



Work-based Learning:
Forging pathways between
theory and practice in
higher education

The history and future of WBL

Dr Stan Lester
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The history and future of work-based learning: a personal development and research perspective

Dr Stan Lester

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Work-based learning: a broad and complex field

“All and any learning that is situated in the workplace
or arises directly out of workplace concerns”

(Lester & Costley 2010).

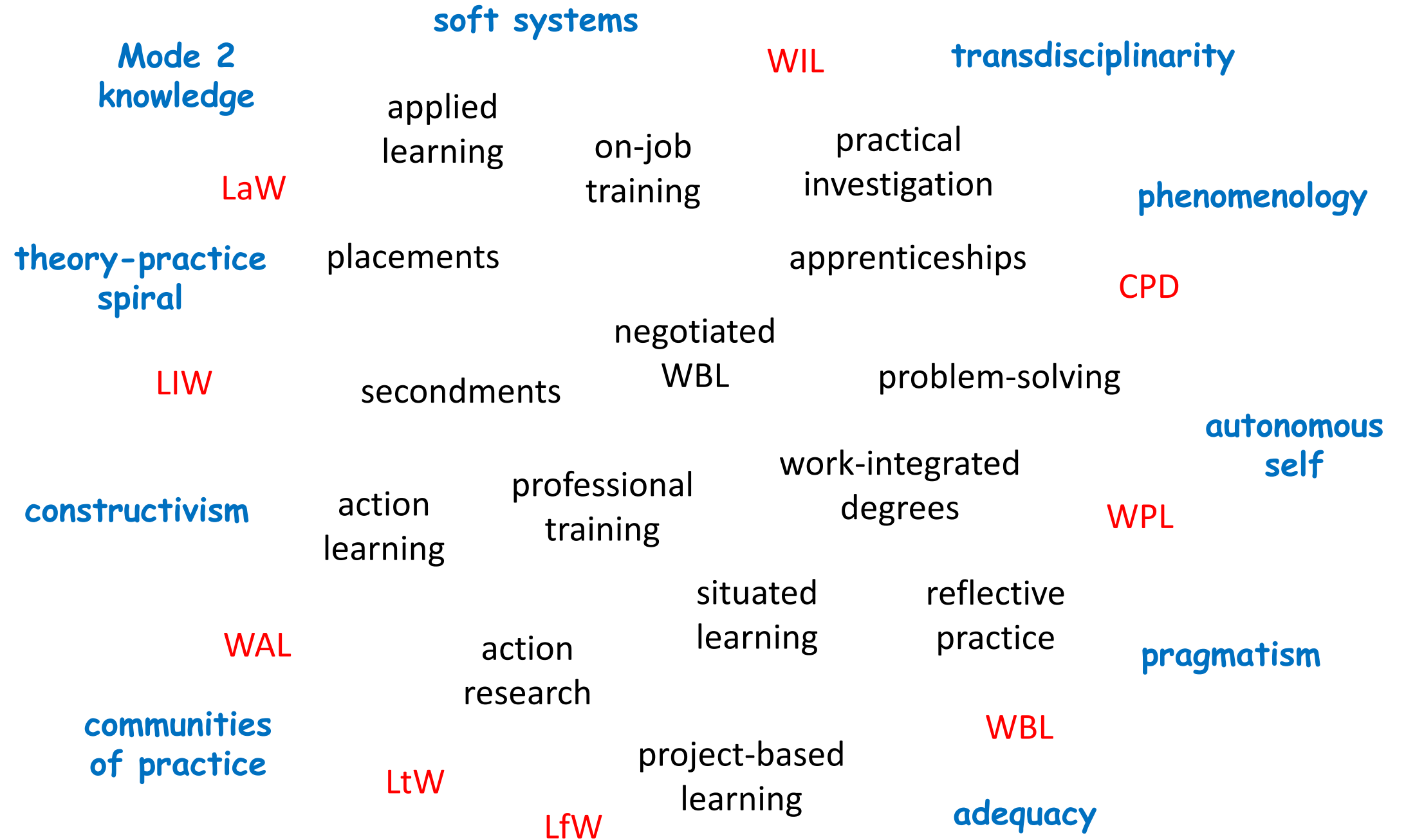


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A personal journey through WBL



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Exploring vocational programmes

1980s – vocational courses

- C&G etc – syllabus-based
- ‘College-devised programme’
- Work with employers to meet needs of existing workers

Early 1990s – NVQs and beyond

- ‘Employer-led’ & ‘work-based’ but rigid
- Misconceptions and misuses
- Research – improve quality of standards & qualifications
- Research – systems evaluation, critique, voice
- Alternatives – action learning, ‘capability’ model



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HE and professional WBL

Mid 1990s on – professional entry & CPD

- systems – open routes into professions
- valuing capability regardless of source
- CPD as impacts not inputs

Late 1990s on – negotiated WBL

- University for Industry ‘Learning through Work’
- Individual programmes negotiated around work context, objectives and aspirations

Middlesex DProf

- NWBL principles
- development of conservation as a ‘qualifying profession’ – systems architecture
- visiting academic – feed back into NWBL, WB doctorates



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Research approach

'Developer first, researcher second'

- Mode 2 knowledge
- transdisciplinary – start from the context
- practice as research (WBL)

Key influences

- phenomenology – see through eyes of those in situation
- soft systems – large scale action research

Why publish research?

- inform practice
- influence the field
- position work in wider context



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The present

Apprenticeships

- dominant but past peak
- positives – collaboration, engagement, integration
- negatives – substitution, reduce innovation, levy distortion

Negotiated WBL

- in decline over last 10-15 years
- resource-intensive, institutional systems don't fit
- 'below radar' – named programmes, action learning
- lots to offer, employer support, commercial proposition
- revisit digital interface, genAI?

Professions

- clear benefits of integrated programmes
- trend to flexible entry routes
- impact of digital technologies on 'complex but routine' work
- bespoke CPD



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Fields for D&R

Implementation

- integration between theory and practice
- authentic, accessible and constructive assessment
- use of digital technology to re-imagine WBL

Institution-organisation

- WBL adding value for individuals & businesses
- fit between WBL and institutional systems
- 'provider/consumer' to realisation and co-production

Professions

- open routes to qualifying
- individually-driven/tripartite CPD
- using digital constructively

Evaluation

- clear impact of WBL
- speak to policy agendas



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Work-based learning

engaging with real-world contexts, improving them and learning from them

- rewarding
- challenging
- relevant
- important

Thank you