MODELLING WORK-BASED PEDAGOGY FOR EXPANSIVE LEARNING

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Abstract
Collaboration between higher education and working life has probably never been as highlighted as it is today. From the perspective of education, the core of the collaboration is in learning and developing students' working-life competences. Work-based learning has widened this perspective from students' learning to all collaboration participants' learning, including teachers and working-life partners. The benefits of work-based learning relate to unifying the theoretical knowledge with practice, deep learning and developing working-life competences. Still, there are also some challenges concerning this kind of learning, which often happens in multidisciplinary networks.

This presentation is based on my dissertation study (2019) and to its third research question which cast light on the functionality of the work-based pedagogy model and its pedagogical elements seen from the perspective of the key participants. The research question was formulated How did the cultural event test and challenge the work-based pedagogical model of vocational higher education and enhance participants’ learning? The dissertation study tested one example of work-based pedagogical model in developing process of cultural event. The event was emerged from strategic partnership between University of Applied Sciences and city theatre, and it was developed further in wide regional network.

The methodological and ontological framework for an abductive analysis was cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), particularly the concepts of the object of activity, contradictions, dimensions of expansion and a zone of expansion. The data consisted students’, teachers’ and working-life partners’ interviews. Interviews were semi-structured or open and ad hoc. Audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim. It was analyzed how the contact lessons and guiding clinics mediated students' developmental assignments and how the model oriented the participants towards the shared object of the cultural event. As a result, a comparison of two development assignments demonstrated that even a sophisticated implementation of a work-based pedagogic (WBP) model cannot be but partial, if the working-life assignment lacks a solid knowledge orientation basis that connects between the theory and practice. In addition, collective implementation of the WBP model formed a “zone of expansion” that beyond the participant-specific features of expansive learning demonstrated the need for the expansion of pedagogical vision, pedagogical mediation, relational expertise and crossdisciplinarity.

Keywords: cultural-historical activity theory, contradictions, expansive learning, object of activity, work-based learning.

1 INTRODUCTION
Recent pedagogical discussion in Finland has highlighted close collaboration between education and working life. Vision for higher education and research in 2030 (Ministry of Culture and Education 2018), presented by the ministry of education and culture, guides higher education to find new ways to conduct education, and research, development and innovation activities in closer collaboration with working life. The vision also sets goals to increase the number of higher educated people and the competence level of the population.

There have been several curricula and pedagogical renewing in Finnish education system from the basic education to higher education for the past couple of years. These renewing indicate that we are in the middle of the pedagogical revolution, based on the facts about digitalization and globalization that change the ways of working and the capabilities required from the employees. Professional expertise in a traditional sense is not enough for the success in working life. We need also working-life competences, or generic skills, including creativity and innovation capacity, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, learning to learn, and communication and collaboration (Binkely et al. 2012; Jääskelä et al. 2018; Salonen et al. 2017).
How these working-life competences are possible to teach is the big question. This question leads us to the relation between the theory and practice. The dilemma between school and life, theory and practice is not new. Already Dewey (1916/2008) presented in the beginning of the 20th century that the only adequate training for occupations is training through occupations. Although there has been development in education systems and pedagogy through the decades, the gap between the education and working life still exists (Edwards 2011; Engeström 1987/2015; Miettinen & Peisa 2002; Stetsenko & Vienna 2009; Stetsenko 2015). Narrowing this gap seems to be especially demanding in higher education where the operations are based on academic tradition and ways to learn. We need more research on the processes and learning in the complex and heterogenous networks of education and working life, to be able to understand and to develop them further.

Work-based pedagogy emphasising the value of experience, reflection, and community as a means of learning (Burke et al. 2009; Grunman et al. 2013) offers an interesting approach to narrow this gap between theory and practice. Its value at the personal level lies in facilitating personal growth and development (Lester & Costley 2010) and in promoting deep learning (Baeten et al. 2010). Pedagogically, the essential point in work-based learning is to guide students in analysing the relationship between their experiences and the theoretical content of their studies.

In my dissertation (Kuoppala 2019) I tested one work-based pedagogical model in context of heterogeneous regional network. The work-based pedagogical model was created in Finnish University of Applied Sciences (further UAS), Cultural Management degree programme. The model was composed of three main elements: contact lessons, developmental assignments, and guiding clinics. The purpose of contact lessons was to offer students the theoretical basics of the course. Developmental assignments were authentic working-life cases related to the objectives of the course and offering a practice context for the theoretical basics. The idea of the guiding clinics was to combine the course’s theoretical and practical contents. Students were able to work on their developmental assignments under their teachers’ guidance. The guiding clinics were intended to unify the objectives of the course/module with the working-life project and the student’s personal goals. The student's personal goals were described in a personal study plan.

