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Practical wisdom and the workplace researcher

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This paper addresses the form of enquiry appropriate for the workplace researcher. The first part of the paper is used to introduce the main themes of *phronesis* and relies heavily on Aristotle and Heidegger. It is argued that practical wisdom developed through experience of practical judgements offers a form of enquiry appropriate for the complexity of the workplace. The discussion is then positioned in terms of the activities of the worker researcher and suggests that workplace researchers ought to aspire toward being practically wise within their enquiry and seek to anticipate the impact on the welfare of the community within which they dwell.

Introduction

Researchers of their own communities of practice—workplace researchers—are researchers who, while retaining their established role in a community, add to it the role of insider researcher for a specific purpose and duration. Moreover, this new role is negotiated within the context of their ongoing work with the intention of maintaining their community membership once the research has been completed. In this sense, the workplace researchers' activities potentially change their community, their perception of the community and the community's longer-term view of them. Researching while dwelling within a community distinguishes this form of research from the outsider or insider researcher who leaves the site of the research on completion of the project (see Merriam *et al.*, 2001).

The literature relating to workplace researchers is most commonly found within the educational (schools and colleges, e.g. Dadds, 2002), nursing (wards and theatres, e.g. Pope, 2005), work-based learning (e.g. Garth & Shiel, 2007) and anthropological literature. For example, Smith (1999), when talking about insider researchers who reside within their community, distinguishes them from outsider researchers in that the former 'have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis forever more, and so do

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their families and communities' (1999, p. 137). Furthermore, such an approach is not without personal risk, for if the role of the workplace researcher extends beyond that which group membership allows, then membership may be lost and the researcher's status becomes that of an outsider and the project itself becomes reframed; the researcher may then be seen to have betrayed his or her community.

The notion of workplace researcher used here is developed from the 'work' in Heidegger (1962) which does not just feature as part of his philosophy but rather is 'the central feature of human existence' (Young, 2002, p. 57). Firstly, the workplace is for Heidegger a key environment within which we develop our understanding of ourselves and of others in it. It is the place where our professional practices grow and where we come to understand the nature of the impact of what we do on others. In Heidegger's terms, it is a dwelling place and for Heidegger 'to dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its essence' (1978b, p. 351).

Secondly, Heidegger also has a deeper meaning for the procedure of research than is adequately captured by the concept of methodology. Heidegger argues that what is revealed through research is a revealing of what must be already knowable: that is, we must be able to recognise that which is revealed through the ground plan of our forms of knowledge. Thus the natural sciences are epitomised by exactness whereas in the human sciences such exactitude would turn humans into objects, so research here is inexactitude yet the more challenging for this. The result of this is that the scholar disappears and is replaced by the researcher engaged in research programmes (Heidegger, 2002). Following this line makes the researcher essentially a technologist who recognises truth 'when and only when truth has been transformed into the certainty of representation' (Heidegger, 1977, p. 127). Thus the researcher becomes a specialist and views the world from a distinctive platform. Contrasting this view with that held by Heidegger (and adopted here), Cooper interprets Heidegger's approach as one in which we account for ourselves in what we judge as truth: that is, 'to be *in the truth* is for us to be party to the uncovering of things, to their emergence into the open' (2002, p. 53, italics added).

The workplace researcher acts within a real workplace in which, as Farrell and Holkner (2006) claim, 'contests exist over what counts as knowledge, who can know, and how knowledge and skill shape, and are shaped by, hierarchies of power and esteem' (2006, p. 312). In this contested space, the role of the workplace researchers of their own communities is complex. It requires judgement, reflexivity and criticality about their relationships with others as well as concern about the quality and richness of data collection, analysis and the use to which this analysis is put. Workplace researchers aim to understand in order to change their practice, the practice of others and/or the context for action.

I will argue that to be able to act within this complexity, the researcher ought to practise practically wise judgements not only in the form of enquiry undertaken but in the claims and uses made of that research *in situ*. This requires personal characteristics that go beyond cleverness in making the right assessment of data to include the right time for acting well for one's community and anticipating the effect of the research on those within one's community. As Aristotle points out, judgement and practical wisdom are not the same thing: 'practical wisdom gives commands, since its end is what should or should not be done, while judgement only judges' (2000, p. 114).

