

## Knowledge about Work and Work Procedures: Lessons From Unpaid Work at Home and at School

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Part of what we expect from the education system is that students will  
be prepared at the end of their schooling to enter the world of work.  
This preparation involves equipping students with the skills they need

to undertake work tasks, with information about occupations to assist their career choice, and with some experience of the world of work through work experience programs and visits to workplaces. Many high school students have part-time jobs out of school hours although what they are learning from these jobs is not entirely desirable or useful for their later working lives, according to a growing number of American researchers (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Bachman & Schulenberg, 1993; Steinberg, Fegley & Dornbusch, 1993) All of this knowledge and experience is meant to give students some idea of what to expect in the workplace.

It is very important that schools do teach students what to expect in their later working lives because children grow up in our society with little access to adult workplaces (James & Prout, 1990). Parents

generally work away from home and children's knowledge of what their occupations are and what these jobs involve, is often sketchy. Even the 10- to 14--year-olds in a study by Piotrkowski and Stark (1987) knew little beyond the type of work that their parents did. They certainly knew little about the non-observable conditions of their parents' work such as the degree of control their parents had over what they did at work. These adolescents also knew more about their mothers' than their fathers' jobs. This may be a function, Piotrkowski and Stark suggest, of their mothers' talking to them more about their jobs. It is certainly unusual for children to accompany their parents to work and to work alongside them.

Instead of sharing in adult work, our children are sent to school, an institution set up to prepare them for life yet where they are kept apart from the "real world". At school, the only adult occupation that children can observe in some detail is teaching. Otherwise, their knowledge of paid work comes from what little they know of their parents' jobs and from the biased portrayal of occupational groups in the media. Content analyses have shown that television, for example, presents some occupations more than others, favouring the "glamour" professional jobs such as lawyer or doctor over more mundane occupations such as office or factory worker, and have a misleading proportion of women in the occupational groups shown (Signorelli, 1993). Children are also given explicit instruction about work and careers at school. Nevertheless, children's knowledge about the world of work after school is seen as inadequate for the important career choices that are made in the last years of high school (Hill, 1969; Evans & Poole, 1991)

My argument in this paper is that despite their lack of access to adult workplaces, children know more about work than we think they do. They have been involved in work themselves long before they start school, and they have learned a lot about work during their school years. What they have learned has come from their experience of work at home and at school which, because it is unpaid, is often not considered "real" work. At home, they have been involved in tidying up and cleaning jobs, helping in the garden and washing the car, and at school children

have been engaged in assigned work tasks in a variety of areas. The knowledge they have developed through this experience is often neglected when we consider what children understand about work. In an attempt to map out what is known about children's developing understanding of work, I undertook, with Jacqueline Goodnow of Macquarie University, to review this previously neglected area of social cognition (Bowes & Goodnow, 1994). In this paper I would like to present some of the findings of that review with an emphasis on what we know about children's understanding of unpaid work and the usefulness of this information for teaching children about what to expect in the world of paid work.

#### Framework

The review draws on studies from the psychological, sociological and anthropological literature and is structured using several distinctions which need to be addressed before the details of some of those studies are presented. The first distinction, evident from the introduction, was made between paid and unpaid work. Children have a great deal of early experience in unpaid work at home. This work begins as early as 3 years when children are eager to help their mothers in the household tasks (Rheingold, 1982). By the age of five to seven years, cross-cultural studies have shown that most children are engaged in household work (Rogoff, Sellers, Pirotta, Fox & White, 1975). The nature of that work might differ between cultures. In developing countries, for example, children are called upon more often to care for younger siblings (Weisner & Gallimore, 1977). In countries like Australia, the emphasis for young children is on "self-care" tasks, work involving the children's own things or activities such as making

their beds or cleaning up toys when they have finished playing (Thrall, 1978; Goodnow, 1988).

Children are also familiar with the notion of work from their experiences at school. Their very first weeks in an educational setting teach them that they are there to do "work". After only a month, the kindergarten children in Apple and King's (1990) observation and interview study came to describe what they do at school as "work". (The incidence of "work" answers to the question "what do you do at school?", rose from 0% in an interview in the first month of kindergarten to 50% in a second month interview) The children saw work as "colouring, drawing, waiting in line, listening to stories, watching movies, cleaning up and singing" (Apple & King, 1990, p.55). The kinds of things that they mentioned might not coincide with adult ideas of work but nevertheless these new students were beginning to form an idea of what counted as work at school.