The new pedagogical model under research was intended to change teaching and learning practices at three levels: learning assignment; schedule; and assessment (Havukainen 2007; Kuoppala 2007). The focus of the developmental learning assignments was transformed from offering theoretical knowledge to applying academic knowledge in authentic working-life contexts. Developmental assignments were in most cases worked on in student groups. The principle was that working on real cases would strengthen motivation, promote working-life competences, offer valuable working-life networks, and enhance deep learning (e.g. Baeten et al. 2010).

Cultural-historical activity theory, further CHAT, as an ontological and methodological framework of this study provides conceptual means to apply a dynamic learning-network approach to complex working life projects. Cultural-historical activity theory is historically rooted in the works of Vygotsky (1978), Leon’t’ev (1978) and Ilyenkov (1977/2008). For exploring the work-based learning, the concepts of object of activity and expansive learning are used. The object of activity is seen as a generator of attention, motivation, effort, and meaning (Engeström 1987/2015; Engeström & Kerosuo 2007; Kaptelinin 2005; Leont’ev 1978; Nardi 2005; Virkkunen 2006). The object of activity is a collectively constructed ideal and material entity, whose purpose is to satisfy human needs (Engeström 1987/2015). The object of activity is not a stable goal, but a complex and contradictory assembly of social and economic relationships and materials, which makes it essential concept also in context of learning. It requires a division of labour and utilisation of a variety of specialised expertise (Miettinen 2005).

Expansive learning represents processes in which learners are involved in constructing and implementing a new, complex object for their activity under transformation (Engeström 1987/2015). In expansive learning learners are learning something that is not yet there (Engeström 2016). The theory of expansive learning is epistemologically rooted in Marxist dialectic (Engeström & Sannino 2010). It places primacy on communities as learners, on the transformation of culture, and on the formation of theoretical concepts that form the orientation basis for everyday activities. Arising in part from these aspects of learning, the theory of expansive learning has been especially useful in cases where traditional learning theories seem not to explain the transformation and activity of workplaces (Engeström 2016).

The research case was the developing and producing process of new cultural event emerged from the strategic partnership between University of Applied Sciences and Theatre. The process offered a
learning environment for the students of the UAS, providing topics for their developmental assignments of speech communication and marketing. In this presentation I will focus on the third research question of dissertation (Kuoppala 2019) How did the cultural event test and challenge the work-based pedagogical model of Vocational Higher Education (VHE) and enhance the participants’ expansive learning? With this research question I scrutinise the functionality of the work-based pedagogical (WBP) model of the Cultural Management Education (CME) programme in the context of the Mikkeli Meets Russia (MMR) cultural event. The sub-questions are:

1. What are the challenges faced and development ideas created in the implementation of the work-based pedagogical model?

2. In the light of students’, teachers’, and working-life partners’ reflection, what is the expansive learning potential of the work-based pedagogical model implemented?

The data of this analysis include two students’ group interviews, one teacher’s pair interview, and two one-on-one working-life partners’ interviews. Interviews were semi-structured or open and ad hoc. They were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (Creswell 1998).

2 Methdology

The three perspectives were explored based on the interviews of a small group of participants. Because of the size of the sample, individually analysed perspectives would not have been representative of the larger groups of the project. Instead, I analysed the perspectives as one unit of data aiming to create a dialogue between the key learner groups, the students, the teachers, and the working-life representatives.

The analysis centres on the three basic elements, the challenges, development ideas and object of learning, of the WBP model of MUAS/CME. The analysis also distinguishes the two course assignments, the marketing plan of the course on marketing and the briefing plan of the speech communication course.

The analysis was twofold: first, by using the coding system of the Atlas.ti program, I analysed statements about the challenges and development ideas regarding the WBP model. Concerning the challenges, the typical statements were ‘It was a bit challenging…’ or ‘For me it was difficult to…’. Development ideas were instead expressed typically as ‘Next time…’ or ‘In the future…’. I then examined the topics to which the challenges and development ideas were related, and which topics were shared with different interviewee groups.