For Heidegger (1978a), the defining characteristic of our epoch, of western modernity, is to frame up everything, raw materials, resources, machines and technologies themselves, information and bureaucratic processes, human thinking and ultimately people, so as to have them set, available and ready-to-hand, the same way the switch for an electrical appliance is ready-to-hand when the appliance is needed. In researching *as* the work-at-hand within the workplace, methodology is used to hold apart the relative positions of subject and object through a modern notion of epistemology. This specific notion of rigour of research is directly contrasted by Heidegger for the humanistic sciences: 'indeed all the sciences concerned with life, must necessarily be inexact in order to remain rigorous' (1977, p. 120).

The enframing of research through the technology of method is a result, Heidegger (1978a) claims, of three phases in the evolution of technological being in western history (Standish, 1997; Lambeir, 2002). The first phase is linked with the Greek cosmos whereby *techne* means not only the '… activities and skills of the craftsman …' but also stands '… for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. *Techne* belongs to bringing forth, to *poiesis*; it is something poetic' (Heidegger, 1978a, p. 318). Moreover, Heidegger claims that from olden times until Plato the words *techne* and *episteme* were linked and denoted knowledge, a knowing of something exceptionally well, being an expert in it. Such knowing allows for an opening up which is a revealing.

For instance, a silversmith is not only a skilled craftsman who knows how to use his tools to shape raw material; primarily, he knows how to open up the silver, to bring forth what is already within it: let us say, to reveal the harmony and beauty of a chalice. The chalice's creation is the co-responsibility of the modes of causality: the matter from which it is formed, its purpose and its circumscription, all of which depend on the skill of the silversmith who considers carefully and 'gathers together the three aforementioned ways of being responsible' (Heidegger, 1978a, p. 315). Using this as analogy for the workplace researcher who is co-responsible for the research (the aspect of the community, the research process and its use being the other co-responsibilities), the resultant meaning of the enquiry is known thanks to the 'pondering' of the research coming into being. In this respect the researcher, through pondering and producing, utilises practical judgement to reveal a truth in context which 'bringing-forth propriates only insofar as something concealed comes into unconcealment' (pp. 317–318).

Against the background of the Greek pre-technological wholeness where the work of the artisan is the focus and origin of the world's meaning, aiding nature's unfolding and revealing reality *as it is*, stands the second phase of *techne*, where the forces of consumerism, industrialised machine production and mercantilism have led to the exploitation of resources and people (Heidegger, 1978a). For instance, through mechanised modes of production and the division of labour, as Marxist theory has adequately determined, the worker at the service of capital is isolated from the final product and its general design, and thus is alienated from himself and from social, political and economical realities, as well as from nature as a whole. As Standish puts it, this phase is characterised '… by factory production geared toward the satisfaction of needs and the reduction of the human being to the labouring animal' (1997, p. 444).

In the third phase, there is an intensification of production that is now increasingly controlled by cybernetics, algorithmic processes, calculative thinking and logistics within

overall system theories. In this phase of *techne*, desire is exploited to its outer limits toward finite social and human ends, because production is now geared toward the achievement of maximal availability, feeding upon the creation of new desires, through an ongoing creation of needs for the satisfaction of endless desire (Standish, 1997; Heidegger, 1978a; Lambeir, 2002).

This is not an argument against enquiry but it is a compelling argument against the separation of method from being. To counter modernity's third form of *techne* with its tendency to enframe the workplace in materialism and instrumentalise those within it as means to these goals, enquiry—re-searching—requires circumspection and judgement from the researcher as co-responsible of what the phenomena might be. Unlike the correct representation of scientific method, the reality of truth within a Heideggerian perspective is the pondering of its revealing; it is in the judgement made of what is revealed and what it might count for. As Heidegger argues (2003), it is in action that the correctness of the deliberation is evident. Moreover the skilfulness of the deliberation, the ability to make the appropriate action and an anticipation of the likely end of the action are gained through experience and discernment and distinguishes *phronesis*.

The skills of workplace researchers

Although a precise definition of practical wisdom is problematic (Noel, 1999), for the purposes of this paper it is assumed that it is not just rationality but also moral intent in action. This distinguishes it from cleverness and the wisdom of *sophia* which is concerned with principles that are not the practicalities of living within the mortal world. Using practical wisdom, according to Heidegger (2003), is the best humans can be within their existence and potentiality. Essential to this process of co-responsibility for the revelation of truth is the skill to deliberate well about what might be possible and to act with the best interest of self and of humanity. Its virtuous footing characteristically ensures a proactive moral, although not infallible, approach to problem resolution based on integrated, practical and situated judgements. Such judgements can be revealed through reasonable action which distinguishes them from mere dogma (Barnett, 2003; Heidegger, 2003).

Aristotle himself links deliberation and rhetoric within the essential characteristic of the *phronimos* (the person who is practically wise) when he talks about the good and the expedient. Aristotle states that the 'assigned scope of the deliberator is expediency (for debates are not about the end but about the means to it, which are the measure that are practically expedient, expediency being a good thing), we must grasp the fundaments of goodness and expediency in general' (1991, p. 91). Having previously established the sources of deliberative persuasiveness, the orator is instructed in those which are likely to bring human action into line with happiness, for it is the ethics of happiness realised through forms of logical justification that links the rhetoric with that which motivates the *phronimos*.

The relevance for worker researchers is clear: their integrity within their community of practice and organisational structure must not be damaged by their enquiry, the results need to be validated, meaningful and worthwhile and they must be presented in a correct manner for their impact to be realised without damaging more vulnerable others. The

importance is that both rhetoric with its persuasive end and the logic of practical reasoning have the same means to reveal the possibility of truth as it relates to a particular proposed action: deliberation followed by practical reasoning to achieve one goal where alternatives exist. This does not contradict the notion of acting in a recognised situation without deliberation, as experts are able to do; rather it is a complement and offers justification where others need to be convinced.

Deliberation is not measured by time but by the correctness of what is beneficial, about the right thing, the right way, and at the right time. As Heidegger (2003) reasons, the *phronimos* does not consider if he ought to be wise, rather he deliberates on how and in which ways to be wise in a concrete and specific situation through 'situational appreciation' (Wiggins, 1980, p. 237). As for Aristotle, wise action is normative:

> [T]he person unqualifiedly good at deliberation is the one who tends to aim, in accordance with his calculation, at the best of the goods for a human being that are achievable in action. Nor is practical wisdom concerned only with universals. Understanding of particulars is also required, since it is practical, and action is concerned with particulars. (2000, p. 110)

The building of the practical arguments for action is, for Aristotle, a production involving skills of reasoning and rhetoric. The basis upon which these pre- and/or post- arguments are made is realised through deliberation in the form of 'for the sake of relationships' (MacIntyre, 2003, p. 131), which link the ultimate good of the action with the situated activities judged to be appropriate. Where action is required of, or justifications made to, others, Aristotle advocates a notion of rhetoric whose arguments are in a contextualised form of the practical syllogism—a three-part deductive argument leading to action. This extends the deliberation of the wise and is concerned with creating judgements in others consistent with those desired by the orator. This, according to Aristotle, is achieved by combining three elements of a communication: the character of the speaker (his or her credibility), the disposition of the audience and the content of the message. The argument should be structured to facilitate action and this call to action is advocated either through illustrative examples or through the rationality of the practical syllogism. In this way, the link between the activities of deliberation utilising the syllogism method enables the actions of the *phronimos* in the political activities of persuading others (community of practice) of the correctness of the proposed actions. It is evident that s/he, the *phronimos*, also grasps the correct or good moment (*Kairos*) and place for the most appropriate action. Indeed Heidegger states that 'concrete interpretation shows how the being which is *Kairos* constitutes itself in *phronesis*' (1992, p. 381).

Practical enquiry

The form of practical enquiry proposed is investigative, intuitive judgement which, when coupled with communication skills based on rhetoric, becomes a forceful method for understanding and change. For Heidegger 'knowledge is judging' (1962, p. 259) and the characteristic of knowledge is truth which can be phenomenologically demonstrated. Its credibility in practical judgement is in the situational discernment mediated by a moral disposition (Noel, 1999) which seeks the wellbeing of the system within its use. It effects

change by wise intervention which takes place in the complex contexts of a social setting such as the workplace. The link with action, logic and intellect augurs for a model of expertise that is both embodied and deliberate. MacIntyre's interpretation of the role of the syllogism is important here for he claims that what matters about rational action is

> not that we have deliberated immediately before embarking upon any particular action through the enouncing of some practical syllogism, but that we should act as someone would have done who had so deliberated *and* that we should be able to answer truly the question 'Why did you so act?' by citing the relevant practical syllogism and the relevant piece of deliberation, even if these had not actually been rehearsed by us on a particular occasion. (2003, p. 131, italics in the original)

This is not to claim that practical enquiry within the workplace requires reasoning but only to suggest that many learning actions situated in the workplace often require judgement in the form of practical reasoning. For example, Stevenson (2005) gives an example where the precept of caring directs us to comfort a patient, to empathise and, through the experience of both, come to better understand the phenomenon.

