



Leading education  
and social research  
Institute of Education  
University of London

**An everlasting, unconsummated  
courtship? The State's desperate  
attempt to involve employers in  
VET**

**Professor Lorna Unwin**

**[l.unwin@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:l.unwin@ioe.ac.uk)**

**Cambridge Assessment Conference  
2009**

# **What role should/can/do employers play?: Active, Passive, Pro-active, Re-active?**

- Nature of 'learning and skills sector' – where do employers sit?
- Complex productive system
- Learning across contexts
- Workforce development and/or Government 'Schemes'

# VET Environments

- Workplaces
- Classrooms
- Workshops
- Virtual environments
- Technology driven new spaces for work and learning: Cars, planes, buses, trains, cafes etc



[Russian-Souvenir.com](http://Russian-Souvenir.com)

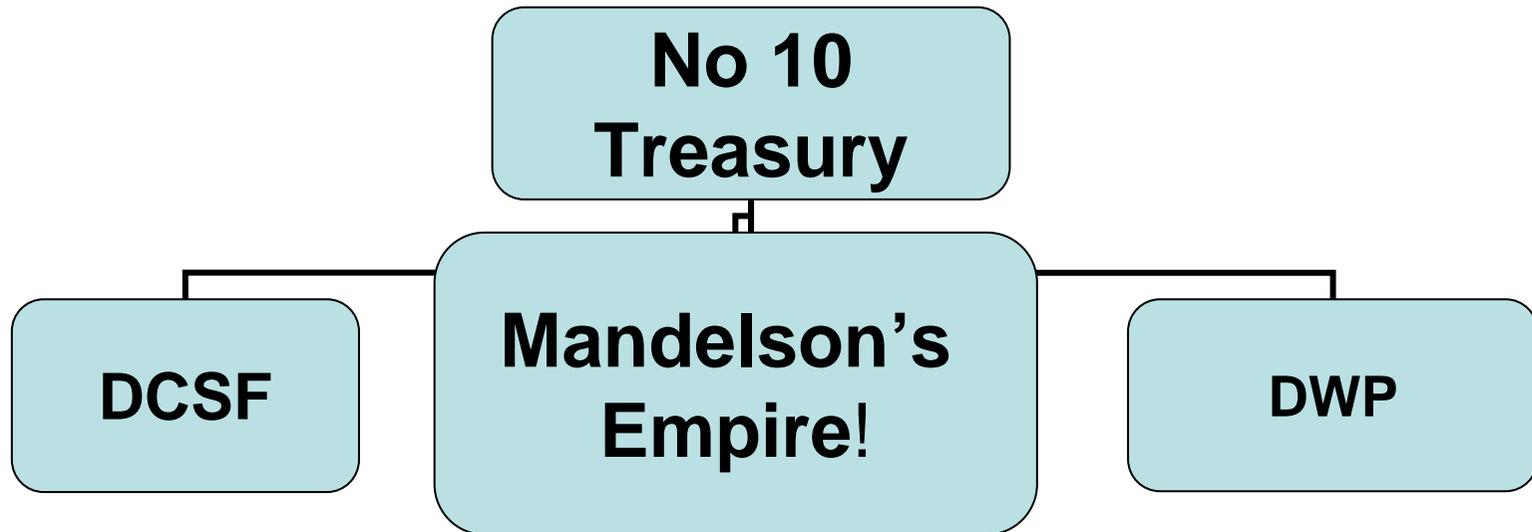
# Learning Spaces

- **Organisation of work and learning**
- **Physical environment**
- **Virtual environment**
- **Mental environment (tacit expertise transformed into explicit – made visible) – use of artefacts**
- **Japanese concepts of *ba and wa* – *harmony/integration***

# Context of 'Flexibility'

- Learning and Skills Sector seen as most 'elastic'
- Voluntarist tradition in UK - government backs off from regulating employers –few 'licences to practise' - limited use of procurement policies for major public projects
- Work-based programmes respond to changing nature of economy, employer behaviour
- Long history of creative management of resources

# Structures of Production



Employers  
and  
'employer  
agencies'

**LSC (for now)**

Regulatory  
bodies

**Local LSCs/LEAs**

Awarding bodies

**Learners**

**Education and Training  
Providers  
Employers**

# **Stages of Production**

**Learners      Completion      Progression**

# METAPHORS OF LEARNING

- Learning as Acquisition (transmission, 'teaching to the exam', accreditation, 'passive', comforting)
- Learning as Participation (situated, social relations, 'active', challenging)
- Learning as Co-configuration (co-design of programmes, shared goal/problem to solve, negotiation, demanding)
- Learning as Transformation (deliberate attempt to problematise situations, critique, leading to change, dramatic, life-changing)

# Expansive-Restrictive Framework

Workforce development aligns organisational and individual goals	Individual moulded to fit organisational goals – ‘learning’ seen as an ‘event’
Employees have dual identity: worker and learner	Fast track to productive worker
Expertise widely distributed: multi-dimensional concept of expertise	Expertise narrowly defined and confined to top level – ‘need to know basis’
Managers’ key role to support learning – supported by mentors	Managers’ role to meet targets – rhetoric of mentoring

Workers given discretion to make judgements and contribute to decision-making	Discretion limited to key workers – no employee involvement in workplace decisions
Participation in different communities of practice is encouraged – job/team boundaries can be crossed	Participation restricted to immediate work team/area – boundary crossing discouraged – isolated workers
Planned time off-the-job for reflection and deeper learning beyond immediate job requirements	All training/development on-the-job and limited to immediate job requirements

# Expansive Environments

- Learning key to success and sustainability – embedded process
- Shared pride in organisational output
- Experienced workers pass on skills, knowledge and tacit understanding

# Pivotal Role of Managers

- Key to maintenance and sustainability of learning environment
- Understanding their drivers and pressures
- **Feedback key motivator for employees**
- Forms of managerial support need building into model of learning - mentors, coaches, appraisers/reviewers

**“Craftsmanship broadly understood means the desire to do something well for its own sake. All human beings want the satisfaction of doing something well and want to believe in what they do. Yet at work, in education, in politics, the new order does not and cannot satisfy this desire...craftsmanship has a cardinal virtue missing in the new culture’s idealised worker, student or citizen. It is commitment.” (Richard Sennett)**

# Application of Framework to Supporting Education and Training Programmes

- To what extent do YOU and YOUR LEARNERS participate in ‘expansive’ learning?
- What spaces are there to ‘expand’ your/their experience?
- Are the ‘restrictive’ aspects of your/their experience imposed by the productive system in which YOU work?