In the second phase of analysis, I analysed statements about learning experiences, which revealed the object of learning (Leont’ev 1978; Engeström 1987/2015; Miettinen 2005). Typically, the analysed answers included expressions such as ‘I learned that…’. The analysis proceeded by categorising the topics to which the statements related.

3 Results

The detailed results of the analysis are presented in my dissertation (Kuoppala 2019), in this presentation I summary the key findings. The analysis was conducted by exploring the students’ developmental assignments connected to the new cultural event MMR, the briefing plan, and the marketing plan. The assignments were analysed because they materialised the implementation of the WBP model. I synthesise the findings to assess the WBP model and its implementation from two theoretical perspectives: 1) the WBP model as solving the dilemma of school learning and 2) the WBP model as enhancing the expansive learning of students, teachers, and working-life partners.

3.1 Challenges and development ideas

Students across these two study groups largely agreed about the challenges and development ideas relating to the MMR and developmental assignments, but there were also differences concerning implementation. A challenge for the students was to deal with the confusing relationship between the content of contact lessons and the developmental assignment. Another challenge was the ambiguity and lack of information concerning the MMR event. Students also raised the assessment of the course’s outcome. The marketing plan students also mentioned the lack of feedback concerning working life and the workload entailed in having another course based on the WBP model running simultaneously.
The challenges also for the teachers were the loose connection between the theory content of contact lessons and the practical application of the developmental assignment, the unclear objectives of the course, and the ambiguity of the MMR event. There were clearly similarities with the students’ challenges. The relationship between theory and practice is a classic dilemma the WBP model was intended to resolve. WBP is a promising way to solve the epistemological problems of work simulations in schools, as well as sensitising school studies to changes in working life (Miettinen and Peisa 2002).

From the working-life perspective the challenges were the lack of information concerning MMR and the lack of direct contact with the students. These challenges were related to the organisational structure of MMR, where contact between students and working life was mediated by the event manager and the production assistant. This arrangement left the students’ involvement in the working-life project ‘virtual’ and impeded collaborative planning. In sum, it seemed that while students and teachers were seeing the relation between theory and practice partly confusing, the working-life representatives instead reflected the challenges relating to organisational things.

The students’ development idea was the openness concerning the process. Students wished that the teachers and working-life partners should openly raise what was unclear to them and reveal what they did not know. Students also wanted more feedback concerning their developmental assignment drafts during the process. Students were also interested in knowledge sharing through virtual platforms, increasing direct contacts with working life, working on the same developmental assignments in several courses, and undertaking bigger projects. All these ideas demonstrate the students’ readiness to expand the object of learning in the spirit of the new WBP model to couple academic studies with working life.

Teachers also expected to see more collaboration between different courses and developmental assignments in future. They suggested guiding should be compulsory and working-life partners should be involved in the seminars at which students presented the results of their developmental assignments. They felt this would improve the WBP model’s usability and help to stabilise it.

Working-life partners encouraged co-planning with students, highlighted the connection between theory and practice, the content of contact lessons and working-life projects, and direct contact between students and working life.

3.2 Expansive learning potential in WBP

The analysis of the object of learning revealed that the all three participants objects of learning could be categorized in two: content-related and collaboration-related learning. The second part of the analysis explored the expansive learning potential of content-related and collaboration-related learning. The students reported that they had learned how to conduct the briefing and marketing plans, which was the intended content-related learning outcome of the courses. Some students said they had learned to apply the theoretical knowledge of the reference book to the practical assignment. This was their content-related learning. Students’ collaboration-related learning took place when they learned how to conduct the developmental assignment with other students and event managers. They felt they had learned ‘how to get the best out of everyone’. Students also mentioned that the more responsibility they were given in developmental assignments, the more they felt they gained self-confidence and learned for their future work.

The teachers’ learning discourse was divided into reflections on students’ learning and their own learning. This division has also been observed in studies of teachers’ learning, where the literature has typically identified two categories: content-oriented, where focus is on knowledge transmission; and learning/student-oriented, focusing on ensuring learning (Töytäri et al. 2016). Teachers’ content-related learning was clearly oriented to the WBP model. They reflected on the benefits of WBP for promoting students’ deep learning and working-life skills, the importance of guidance, learning concerning their subjects, and the importance of students’ own responsibility for and attitude to learning. As collaboration related learning, the teachers saw the entire process as a learning process. They thus learned above all how to further develop the WBP model. For example, they seemed to realise the potential of collaboration between different courses.

