Belonging, Becoming and Being a Baker: The Role and Processes of Apprenticeship

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

July 2011
Abstract

The journey traversed by young people from being school-leavers to becoming qualified trade workers is a common, but far from fully understood process. Moreover, recent socio-historical changes exemplified by increased use of technology, the altering nature of work, and shifting patterns in the employment market are influencing both the apprenticeship journey and its destination. Central to this journey is how apprentices learn their skills and form identities as trades workers. Hence, there is a need to undertake detailed study of apprenticeship, as it is being currently enacted. In this dissertation, a contemporary account of apprenticeship is provided through mapping the experiences of 13 apprentice bakers and accounts of their bakeries. The dissertation proposes the apprentice journey as comprised of three phases—belonging to a workplace, becoming a baker, and being a baker—as descriptive metaphors of apprenticeship processes’ contribution to occupational identity formation processes. In this way, the dissertation conceptualises and illuminates aspects of apprentices’ indenture, including the role and influences of personal and situational factors that together shape how (a) young people begin participation in a trade-based occupation through processes of belonging to a workplace, (b) they identify with their occupation through a process of engagement with bakery work and practices, and (c) they commence the process of developing an occupational identity as bakers.

Key contributions to knowledge advanced in this study include, firstly, vocational identity formation as directed initially at belonging to a workplace, thereby emphasising the situational rather than occupational orientation in identity formation. Hence, this aspect of belonging to the workplace stands as a precursor to actual engagement in apprenticeship. Concurrently, the concept of “proximal participation” is advanced as an entry mechanism into the workplace for reluctant or undecided novices to craft or trade practice communities. Secondly, in the phase of becoming a baker, it was found that apprentices required conferment of occupational identity by others before they are able to self-infer their vocational identity as bakers. Additionally, the strong influences of workplaces on skill and knowledge acquisition and dispositional development were identified, as evidenced by apprentices transitioning progressively from being dependent learners to becoming independent trade workers. Thirdly, in the stage of being a baker, the findings include that deep engagement in specific workplaces
engenders passion for the work; individual agentic action by motivated apprentices can circumvent limited workplace learning affordances; and some apprentices transformed perceptions of the baking occupation from job to career to vocation. Hence, the study identifies and defines distinct processes of engagement and occupational identity transformation at each apprenticeship stage.

Finally, a model that illuminates this process of apprenticeship and its various contributions is synthesised from the study’s findings. This model is constructed through a process of case study theory building, summarising findings, and describing and rationalising contributions to apprentices’ vocational identity formation as bakers.
Statement of originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed: Date:
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Acknowledgements

My special thanks to the apprentices and bakers who participated in this study. Their insights and responses form the basis of this dissertation. I am ever grateful for their willingness to participate in this study and for their forbearance, sense of humour, and candour through the research process.

Thank you to Dr. Maureen Doherty at the Christchurch College of Education, who assisted me at the beginning stages of the research journey.

A very special thanks to Professor Stephen Billett, my supervisor, for his wisdom, patience, prompt replies to my emails, and positive criticism throughout the 7 years this thesis has taken to complete. Stephen provided wonderful and much needed support by modelling various aspects of becoming a scholar, as I served my apprenticeship in research and academic writing.

My thanks also for support from my

- parents, who have always believed in me;
- husband, Mark;
- children, Jonathan and Joanna, as they embark on their own explorations; and
- colleagues at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, who were subjected to endless iterations of this dissertation as it developed. Their forbearance and critical friendship contributed much to my learning.

The research project reported in this dissertation has been approved by Academic Research Committees at Griffith University and the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology.