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The proper place for skills and autonomy in conceptualising academic work and development

4th International conference of the Centre for Excellence in Preparing for Academic Practice, St Hugh’s College Oxford, 4-6 April 2011

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Autonomous work:
“is a form of activity whose end-product (X) is chosen as such as a major goal of an autonomous agent”

vs

Heteronomous work

Autonomous work

vs

Autonomy in work
Skills training requirements for research students: joint statement by the research councils/AHRB (2001)

A - Research Skills and Techniques
B - Research Environment
C - Research Management
D - Personal Effectiveness
E - Communication Skills
F - Networking and Teamworking
G - Career Management
“Skills Agenda”

Stephen Rowland
- lowest common denominator problem

Diana Leonard – leads to infantilisation

And amounts to external interference
- skills for other employers' interests
- top-down imposition and autonomy problem

Rowland, Frank Furedi – misguided Realists
Realism (ontologically distinct entities): X is a skill, Y is not a skill

Irrealism:
\{A \text{ has skill } X\} = \{A \text{ is skilled at doing } X\} = \{A \text{ is skilled at conducting lab work}\} = \{A \text{ is skilled at conducting lab work}\} = \{A \text{ has lab work skills}\}
Need for re-enchantment of Science

Immanuel Kant: autonomy as freedom of direction, unswayed by incentive, with ethical sensibility

McDowell, J. (1994) *Mind & World*
- Space of Reasons

vs
- Space of Nature

Polanyi – the ‘passion’ of scientific enquiry

The antagonism of Dawkins
1) Wise old academic sages’ pep-talks

2) Dynamic new consultants’ parachuted-in training sessions

3) Professional Development as an academic field
   - paradigm of embeddedness
   - robust academically grounded programmes
   - needed for the new RDF anyway?
A skill development model
A skill development model

Unconsciously Incompetent
A skill development model

Unconsciously Incompetent
A skill development model

- Consciously Incompetent
- Unconsciously Incompetent
A skill development model

Consciously Incompetent

Consciously Competent

Unconsciously Incompetent

Consciousness

Competence
A skill development model

Consciously Competent

Consciously Incompetent

Unconsciously Competent

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