

Approaches to the creation of professional identity

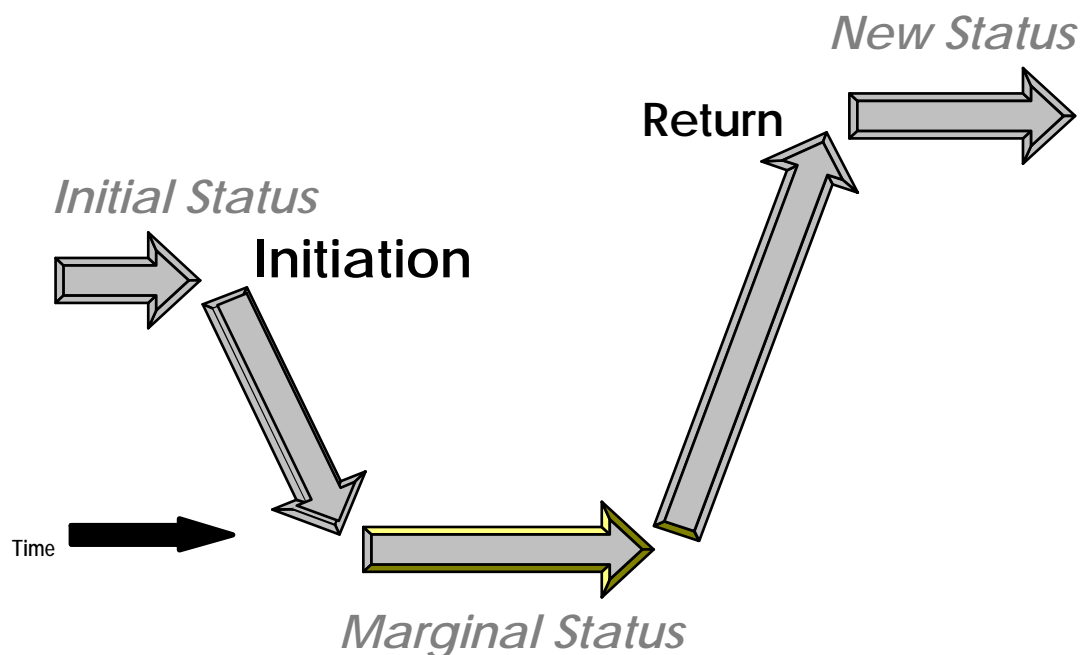
These handouts describe (in very rough and ready terms) some angles on how professional identity may be acquired or what it consists of. They are all deliberately quite venerable enough to have become embedded in practice, and of course in the real world they co-exist in relation to the same courses.

The questions for discussion are;

What would a course/programme look like if it attempted to embody the approach outlined on this page?

How do they contribute to "thinking like a professional?"

Please identify positive features on the green post-its, "interesting" on the yellow, and issues requiring caution on the pink/red ones.



Initiation

Professional identity is seen as something which is acquired through initiation, which is not merely formal ritual, but which requires an active process of separation from the former self, an induction into the role, and a managed return to the community in that new role.

Examples include joining armed services, or some religious ministries.

Based on van Gennep (1909)