A second distinction is between category knowledge and procedural knowledge. Category knowledge refers to the distinctions children draw among jobs and the dimensions they use and procedural knowledge refers to children's sense of the way work is done and is supposed to be done -- supposed to be shared, delegated, decided upon, monitored, paid for, offered as a gift or accepted as a duty.

With these distinctions in mind, I propose to:

- i review briefly what is known about children's understanding, categorical and procedural, of unpaid work
- ii review what is known about the connections children themselves make between unpaid and paid work, and
- iii discuss the usefulness of this information for developing approaches to teaching children at school about the world of paid work.

#### 1. Children's Knowledge of Unpaid Work

##### Category Knowledge

a) Distinction between "work" and not work. I have mentioned two of the distinctions children make about work. One is between "work" and "non-work", a focus in several studies which show that most children see work as something that is paid for (Butorac, 1989; Goldstein & Oldham, 1979). In a Western Australian study, Butorac (1988) found that children in Years 5 and 6 identified work at school most strongly with mathematics (60% of those who mentioned schoolwork when asked what work was) and to a lesser extent, English (8%) and spelling (6%) and distinguished between work and leisure, play, "mucking about" and "having fun" in terms of the effort, pleasure and choice involved. The importance of this distinction becomes greater for children as they progress through the school years (Butorac, 1989; Davies, 1982; Eckert, 1991; Willis, 1977).

b) Activities regarded as "work". A second distinction is among the activities that are usually regarded as "work". Children in kindergarten see drawing and colouring as work (Apple & King, 1990) whereas art may become a subject liked as much as sport by children in primary school (Goodnow & Burns, 1985), and no longer seen as "work". Activities can change categories in children's eyes, shifting from work to non-work or in the other direction.

Work is also seen by children to differ according to the rewards associated with it, and according to the gender of who does certain kinds of work. These two further distinctions will be examined before consideration of children's knowledge of the procedural aspects of work.

c) Distinctions related to rewards. In everyday life, work is expected to bring a variety of rewards. It is expected, for instance, to provide a structure to one's day, a point of contact with others, a sense of personal fulfillment, a status in one's community, a basis for praise, prizes, or thanks from others, and -- in the case of work in the paid workforce -- a financial reward. Doyle (1979) was concerned with the extent to which children regard their school work as part of

an exchange for praise or grades but the overwhelming focus within developmental studies, is on the understanding of differential rewards in the form of money.

Most studies about rewards for unpaid work concentrate upon the extent to which children are paid for household jobs or upon parents' viewpoints about the reasonableness or unreasonableness of rewarding children with money for their household contributions or for their

performance at school (e.g. Feather, 1978; Furnham & Thomas, 1984 a, b; Warton & Goodnow, 1994). Far less is known about children's perceptions of either what occurs in most families or what should occur in their own or other households.

There is, however, some evidence that children think in exchange terms when they are paid for housework. Wittner (1980) interviewed children in foster homes who saw their pay for household work as equivalent to the way their foster parents were paid for caring for them. According to Clark (1984), however, and to the foster children in Wittner's study, an exchange orientation would not be expected in "real" families.

Another study (Warton & Goodnow, 1991) points to an age effect in the extent to which children differentiate among household jobs in terms of money. At 8, 11, and 14 years of age, these children regarded it as fair to be paid for a job such as washing a car (the job is "big" and "extra"). An age difference appeared, however, for the job of making one's bed: this was a "big" job and rewardable with money in the eyes of the 8-year-olds. In contrast, money was a ridiculous expectation in the eyes of the 11- and 14-year-olds ("it would be like asking to be paid for keeping yourself tidy": Warton & Goodnow, 1991, p.163). As with the distinction between "work" and "not work", the concept of two categories has been retained (paid jobs, unpaid jobs). What has changed with age are the specific items placed in the two categories. .

d) Gender distinctions among unpaid tasks. For work at school, there are reports of some school subjects being seen as "owned" on the basis of gender. Mathematics, for instance, is regarded by many U.S. adolescents as more relevant and as more related to "natural talent" for males than for females (e.g., Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982). For household work, there is ample evidence that in many cultures boys and girls do different kinds of work (e.g., Barry, Bacon & Child, 1957; Goodnow, Bowes, Warton, Dawes, & Taylor, 1991; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). Less is known, however, about children's distinctions on the basis of gender.

Two studies are of particular interest. One of these asked children aged 8, 11, and 14 years whether, on a busy day, they could ask their mother, father, a sister, or a brother to do a particular job for them.

