaurants or cooking in the kitchen. We also note that there are classrooms in this operational hotel, and that in class students wear 'school uniforms' (hang on – this is a sign of primary and secondary schools rather than post-compulsory tertiary ones). In the hotel accommodation section there are many noticeboards with local 'what's on' information.

We are told that an important aspect of the simulation with students being both guests and staff (as well as students) is operationalised around the reconciling of each room bills at the end of each week as if the guests-students were departing. Each week begins with a new account as if to mark the arrival of new or returning guests-students.

We notice that all staff-students wear name tags as do the teachers/supervisors. It is also clear that this is a highly disciplined and hierarchical place. For example students are pulled up in corridors if their dress is not quite right or their name tags are missing. A commonly heard

reprimand 'guests can't see your name tag if it's under your jacket'. As we are reminded by the teacher there is 'no point in allowing students to be slack at the school and then get discipline in the *real* world workplace'. This is reflected also in the fact that classroom lessons start at 8am - as Bob, the teacher, explains, 'this is just like work often does in the industry.' However this sits alongside other more school-like disciplinary practices. For example we are also told that students start with 100 points and lose points for infractions, such as drinking on the job and arriving late to class. If they miss a class, they are expected to make arrangements to 'make up' within two weeks or they will be asked to show cause. If they are inappropriately groomed in class, they are sent away to shave or change their clothes. Perhaps this is about instilling in them the consequences of missing their shifts or being ungroomed in the workplace.

Furthermore during corridor exchanges hierarchical differences are affirmed in the various forms of address. Students and staff are called Mr or Mrs, while we researchers are introduced as either Professor or Doctor. We are a little uncertain how to address the teacher/s, and whether or not we should act in the spirit of the simulation. Invariably though we fail and use first names. It seems as outsiders, only momentarily being in the inside, we are not completely caught up in the simulation. But at the same time, when in the classrooms we experience the place as a school, and while in the corridors and in the gardens we experience the place as a hotel. Also we experience Bob as a teacher in the classroom, and as a hotel manager in the corridor.

We are invited to lunch in the hotel restaurant with the principal of the School and the teacher. In many ways our lunch has many of the signs of other restaurants - a booking has been made, our name is crossed off the reservation list, we are shown to our table, a waiter comes with menu. The restaurant is quite full as this is one of the two places in the hotels in which the students (in school uniforms) can eat. However other signs are not connected to our understandings of and experiences with restaurants. One such sign is the excessive nervousness of the waiter-student. This is no doubt encouraged by our presence and the watchful eye of Bob, who inevitably draws attention to any slip-up with the service. But there are other hyperreality signs. One appears during the serving of drinks. Our waiter uses a cork-screw to open what looks like a bottle of wine and then proceeds to pour the 'alcohol' into our glasses. But it is lemon and red cordial and not white and red wine. Another example of this hyperreality is on the menu. It looks like a menu except for one small detail, and that is the cost of each item is in an unfamiliar currency. It is not \$A or \$US or even Euros, but as in Club Med kind of resorts, the School uses its own currency. This currency does not have a 'real' hard form, such as coins or notes, but nevertheless has an accounting function.

We spend many hours observing several classes as well as the practical assessment in housekeeping and front office work. One particular incident that we observed in a class illustrates some of the complexities around the combined positioning of these learner-workers, and the accompanying tensions and instability experienced by the students. After our lunch we sat in the back of a classroom. The class was interrupted by an employee of the hotel school asking for two students to 'step outside'. They did and in fact did not return. Those remaining in the class were told the reason for this abrupt departure. A function was to be held that evening for some Austrian visitors. This 'real' event was to have 'real' wine (unlike our lunch). Apparently the wine was delivered 2 days ago and according to the deliverer was left at reception. At that time a number of the students in class were the front office workers. However the wine was not to be found and the 'suspect' students were asked to help to track down the missing wine. Everyone (including us) felt uncomfortable if not a little guilty. We discovered at a later date that the problem had been resolved and in fact no-one in the hotel was found to be responsible as it seems the deliverer hadn't delivered the wine in the first place.