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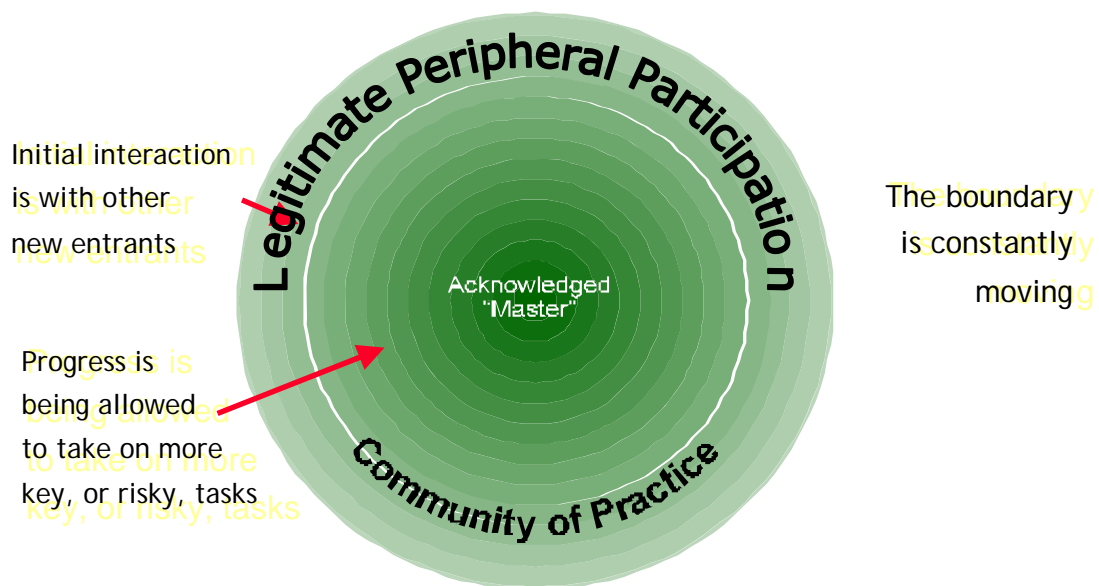
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Communities of Practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) describe the formation of skilled workers and professionals outside the formal educational system, drawing on anthropological evidence. They described the process as being one of "legitimate peripheral participation", in which established members of the community tolerate and then authorise the acceptance of new members by informally allocating them tasks through which they learn.

In the UK, this is known as "sitting by Nellie". A different sociological tradition would call it "occupational socialization". It was described earlier by Howard Becker in his wonderful essay, "Why School is a Lousy Place to Learn Anything In."

Note that L & W explicitly reject the depiction of their model in a diagram such as shown above.

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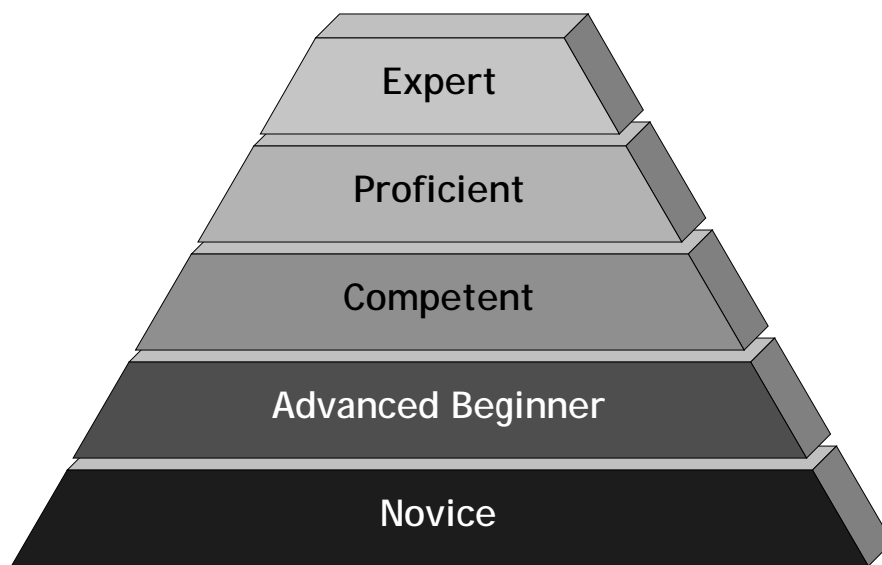
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Developmental Progression

Dreyfus and Dreyfus' model (1986) envisages a progressive development and unfolding of experience which may eventually reach expertise. They see the practitioner's understanding of her or his task and role changing as she or he develops. They are not clear, however, at what stage the professional identity is acquired and internalised (that may vary between occupations).

This model (as adopted by Benner, 1984) is very popular in nursing. Fuller (1970) has a similarly influential view in teaching.