Practical enquiry within the workplace thus takes a more political and critical view of workplace researchers whose agency is recognised within the social, economic and political power of their workplace. This context foregrounds the researchers' dwelling within the workplace as part of the process of change whilst creating research activities. Workplace researchers are subjects in their own research and their positionality is critical to their intended change. Their relation with knowledge is one that requires renegotiation away from a methodology of technical rationality to one of practical judgement, since the results involve them and their communities. Work has a conjoint interdependence and judgements that respect this hermeneutic do not require a research method intent on holding apart subject and object. Methodology stripped of a contextual validity, regardless of its rigour, acts to cut off from the phenomenon the actuality of the being-researcher in one's own life. Validity involves determining the degree to which researchers' claims about knowledge correspond to the reality (or research participants' perception of reality) being studied. They may be apprehensive not in the resultant outcome of action, but in the way in which different discourses attribute these virtues to claims of truthfulness and relevance.

The *phronimos* seeks plausible and credible explanations for action not against some essential Platonic principle of excellence but in the specifics which for every situation are different. The circumstances, the givens, the times and the people vary. Moreover, as Heidegger indicates, the 'meaning of the action itself i.e. precisely what I want to do varies as well' (2003, p. 101). Thus the researchers' actions owe as much to their ontological growth, their maturity as *phronimoi*, as to their epistemology forged in the dialectic co-participation of practice (Billet, 2004).

In an important attempt to understand how the wise judge comes to act, Heidegger offers some concrete advice on the notion of the action of the *phronesis*. He argues that every action is in relation to a determinate purpose and since the practical life 'moves in each case within a definite surrounding world, this action is carried out under determined circumstances. These circumstances characterize the *situation* … [and the] action itself is characterized by various moments' (2003, p. 100, italics in the original).

The five characterisations of deliberated practical enquiry derived from Heidegger (2003, pp. 100–101) are:

1. The purpose of the action.
2. The means to be able to act.
3. The feasibility of the action being undertaken.
4. Every action is carried out at a determinate time.
5. Every action is carried out with respect to others.

For Heidegger the 'question of the structure of phronesis is hence concentrated on the question of what good judgment is, i.e. the correct deliberation on action, from its start to its end, its last reach' (2003, p. 102). In the location of the trans-disciplinary workplace, it is the language of prudent common sense and transparency mediated through the power of others that counts as the revealing of truth in worthiness.

The difficulty of disintegrating the enquiry skills from the dispositions of the workplace researcher and their learning process of dwelling successfully in the politic of the work situation is recognised in this approach. The researchers' actions owe as much to their ontological growth, their maturity as a *phronimos*, as to their epistemology forged in the dialectic co-participation of practice (Billett, 2004).

The purpose of the action

Beckett and Hager (2002) describe the workplace as a space where there is 'pervasive change and crisis, reorganisation of difference and diversity, a focus on the particular and the local, and recognition of the political and social dimension of knowledge' (p. 176). In such an environment, the nature of practical judgement is not one that is revealed through a heuristic of decision making: it is not simply a logical analysis or a synthesis but a response to being engaged, purposively, within a specific context. It requires an ability to act appropriately, often in ways that help define the future which may be incomprehensible, incommensurate with or just dogmatically blocked by others' ways of being. Such ability sets the practically wise apart from those able just to make judgements without the virtuous comportment towards action. For workplace researchers, this requires an understanding of their own positionality in the blurring of context and subject. The workplace researcher may be empowered by the research commission or by the participants' deference to academic methodology but should be aware that this very positioning may alienate the workplace researcher from his or her community. The wise researcher is able to further knowledge and effect change with the best interests of all those involved in the workplace as central to their outcomes (Gibbs & Costley, 2006).

For example, the wise workplace researcher needs to be conscious of the real intent of the research. If in the commercial workplace an enquiry is commissioned to understand better the levels of service provided by staff, and presented to them as such, but its intent is to penalise those with lower than expected service levels, the researcher ought not to accept the commission. To do so would be unwise for it is undertaken in deceit. If, however, the research is about effectiveness for the benefit of all, with the intent of helping to sustain the business, then it is wise to undertake it.

Another example might be where a professional—say, a teacher—acts as a 'critical friend' to a colleague in order to help that colleague improve his or her professional practice. In this case, the wise 'friend' must be unencumbered by interests other than that of the colleague. The friend should not reveal the colleague's weaknesses for the benefit of others or to demonstrate his or her own superiority.