In our observation of Bob's classroom teaching there are numerous examples of a secondary school classroom disciplinary regime. For example he chides a student for reading something other than class document and a student asks permission to go to the toilet. At the same time

however the teacher often talks to students as if they aren't secondary school students, eg. 'you are aspiring to a career in hotel management.... I don't see students sitting in this room, I see employees, potential employees, expected to reach benchmarks as per industry expectations.'

Each lesson is closed by the teacher with the words 'thank you ladies and gentlemen'.

These are just some examples of the signs in the hotel school that we, as researchers, observed that have helped to produce a hyperreality where the distinction between the real and unreal are blurred. In the next section I will explore the experiences of the people living/working/learning in this simulated operational hotel.

We interviewed the principal and a teacher (who was also our guide) and held a focus group with the students to explore the realities of their experiences in this site. We found that although the distinction between real and unreal was blurred in almost every pedagogic aspect of the site and the curriculum, distinctions between the real and unreal were nevertheless constantly invoked and reproduced. And frequently these were used to highlight the fact that the BBHS was not a 'real' hotel but was a school and this school, in spite of itself, was experienced as all schools do, as a place that was not the real world, but a world that was preparing people for the real world.

Teachers' reading of the simulation

John, the principal, had previously been an academic and retains his title as a professor. In the interview he spoke positively and optimistically about the experience and outcomes of the School. When asked about the philosophy and practice of the BBHS he draws heavily on the language of educators and familiar theorisations to do with the relationship of theory and practice:

I think the real driver of those programs is to try and utilise what I call the realistic work environment. In other words it's the integration of theory and the practice. The thing in some ways that drives them in the practice which you can then relate to theory to as opposed to of the other way around which is where you teach the theory and then you say 'well now we'll have a go at practising it'. So what we do is that we do literally start the practice and the theory at the same time. So that they go through, as they're going through the practical application, then they're actually receiving the underpinning theory as part and parcel of that. we're always trying to make sure that the relationship that is built between what they're doing in the practice and how that can be used as a case example for the theory.

At times John spoke 'realistically' about the complexities of this kind of pedagogical practice, eg. 'That's what we try and do. I wouldn't say we achieve it all the time but that's what we try and do.'

Bob, the teacher presented quite a complex picture of the School. This complexity is likely to have surfaced for a number of reasons. Firstly, individually and collectively, we were 'with Bob' across many different aspects of his teaching and middle management work - in his office, in the classroom, doing the on-the-job assessment, at lunch etc. Secondly these many different aspects of his work meant that he was experiencing first-hand all the complexities of both the simulation and the operationalisation of the hotel school. Unlike the principal, Bob was playing out many identities and at the same time these contributed to his own struggles with his career directions and professional uncertainties.

The concept of a simulated fully operational hotel learning experience sits very comfortably with Bob. He celebrates the *reality principle* behind this pedagogical practice.

There's scope for simulating quite closely a *real* context in the sense that next door here at the front desk, that's as live as it can be. You're answering a *real* switchboard. So you'll have the Director of Tourism, Training Australia ringing up wanting to speak

to (the principal). How much more *real* can you get than that? They are dealing with *real* money, they're dealing with *real* guest complaining about why is that photocopying charged to my account? Which from the experience point of view is conducive to I guess nurturing those dispositions, or developing those attitudes. (19)

Bob's belief in this kind of learning experience in part explains his concern with the imminent shift to becoming a higher education institution. He believes that this move threatens the current simulation set up 'I find it concerning to lose sight of what it is and what potential, um, maybe a little myopic. (263)

From our observations we were interested in the seemingly seamless identity shifts played out by the students-guests-workers and by him as a manager-teacher. In Bob's response to a question about any tensions in these switches he was certain that there were no tensions. His explanation is that in industry work such shifts are just 'normal':