For the four jobs, the children's answers showed that two were sharply differentiated by gender: washing a car (fathers or brothers could be asked) and cleaning a bathtub (mothers or sisters could be asked). Of the other two jobs, one (making one's own bed) was regarded as unlikely to be asked of anyone. If the request was made, however, it would be of mothers or sisters. The last task, clearing or setting a table, was not gendered. It displayed, however, a strong differentiation by generation. A request could be made of sisters or brothers, but not of parents (Goodnow et al., 1991).

The second study is by McHale Bartko, Crouter & Perry-Jenkins (1990). They found that when fathers endorsed a traditional distinction between "men's work" and "women's work", but their sons (9- to 12-year-olds) were expected to do a number of "women's jobs", the boys showed higher level of stress, a poorer relationship to parents and a lower sense of

competence than boys whose views were more congruent with the boys' activities. For these effects to occur, a sense of the gender-appropriateness of various household tasks must be present in the understanding of these young adolescents.

### Procedural Knowledge

The understanding of procedures, refers to ideas about the ways in which work is done or should be done. The term covers ideas about how work begins and ends, the extent to which you should do the work yourself as against seeking help or delegating a task, the possibilities and the methods for raising questions or negotiating a change, the forms of talk or silence that are expected to accompany the work one does, and the extent to which people can make decisions for themselves or need to follow orders.

To date, research on the understanding of work procedures has been less extensive than research on the understanding of categories. The relative neglect is surprising given the recognition that adult learning in any new job often has to do with informal procedures: ways of working that are not part of any written job description. In households and schools, children have more access to information about procedures. In those settings, they are also known to display a marked interest in the rules or procedures that apply and an early understanding of them (e.g., Davies, 1982, for schools; Dunn, 1988, for households).

a) Procedural knowledge at school. In several sociological accounts, schools are presented as places where children are often expected to learn that what matters is not so much what is produced but the way any production takes place. For many, school is a place where you do things "properly" (Butorac, 1988), where you sit quietly, stop and start with the clock, put in your time, follow directions, and make a visible effort: all forms of learning that have more to do with ways of working than with the acquisition of direct skill in dealing with a subject matter (Apple & King, 1990; LeCompte, 1978; Lundgren, 1981).

Mehan's (1979) observations of the skill with which some children can "derail" a teacher's agenda without acquiring the label of "disruptive" provide one example of children's knowledge of procedural rules.

Another is provided by Corsaro's (1990) observations of the ways in which children avoid clean-up time in preschools. They go elsewhere, pretend not to hear a request, or plead a pressing personal problem (they have hurt themselves, need to go to the bathroom, or need to finish what they are doing). Several studies have looked at children's understanding of authority and the way that authority operates at school. These have tended to concentrate upon possible limits to the authority of teachers. Researchers have asked children whether there are other people who tell teachers what to do (e.g., Emler, Ohana & Dickinson, 1990), how far teachers' authority prevails beyond the school (Laupa & Turiel, 1993; Braine, Pomerantz, Lorber & Krantz, 1991), regulations that must be followed even when they are unfair (Emler et al., 1990), or moral systems that say teachers should not



"play favorites" (e.g. Davies, 1982; Emler et al., 1990).

b) Procedural knowledge at home. Within research on work procedures at home, questions about authority appear once more. Smetana (1988) asked children aged 10 to 18 years, and their parents, who should make the rules about an activity such as "cleaning one's own room". The adolescents in this study saw the issue as one of personal choice while their parents saw it as a matter of social convention over which they should have control...Children's ideas about fair distribution of work have been the subject of several studies about whether it is fair to expect someone else to put away what you have used (Shure, 1968; Warton & Goodnow, 1991). Children as young as six years have a well-developed sense of justice when it comes to cleaning up someone else's mess: they see it as unfair and have developed several ways of renegotiating the work, including saying to their mothers, "I didn't take it out" or "I'll only do my half" (Bowes, 1994).

Less focused on justice and more on what is appropriate in family relationships are questions about reasonable and unreasonable ways to ask a brother or sister to take on a household job, to describe the job, to give a reminder, or to check that the job has been done

(Goodnow & Warton, 1992). The adolescents in that study showed a detailed and sensitive understanding about how work should be delegated in a family setting. They knew, for example, that standing and watching someone work or being too "picky" about standards was not appropriate when that work was being done as a favour.

Children's Understanding of Connections Between Unpaid and Paid Work  
Children are often thought to learn at home or at school "habits of work" or expectations that they then carry over to other work settings (e.g., Borow, 1966; Eccles & Hoffman, 1984). Less often, a carry-over is directly observed (e.g., from school to workplace in Willis, 1977). Less often, also, questions are asked about the extent to which children themselves see work settings as inter-connected, and about the kinds of connections that they make.

a) The Perceived Usefulness of Work at School For Paid Work.