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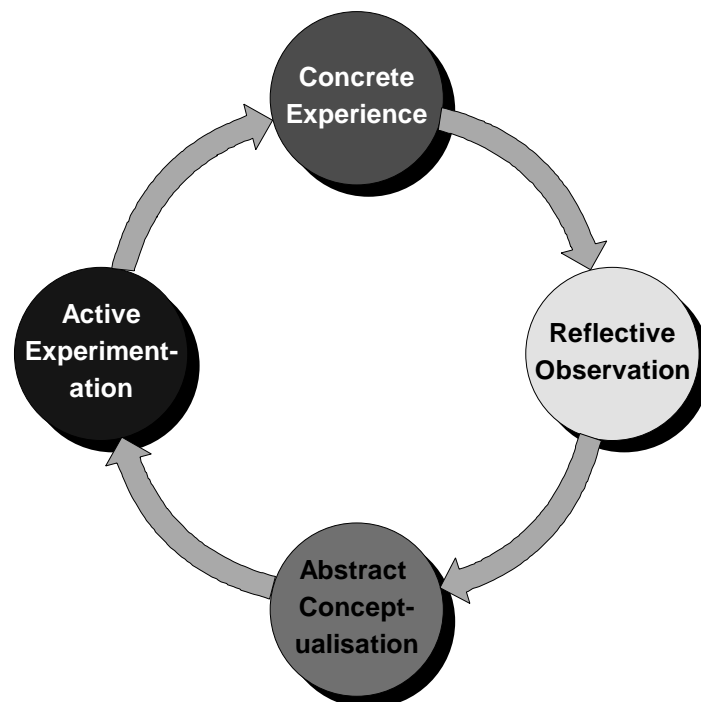
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Reflective practice

David Boud (1982), Donald Schön (1983) and latterly Jenny Moon (1999) have made much of reflection as a defining characteristic of a professional practitioner (with differing emphases). The diagram comes from David Kolb's (1984) very influential experiential learning cycle.

Reflective practice, characterised by constant thoughtfulness and evaluation of past and present practice in a spirit of constant improvement, is contrasted with the mere exercise of great skill.

The idea has been very influential in education, nursing, and social work, although as Jenny Moon suggests, it may be honoured more in rhetoric than practice in some cases.

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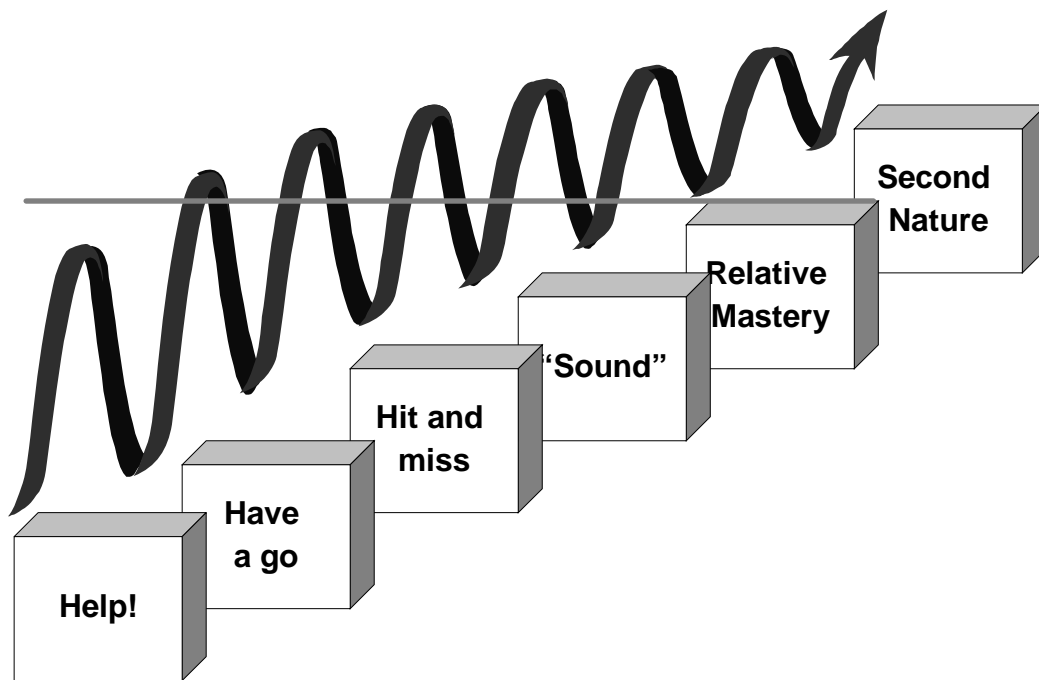
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Towards Unconscious Competence