I find it quite easy to flex from one to the other... you know there's 15 or 16 years of industry experience behind that because the same thing will happen in a hotel. You're a guest and I then have to flex and be the staff member. (115)

I guess what ultimately I would like to be able to say is that the students see me as a leader or a manager rather than a teacher or the person who assigns rooms in the hotel. (121)

When asked how he experiences the students 'when they're out there at the front desk do you experience them as learners, learner-workers, or as ...' (126) Bob's immediate response is:

Learners. No, very much as learners. Very much as learners, but with the framework of the industry benchmarks.... As in these are the standards, this is what we expect in a hotel, whether it be grooming, appearance, words that come out of your mouth and so forth. I will coach you. We'll coach you. We'll coach and we'll develop that skill. (129)

One of Bob's complaints though is related to this learner identity. He says that as students they don't capitalise on the opportunities of the place, and while they are always concerned about the money it costs 'some students are not willing to get the value for money (103) and have a mindset 'well I'm at school, you tell me what I need to know, don't tell me anything else, just tell me what I need to know'. (103)

This 'reality' of high fees creates a tension around the worker aspect of the learner-worker identity in this simulation practice. As Bob says, 'You're constantly getting "well I'm paying \$20,000 dollars" thrown in your face from that value point of view.' (93) Bob knows that the reality of being a paid employee rather than a paying student contributes to different kinds of work performances. And it is this tension that legitimises the inclusion of a work placement component in all the programs. Students complete 2 six month semesters of work placement in Australia or overseas and during this placement students receive full award wages.

On the whole, however, Bob's description of the school is a positive one. While he reveals some problems, he celebrates the simulated pedagogy and what offers the students. However, Bob is in state of professional crisis and while he can work easily with the identity shifts in the simulated fully operational hotel, he is uncertain about his own identity. His explanations for this draw on the fairly conventional divide between working in real work in industry and working in an educational institution.

Bob has moved between work in hotels and in schools for the last 15 years or so. He has a Bachelor of Further Education & Training and has been at BBHS for the last 6 years. Recently he informed us that he has just left BBHS to work in a 'real' hotel in the Northern Territory. However in the interview he expressed concern about his employment chances in the 'real' world. This is based on his view that 'the longer you stay out of the industry, how

marketable are you really back in the real world?' (25) Education and training distinctions come to the fore in his responses:

I am feeling trapped .. industry tends to think that having been back six years, that you're an educator, not a trainer. And that's a mindset, that's a perception type of thing. (49)

as much as a place like this is comparable with an industry context I think some operators tend to look at it as a school, and you wouldn't survive in the 'real' world. So that's the perception.. (51)

In response to a suggestion that this hotel school experience might be useful in working as a learning and development person in a hotel, Bob, says:

Oh very much so. I believe that. I believe that in myself. Whether the industry would recognise that's a question mark. From the point of view of you're ... let's say, the school, it's education rather than training. (57)

I think there's a perception that you opt out to go into education. You can't hack it in the *real* world. So that's the perception. Sadly. I don't agree with it. I don't condone it but I think .. (58)

Currently Bob is doing a Masters in Educational Management. His reason for doing subjects in HRM is that he hopes they would give him 'some degree of leverage in making a transition back to a *real* world, not that this isn't *real*. The other world... (71)

At the same time he says that industry experience is integral to good teaching in this school and talks about teachers who haven't 'practised in that field of hotel operation' (73) His rationale for this is:

The clientele we have here for the most part are looking for an applied experience. They're for the most part not greatly academically inclined and therefore want the real world application. And also the essence I guess of the qualification is that it's applied.... I couldn't imagine not being able to step into the room without that anecdotal, without that real life dimension.

Students' reading of the simulation

So how do the students experience this simulated fully operationally hotel? In our observations they appeared to move in and out of the various identities with relative ease. In classrooms they behaved like students, some even displaying some typical behaviours of reluctant students. When working at reception they behaved like front office workers, although when waiting at our table they seemed less at ease. However these appearances did not necessarily translate into a satisfying learning experiences. During the focus group discussions quite a different picture emerged around their engagement with this pedagogy that attempted to conflate the real with the 'unreal'. Indeed the discussion provided a site for expressing many issues around the unreality of the school compared to the real world of work.

Many students expressed an unambiguous view that the simulation failed and their reasons primarily focused on the fact that it wasn't real. For example, when asked whether they think that the simulation prepares or doesn't prepare them for work, the answer is:

It doesn't really... it's a waste of time. (143)

I don't think it works (152)

I think what we know is simple compared with the real world. (202)

You go out to the industry and you start doing the stuff and they go, 'we don't do that, just do it like a quicker way' (156).

there are actually real guests in the industry. I mean here it's your peers and stuff (161)

Other students however express more ambivalence drawing attention to some of its strengths as well as limitations, for example:

I think the idea of the simulated environment is excellent and I think probably you would find the practical classes wouldn't work without it because you wouldn't take it as seriously. Not that possibly people do anyway. But I don't know. I mean it's worlds apart from the industry. (163)

Group work activities are a feature of the classroom work, as in many classrooms today. Reasons for doing so are often related to a particular approach to teaching and learning, but in addition a frequently cited explanation for doing group work is to learn how to work in a team as team-work is understood to be a characteristic of contemporary work. However the *real* world of the classroom and its relationship to a *real* work rationale doesn't hold much weight for the students. As a *real* student one aspect of that reality is achieving a good grade, which some feel is not possible with group work.

one of the problems that we've experienced this year with the whole simulated environment this .. with group work for example. Like our grades is dependent on these group works and you can't rely on yourself anymore. You have to rely on everyone else. If this was the industry you wouldn't have to take that someone didn't do their part of the job, because that person would be fired. But it doesn't work like that at the school.. (163)

if you're working with a person, there's an assumed level of knowledge and experience that you're entering at, so then there's mutual respect and its an environment where you want to help each other out.. here, I mean, I mean in a sense, I don't think it's a very competitive environment, but in a sense I guess we're competing and it's ... I don't know, it just doesn't work I don't think (195)

A number of the dissatisfactions such as these are expressed and reflect a confusion to do with the different realities of workplaces and schools, which are not overridden in the simulation. Some feel that this confusion is overcome during their work placements when 'real learning happens'. Some claim that the work place 'helps (one) to become more responsible' (316) and 'for me I just always thinking I come here and I pay money for doing this but if I go out for work I get money for doing this. '(391) They seem to have clear ideas about the distinctions between being a consumer/customer and being an employee.

In school they don't think of themselves as workers. They are simply 'students', but in workplace they see themselves differently:

half a student and half a worker. (403)

you are an employee but also we are learning ... yeah we learn something from there. Yeah still teach you if you do something wrong (416).

The students in the School have multiple identities and positions – as learners, workers, guests and consumers – along with the different identities and positions in their work placements – half worker-half students. They are located in different relations of power in each. They have to negotiate a multiplicity of identities and power relations in the simulated environment which they wouldn't necessarily encounter in a more traditional educational institution or workplace. Their identities in this site are more unstable and perhaps this creates much of their unease and dissatisfaction.

SECOND SITE: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM IN A UNIVERSITY

The focus of the second pedagogical practice in this paper is a Networking subject in a Masters Program in a Information Technology Faculty in a university. In this subject the teaching and learning also attempt to 'simulate' the real. However this simulation is quite different to the one discussed above. Unlike the BBHS it is just one subject that is an elective within an 8 subject Masters course work program. The program is not a whole simulated experience nor is the institution. The signs indeed are the signs of a contemporary yet conventional university. Nevertheless the following discussion also draws attention to the complexities that present themselves in pedagogies that attempt to invoke the real world in classrooms or at least to minimise the distance between the real world of work and the other world that goes on in universities.