Researchers have asked about the perceived relevance of work at school for later paid work. Children in primary school make a general connection between going to school and being employed. That connection may be in the negative form of answering, when asked "why do you go to school?", that "if you don't go to school, you won't get a job" (Goodnow & Burns, 1985), or in the more positive form of perceiving a direct link between working hard at school and getting "good work" in the future (Roberts & Dolan, 1989). The link is not made to school, however, when young children are asked how someone came to be in a particular job (Hill, 1969; Furth, 1978; Goldstein & Oldham, 1979). Furth (1978), for example, quotes a 6-year-old who said that a shopkeeper became a shopkeeper because he wished to have that job, a comment illustrating a common belief amongst children that personal decision is the main route to work roles.

In a number of reports, the point has been made that the procedural

rules learned at school mirror or are a preparation for what will be expected in the paid work force (e.g., Davies, 1982, James & Prout, 1990; LeCompte, 1978; Lundgren, 1981; Wilcox & Moriarty, 1980). This argument has been offered for schools in general and for particular classrooms. Wilcox and Moriarty (1980), for example, report a difference between a first grade U.S. classroom where the pupils were from middle-class families (a fair degree of autonomy in schoolwork was expected) and one where the pupils were from working-class families (more obedience and working from directions was expected).

Butorac (1988) suggests that a difference is seen in the extent to which people are allowed to stop what they are doing and finish it later, possibly elsewhere. Some of the children in her sample, for instance, comment that "you can take schoolwork home " but that "at work, you can't stop".

b) The Perceived Usefulness of Work at Home for Paid Work. In some studies, the question asked is about the perceived relevance of work at home for later life. Straus (1962), for instance, reports that among three samples of adolescent boys in the U.S.A. (rural, town, town/country fringe), only the rural boys in the first sample saw what they did at home as useful for what they would do later (occupationally). Another group who saw their unpaid work at home as significant for their occupational future was the group of boys (but not girls) growing up in institutional care and interviewed by Wittner (1980). For these boys, skill in household work was a step towards the independent living that they saw as an inevitable part of their future and as an essential part of becoming self-supporting adults. For a sample of younger children (primary school), covering both boys and girls, Goodnow and Burns (1985) report an emphasis upon family jobs as useful only for later domestic life (e.g., "when you leave home, you need to know how to do these things").

More extensive data about understanding of differences in procedural rules at home and in paid work came from Goodnow and Warton's (1992) report of answers to a question about whether the procedures associated

with delegating a job are likely to be the same in the two settings. The interesting result was a gender difference. Girls (aged 14 and 18 years) downplayed any difference saying that personal relationships mattered in both cases. Boys were more inclined to regard the two settings as different (in paid work, "they just tell you"). Boys and girls in this group did not differ in their involvement in part-time work. Whether their different perceptions came from their socialisation or from experience in different kinds of work settings is not known.

c) The Perceived Usefulness of Part-Time Work for Later Paid Work. A clearer link between early and later work life is made by school students aged 15 and 16 years who held part-time jobs. Most of the students interviewed by Steinberg and colleagues reported the belief that their experience in part-time jobs had long-term occupational significance (Steinberg, Greenberger, Vaux & Ruggiero, 1981). Work



experience organised by the school was also seen as directly related to future work by students in their final years at school (Stern, Stone, Hopkins, & McMillion, 1990), with students in one study reporting their belief that school-based work experience programs were more relevant for future work than were part-time jobs (Stern, 1984).

#### Usefulness of Knowledge about Children's Understanding of Unpaid Work for Teaching about Work.

In the unpaid work settings of home and school, children have been introduced to distinctions and procedures which may or may not relate to paid work. Expecting the flexibility that comes with work within the family in a paid work setting is probably not realistic, although it was a view held, on the basis of experience, by the teenage girls in Goodnow and Warton's (1992) study. It is with time and experience that children come to realise that a different set of distinctions and procedural rules apply in the world of business than apply in the home and school work settings. At the same time, many of the distinctions and rules learned in unpaid work will carry over usefully to paid work.

Some examples are knowing that "you are responsible for work you have created" , knowing how to distinguish between work and not work, knowing how to distribute work fairly and how to delegate work.

In preparing students for the world of paid work, teachers can build on this prior knowledge of work categories and procedures. Discussion of what students already know from work contexts with which they are very familiar can lead to preparation for similar distinctions and procedures in the workplace. Discussion about which distinctions and procedural understandings might not be appropriately transferred might also prepare students and protect them from the misunderstandings and disappointment often reported by young people when they first enter full time work.

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