The means to be able to act

For Heidegger, the future positioning of our being is constrained by the parameters of our social system within which we can express ourselves. Our understanding of our identity as workplace researchers will evidently change as we interpret the accumulated experience of the choices we have made from the range of preferences available to us. This understanding of ourselves in our every-day-ness is, as Heidegger proposes, a making ourselves at home in the world. The context best suited to that is one in which the trustworthiness of self as researcher and others can be expected to be present, that is where the researcher is recognised as a person of virtue. This trustworthiness is more than the mere reliance on rules of engagement and exchange; it is deeper, and reflects the root of commonality of being-in-the-world, together, at work. For the workplace researcher, virtuous comportment towards others leads to a gratuitous and caring interpretation of what is revealed through enquiry in order to satisfy the wellbeing of those involved.

There is an obligation for the researcher to be competent in terms of the skills themselves and the potential consequences of such skills. This is not always easy to achieve. The researcher could, for example, cause distress to those being researched even though this was not envisaged. Davison states that in the social work context, the methodological literature on qualitative research 'consistently endorses the advantages of close relationships with respondents which will enhance rapport and enrich research findings' (2004, p. 381). However, the selection of particular research methods—whether deliberately or through carelessness or ignorance—can affect the likelihood of the researched revealing more than intended and the researcher being inadequately competent to care for the researched. Such deep emotional revelations could occur, for example, when discussing the nature of failure with school pupils.

Heightened empathy and emotional resonance with research participants is considered to be a process which is likely to increase the richness of the research data, but also may accentuate researcher vulnerability or distress. This may also be true of methods that emphasise emancipatory collaboration and empowerment yet which are more invasive such as phenomenological ground interviews, covert ethnography and aspects of action research.

The feasibility of the act

The four dimensions of workplace contextuality that Beckett and Hager (2002, p. 177) emphasise are the specific time the context is revealed, its changeability over time, its social and cultural features, and the integration of personal characteristics of the researchers to the workplace. Roberts (2001) argues that such situations position subjects within

the ideological limits of the specific power relationships and thus influence the dialogic relationship between the researcher and others. Bakhtin suggests that an 'interpretation of contextual meanings cannot be scientific (but are profoundly cognitive). It can directly serve practice, practice that deals with things' (1986, p. 160).

Researchers need to be able to identify the socially constructed nature of the power of authority and surveillance, the positionality of the researcher within the research experience and how this effects the production of meaning. Davison (2004) points to the danger this incurs for the researcher. This is particularly important for what is advocated here and in Flyvbjerg (1998) is the 'thick' analysis of the details of a phenomenon from which more general insights can be gained.

In the workplace context, the researcher needs to be satisfied as to his or her ability to understand all this and to persuade the recipient of the research of its truth. This means more than presenting findings and allowing others to interpret them in ways they see fit (an act which may innocently or deliberately be used to abdicate personal responsibility). It requires researchers to be able to argue the truth of the finding in modes of discourse appropriate for their audience. For Aristotle, this was the skill of Rhetoric while for us it is the skills of rationality, form and content. In a medical context, the need to care for the patient as a whole might override the invasive surgery of others or the notion of separation of practitioner from patient in professionalism rather than in care (Stevenson, 2005).

Determinate timing

'Doing things right and doing the right things' is the title of a paper by Rämö (2002) which bears directly on the practical enquiry. Acts in such circumstances are acts of those of the *phronimoi*, who recognise the right moment or create the right situation for action. Moreover, the sense of timing and the positionality of the research directly affect the openness of access to information leading to sensitivities in the political–temporal contingencies of the research process. (See Flyvbjerg, 2001; Bourdieu, 2006 and especially Trotter, 2003 for examples and detailed discussions).

As Roberts (2001) points out, Bakhtin alerts us to the idea that each utterance seeks to influence the dialogic position occupied by each. For example, an utterance by a respondent addressed to a researcher might endeavour to position the researcher in a certain manner. The unconcealing of the positionality and identity of the researcher in the context of the authorship of the enquiry is important for the credibility of the researcher both in understanding his or her enquiry in its widest context and in communicating issues of change.

In the context of action research within a classroom situation where the researcher is enquiring into classroom control and how to change the current state (undisciplined) to the required state (attentive), an understanding of the temporal location of the event as well as the spatial is required to reveal the real truth of what is happening. When to intervene in an action research cycle has a direct impact on the result of the intervention. Too soon and the intervention can be ignored, too late and the moment is lost. Timing can liberate the research giving back the tempo of the research to the participants rather than those responsible for, say, school improvement, in some disembodied managerial way. To

both intervene and report at the right moment (*Kairos*) is a judgement central to practical wisdom as has previously been discussed.