The Networking subject is in a regular program that is part of the usual repertoire of course offerings in one of the five ATN universities. As one of the 'new' universities, the degree offerings have been shaped by a different history and a different positioning to the older universities. The university's image lies in its reputation for practice-based teaching. It describes itself new and progressive, non-elitist and egalitarian, with a distinctive focus on professional practice. The university also foregrounds the importance it place of partnerships, alignments and networks with industries and organizations in both the public and private sectors.

All IT programs involve a considerable amount of industry connections. For example there is an industry training year in all undergraduate programs. As we are told by the head of programs, work experience plays a major part as the aim is to provide 'high levels of industry experiences' and 'genuine practical experience' (28). One of the reasons given for this is that 99.9% of the intake 'comes here to get a passport to practice, not a passport to further research' (29). Furthermore we are told the students study IT 'because of the job prospects and the money' (89).

When asked to elaborate on the reasons for a strong emphasis on industry and employability, one of the explanations offered is that the industry itself is 'still struggling to establish a set of underpinning concepts and research methods and approaches that are its own. It is at the confluence of other disciplines where a lot of its makeup is borrowed. And because it doesn't have that absolutely accepted theoretical base then practice is what binds it altogether... Industry experience is important to the material that we teach and the kind of student that we turn out.' (19), for example 'we consciously build teamwork into our curriculum... the teamwork content is deliberate because that's how the industry works.' (101)

Nevertheless the connections between the programs and work in the IT industry is under considerable debate within the Faculty. For example the head of programs is keen to encourage an understanding that Faculty courses are very different to skill-based training provision that can be immediately applied to work. He explains that although the emphasis is on technological aspects of IT work there is a distinct difference between the IT courses offered in TAFE and those in the university. It is 'not just skills but underpinning theories of, for example, programming.' (45)

Tensions around a 'vocational' focus surfaced during an interview with a group of senior staff which triggered a heated discussion about vocational versus general education. One member considered the industry orientation to be its strength, while another expressed strongly the view that higher education should maintain the tradition of producing independent critical thinkers 'who are active citizens in a democracy.' He suggested that the faculty should consider offering foundation units in communication and international politics, but this was

opposed with an argument around the need to respond to the expressed desires of IT students who want job and are not interested in cultural or philosophical studies.

The subject of our research is a networking one. It is an online accredited package that has been developed by a global software company. Specific training is required by those who want to buy and use the package. The use of the package in the faculty is contested. As indicated by a member of staff in a new position designed to support and improve the quality of teaching and learning in the faculty, programs such as this raise a number of questions: How far along the corporatisation of the learning process path should they go? How do they include and exclude other organizations? He points out some additional problems with the use of commercial products such as their short shelf life given the speed with which the technical details change and the fact that the high quality of the materials highlights the 'shabbiness' of other teaching materials. At the same time he indicates that the faculty cannot put the time and resource into 'that sort of quality of delivery.'

The debate about this Networking subject extends beyond its commercial base to a concern with its content, that is networking. The subject teacher, Susan, defends it fiercely, commenting that, 'computing science people who go down the networking path, (are) considered as belonging to the evil empire'. Her explanation is that this critique is a symptom of academics' fear of industry and this should be offset by evidence that demonstrates the high student demand for practical lab sessions. She believes that the reduction in lecture mode teaching of networking is an appropriate one as, from her perspective, lab sessions are a simulation of training.

Again here we have the term 'simulation' and we are told that the value of the labs is that they simulate the work situation, the work place and the work conditions. They do this by giving students tasks of setting up a network in a fixed amount of time with a lot of pressure and this give the students an idea what it is like to work in the industry.