When you get really good at something you can do it without thinking, and that frees up physical and intellectual energy for other things. That lies at the root of this progressive model, which also touches on the phenomenon of "beginner's luck" and the question of how much of the time practice has to exceed a threshold of competence (the horizontal line) to count as creditable.

This is the underlying idea of "serving time" in an apprenticeship—either as a plumber or, in part, as a surgeon, and of course of "drilling" as in the armed or emergency services. It may be the opposite of "reflective practice".

This representation is even more of a travesty than others, because I can no longer get hold of Bertha Reynolds' (1965) text, and so it is reconstructed from memory.

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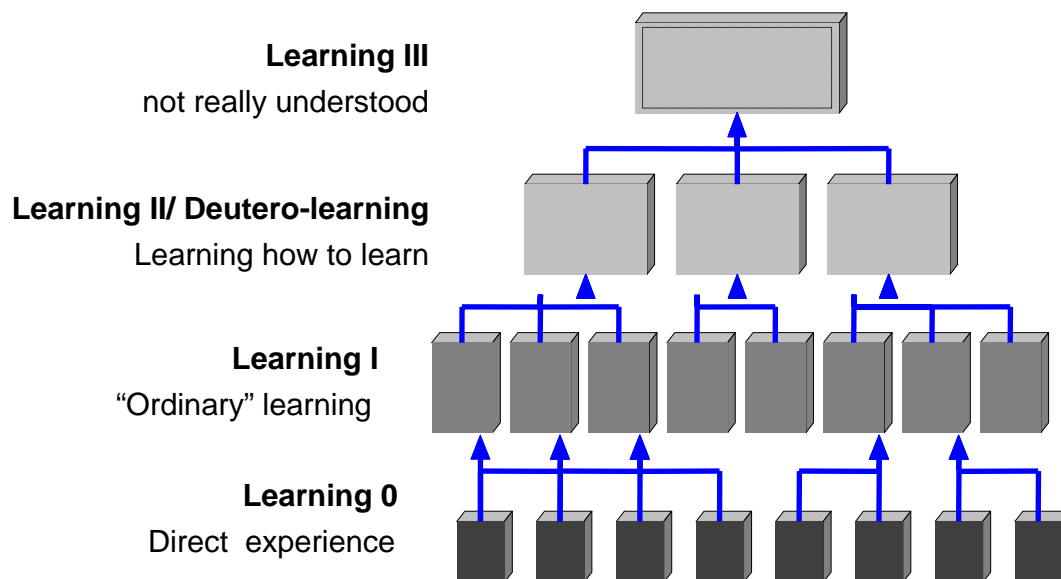
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Learning how to Learn

Bateson (1973) suggests that there is much confusion around learning because people fail to recognise its different levels—which are not about "difficulty" but about contextualising lower layers.

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|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Learning 0 | is not really "learning", just having an experience. Bateson says it is like the position of an object. |
| Learning I | is connecting more than one experience; routine academic or skill learning. It is like the object's speed when it changes position. We are quite good at managing this. |
| Learning II | is about contextualising items of Learning I. It is like the object's acceleration (change in speed). We know it happens, but not necessarily how to teach it. Thinking like a professional may be at this level. |
| Learning III | is little understood. It is to Learning II as Learning II is to Learning I; it is a change in the rate of acceleration. |

So how do we create the conditions for Learning II to happen?