Respect for others

For Heidegger (1962), our being in the world is co-determined by others in the action and in deliberation based on practical experience and discussion with others: action is determined with regard to others. He gives the example of the workplace when he states, 'along with the equipment to be found when one is at work, those Others for whom the work is destined are encountered too' (1962, p. 153). In this sense of 'encountered', he means involved in the end of the work either as those for whom what is being worked is intended (in our case the research project) or those engaged in its production. This could be contrasted with an attitude to others who are merely treated as providers of information, as resource, otherwise uninvolved in the process. To follow this line makes the researcher essentially a technician who somehow is insulated from the phenomena of enquiry, insulated by the situated-ness of its power through methodology.

Workplace researchers ought to be concerned for the communities that host them, in which they re-search and dwell. Such awareness leads to care which will manifest itself in the good actions to which the research is put, not purely the cleverest or the most satisfying use for the university or the employer.

Heidegger claims that *phronesis* has no effect on action unless it is carried out by someone who is good. The 'mere having an orientation and guidance does not place us on the level of Being which genuinely corresponds to the meaning of truth' (2003, p. 115). In this regard, Heidegger requires of us an understanding of others not in terms of beings as resource to be used as and when required. Indeed, having warned us of the risk that technology and scientific methods pose in turning our perceptions of others that way, we must be circumspect in our views of the whole situation of the research to make judgements that are beneficial to the degree that they represent sound deliberation for the benefit of others.

In the workplace, this may be problematic given the dominance of the ethos of modernity, its manifestation in efficiency and its desire for end results. Clearly, the workplace researchers' perceptions of reality, if abstracted rather than grounded for the sake of others, may leave the researchers alienated from the workplace community albeit satisfying the research commission. The judgements as to the nature of the truth revealed in the presentation of the research ought to consider others as co-producers of the project for whom the researchers bear a responsibility. The presentation of research in ways which potentially harm those who have given freely to it treats them—the co-producers—as entities to be used.

The deplorable actions of researchers, workplace or otherwise, deliberately deceiving participants in social science research is less evident today than in the history of medical and psychological experimentation that Oakley (2000) points to in the post-war years especially in the USA. Yet the temptation to treat participants as objects, as means to research outcomes, remains. The use of children in classroom research predicated on a model of causality which leads to usable results has a tendency to be structured in this

way. The Tuskegee study of the natural course of syphilis that took place in Alabama (Pence, 1999) is one well-known example of racism in research. Respect for others is not simply to receive their consent to participate but to care for them in the truth that the researcher seeks. Although this practice is valid in all forms of research, in workplace research not to care is a betrayal of the trust that the community has invested in the researcher. This is a trust that only a wise practitioner can respect while both seeking truth and fulfilling the self-interest of his or her own professional development.

Conclusion

The relationship between knowledge and action is one of judgement. Judgement is the ability to recognise situations, cases or problems and then to deal adequately with them without necessarily imposing the application of a general rule. As Dunne states, judgement 'does not reside in formulaic knowledge precisely because it is the ability to actuate knowledge with relevance, appositeness or sensibility to context' (1999, p. 710). Yet *phronesis* reveals a different engagement with the situations of research in the workplace which both influences the context of the enquiry and the workplace researcher. Aristotle alludes to this when he states that the 'person who knows his own interests and makes these his concern seems to be a practically wise person' (2000, p. 111), although Aristotle is quick to temper this view by arguing that such self-interest is contingent in the wellbeing of others.

Practical enquiry is a holistic and integrative approach to interpretation of work-based issues that seeks to understand and demonstratively effect change through *phronesis*. What the practical enquiry offers is a different epistemological belief, a belief in the plausibility of practical wisdom rather than the certainty of divine wisdom and the certainty of representative knowledge. It offers a form of enquiry, the judgement of specifics and a mode for its dissemination enshrined in rhetorical discourse. It recognises the political and its persuasive use of argument, timing and place. It is temporal in looking at possibility but not divine in seeking universal principles and will produce good research in the workplace. Finally, it is hard to be a workplace researcher, and harder still to get it right.

Acknowledgments

Note on contributor

Paul Gibbs is interested in the work of Heidegger in respect of education, workplace learning and marketing. He is a Reader in the Institute of Work Based Learning at Middlesex University.

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