Susan is an accredited trainer for this subject and as indicated above is clearly a strong advocate of the subject and its pedagogy. She says that the very hands-on training required for her accreditation was invaluable. Firstly 'it sort of suddenly made me realise that you really have to be a 'doing' person. I think you have to learn by doing.' (41) and after all that's what industry wants (75). But also secondly it has given her 'more street credibility (49), and it make her feel 'up-to-date' (51). But above all her positive comments on the program come down to the market place 'this is what the students want. I mean we're just beating the students off with sticks. They want to do the networking. They love the networking. You know, we recently increased the hours from three hours to four hours and they all want that and they all come in and .. I mean we have 24/7 access for the postgraduates and they're there all night. And the certification has a value in the *real* world... it's nice to have not only a degree but also certification.' (77)

Interestingly Susan does reveal some problems with the program but believes these are not intrinsic to its pedagogy. The main problem for her is that the program fails to teach the students to be responsible 'the students steal all our cables, they cheat unmercifully, they refuse to take responsibility if something goes wrong' (137). While one might understand this as very 'real' behaviour, Susan feels that more time to practice in the lab would address this.

One of the other advantages of this subject for Susan is that it helps students to learn about team work. She encourages them to bond as a team and talks to them as a team/group rather than as individuals and also brings into the class examples from her experience working with a team of people in a bank.

Researchers' observations

The classroom is described as a laboratory and indeed there are no conventional rows of seats but each student sits at a desk in front of a computer. Somehow I imagined it to look different to other computer laboratories — many of which are scattered around the university for use by all students regardless of their discipline. The only sign of difference is a number of routers for practical networking activities located at the back of the class.

The class is held for four hours in the evening. This is atypical as evening classes tend to run for 2 or 3 hours. But typically as in other classes students wander in late probably due to work commitments. The majority of students are male and of Asian backgrounds, and this is a reflection of the gender and cultural background make-up of other evening post-graduate IT courses. This is the first class of the semester yet there are no introductions. This means we do not know the place or kind of work that students are participating in.

Susan, the teacher presents as a conventional teacher. This can be seen in her frequent calling of attention to the students and the frequent giving of praise (such as 'beautiful' and 'clap the winning group'). Susan opens the class typically in that she shows learning objectives and their relationship to previous subjects and positions students in a conventional classroom way, always throwing questions at them to test their knowledge, particularly of technical terms. There is an emphasis on amount of work that is to be completed outside of class hour involving informal tests plus accessing notes and information on various web sites. Attention is drawn to the need to be self-motivated and self-regulated but at the same time the teacher is a strong disciplinarian using language that is full of cautions.

Students' experience

The impact of the real world of work was predictably seen in the difficulty we had in recruiting students for the focus group. While the students accepted our presence as observers in their class, their work commitments and/or their 'real' lack of interest in our research meant that only a few agreed to participate in the focus group discussions.

Nevertheless the discussion did raise a number of issues relevant to our interest in the relationship of the world of work with this kind of simulation. Predictably there was a range of opinions, but in the main, positive comments about the subject were overshadowed by negative ones (this is likely to be a characteristic of focus groups). Most complaints centred on practical matters, such as lack of time for practice, an inability to access the lab outside of the 4 hour class and at times the unreliability of the equipment.

We are just given like a certain time but we always have problem with not, not our knowledge but some problem with the equipment or some other problems.

Some experienced the value of the simulation citing examples such as 'solving the problem with the network (in the lab) even if it's a simple problem is like the situation at work for IT persons to find out like why how this machine is not running' (84). But others suggested that it is not completely like work, and expressed their views of some of the limitations of the simulation pedagogy. For example:

you see our lab is always like you see the router on one rack but in *real* situation probably one in Hong Kong and the other one in Sydney. It is quite different (86).

in the *real* situation you might need to lease a line from Telstra which is different as, the problem is different. You might involve other people like Telstra technician in the project. But you don't really have this situation (88).

they try to set up the situation. It is not quite correct. (90)

The experience is more important actually. We didn't have a chance to accumulate that in our lab.

I think they trying hard to simulate to the work situation but I think the way is not very correct. I think in *real* situation you wouldn't have that problem. (94)

Other students however draw attention to the strengths of the simulation, eg.