Working-life partners’ content-related learning was related to the collaborative planning process, which is important part of planning and conducting multiprofessional projects. That is why it is seen as content-related learning. They observed that planning often started with great visions, whereas the concrete implementation work was forgotten. One suggested the solution would be to organise a smaller working group from the outset. Working-life partners’ collaboration-related learning focused on realising network participants’ different interests and responsibilities in the process. This is competence is called as relational expertise (Edwards 2011), and it is seen as important competence in networking. The working-life partners had also learned the importance of network participants’ commitment and the meaning of concrete actions.
Comparison of two development assignments demonstrated that even a sophisticated implementation of a work-based pedagogical model cannot be but partial, if the working-life assignment lacks a solid knowledge orientation basis that connects between theory and practice to solve the dilemma of school learning. In addition, collective implementation of the work-based pedagogical model during the Mikkeli Meets Russia event formed a zone of expansion that demonstrated the need for the expansion of pedagogical vision, pedagogical mediation, relational expertise, and crossdisciplinarity (Figure 1).

All these aspects of learning related to all participants, but the emphasis varied between participants. Cross-disciplinarity was especially emphasised in students’ and teachers’ reflections on their learning. Both these respondent groups suggested that there could be a bigger project unifying different study courses in future. Working-life partners’ reflections about cross-disciplinarity was related to the idea of the size and focus of the planning group. They articulated that there needed to be critical mass and a big picture, but that a smaller working group should quickly be formed to begin to concretise plans. This planning needed different kinds of competence.

Relational expertise (Edwards 2011) is instead especially emphasised in working-life partners’ reflections expanding their ability to collaborate in networking and understanding other participants’ interests. However, relational expertise was also observed in students’ discussion. It seems the students had learned to utilise co-students’ competences to achieve the shared goal. The students reflected that they had learned “how to get the best out of everyone”. Teachers’ reflections about relational agency were related to collaborative learning both among the students and between students and working life.

All participants experienced a lack of and possibilities for pedagogical mediation. WBP models should therefore mediate not only the relationship between theory and practice (Tynjälä 2009), but also the continuity of partnerships, participants’ commitment, working-life skills, and multidisciplinarity.

Pedagogical vision also featured in all participants’ experiences, partly through its lack. It seems the pedagogical vision in shared WBP projects should be integrated into working-life partners’ vision of collaboration. However, this should be done so neither is lost: instead, they should complement and support each other.

![Figure 1. Participants’ expansions of learning (originally in Kuoppala 2019).](image-url)
4 CONCLUSIONS
An implication for the WBP model is dealt with in my positing that instead of dichotomy-thinking about theory and practice (Costley 2007; Garnett 2016; Lester & Costley 2010; Tynjälä et al. 2003) we should move to a more hybrid model, where the object of learning is formed by a dynamic combination of theoretical, experiential, and practical knowledge. The object is constructed in constant interaction between the students, teachers, and working-life partners. If this is to happen, models that mediate collaborative planning between teachers, students, and working-life partners will be required.

The findings reveal that the most critical question concerning work-based pedagogy is how its implementation enhances equal learning possibilities among students, teachers and working-life partners. Educational organizations still carry the main responsibility for learning, but taking a lead role in regional working-life networks requires new and expanded capabilities of teachers and other pedagogical actors. Overcoming a dichotomy between theory and practice calls for the mastery of work-based pedagogical models, in which students, teachers and working-life partners construct the object of activity through relational expertise and expansive learning.

This study showed that collaboration between education and working-life creates all participants' learning. Learning happens as a movement between the different levels of collaboration through negotiating. Pedagogical solutions should always be based on values (Stetsenko, in press). According to my study, equality seems to be the main value behind work-based learning. This means that work-based pedagogical models try to create learning possibilities to all three participants: students, teachers and working-life partners. Although equality is a great value for learning, it is also challenging. It seems that still the education structures and goals direct collaboration with working life. However, although the studies of work-based pedagogy emphasize the equality between the actors, still the idea of the role of university as facilitator can be found. That is why vocational higher education institutions should re-examine their roles in regional collaboration, its education activities and structures more from the perspective promoting all participants' learning. This fundamental idea of all participants' learning makes work-based pedagogy also promising tool for continuing learning. To promote and conduct continuing learning, we need to create also learning models which are agile and unify working and studying. It seems that work-based learning has potential to be developed for a tool for that.

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