(unlike elsewhere such as lectures where you don't touch the hardware here 'they provide me like way to try to use those hardware, it really, I think it is really useful for the future. (98)

for networking .. important to have practice.. if you don't practise you won't actually understand it. The theory sounds like something from another world. (103)

if it is just theory you can imagine that it all runs very smooth but where I go to do it is a different story. (105)

it is hard to get a chance to practise in your *real* work. (109)

36 here at (the university) you can learn something you can straight apply to work immediately

It is clear from the above discussion that the nature of the simulation in this program is a different one to that discussed in the first site. It is only a small part of a program and as such is more contained not only in time, but also in terms of what it is trying to do. The focus is not on producing workers. After all these students are workers and in fact their work practices are not explicitly brought into class. The focus is on 'real' and specific technical knowledge and skills, and in doing so there is a simulation of technical problems, the physical location, and team work. Yet even with this more limited promise, there is significant questioning on how 'real' it is. It seems that by taking on the 'real' in our keenness to integrate work and learning, we immediately (perhaps unwittingly) draw attention to how 'unreal' it is.

SOME PROVISIONAL AND LIMITED CONCLUSIONS

How do people learn to be real workers and do real work?

Putting aside (temporarily) the problematic around what is a real work and what is a real worker, there are many teaching and learning practices in educational institutions that attempt to help people to learn to be a real worker. This paper focused on one such practice examining two different simulations. There are many pedagogical understandings and intentions around simulations which are not addressed in this paper. However from our understanding and interpretation of this kind of practice in two sites, it seems that educators believe that a simulation experience educates student for the 'real world' of work and in doing so helps them to become 'real' workers. But as these case studies illustrate, simulation does not simulate the real. Student perceptions of simulation is that it is 'unrealistic', compared with industry placement, or if they are employed, with the workplace. But why should we be surprised at this and the accompanying student dissatisfaction with the simulation experience? After all, simulations are not 'real' by their own definition.

Maybe it would be better to understand simulation on its own terms, that is as a discursive practice which produces its own world which is a hybrid of work and learning and whose conditions and problematics are peculiar to itself, rather than being present in either a 'purely' educational site or work site. This shifts the analysis from that of a failure of simulation to simulate the real and therefore how it might be improved in order to become 'more realistic', to an analysis of the simulated world itself, with its complex and contradictory terrain that is generated out of its constitutive conditions and what it purports to achieve. Perhaps this kind of analysis could be built into the educational experience. Rather than being concerned that

such an analysis would disrupt the hyperreality (which is in any case inevitable), a consideration of the knowledges, identities and power relations within the particular reality that is being produced, could be productive.

But perhaps the problem is with the term 'simulation' itself. Even talking about it as such locates it in a binary where it the 'other' of the 'real'. Perhaps if educators want to bring work and learning closer together and undo binaries between education and training, theory and practice etc, then simulation shouldn't be invoked. The term is bound up in hierarchies of inferiority and superiority where the 'real' (and perhaps relevance) is constructed as the world of commerce and employment against the 'unreality' (and perhaps irrelevance) of education, the whole notion of 'real' and the idea of certain worlds as real and thus privileged and valorised needs to be troubled rather than constantly mobilised (Garrick & Rhodes 1998).

Given the fact that the rhetoric of the 'real' and the 'authentic' is seductive in terms of its promise for jobs, and real work skills, we need to further interrogate the work that does the term 'real' currently does. For students it seems to offer a promise of learning that has immediate relevance and for educators it sits comfortably with the current attention given to linking education with work as well as with an attention to the significance of situated knowledge, situated learning and multidisciplinary knowledge. However in doing this paper (and indeed in doing our research project) our interest in the 'real' and its relationship with the integration of learning and work raises a number of pedagogical issues and questions. And it is with these questions that this paper closes... for the moment.

What is a 'real' worker? What is 'real' work?

How do people learn to be real workers and do real work?

In different educational sites, what kind of pedagogies are appropriate for preparing workers for work?

In our search for pedagogies that override conventional binaries and that work with multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge, how do we engage with disciplinary knowledge?

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