

Knowing How, Intelligence
and Vocational and
Professional Education

A Symposium Proposal for
PESGB Annual Conference
2010

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The post-Rylean debate on knowing how that was initiated by David Carr in two papers in 1979 and 1981 has now become well-established in contemporary analytic epistemology. A dominant view has become that of the so-called intellectualists such as Timothy Williamson and Jason Stanley who argued in an influential paper in 2001 that, contrary to Ryle's claim, knowing how is conceptually a species of knowing that, namely knowing that A is a way to F in a practical mode of presentation. Stanley and Williamson's analysis has, despite widespread criticism, become influential and is part of a larger intellectualist project that seeks to give an account of the human mind as a kind of engine for generating, evaluating and manipulating propositional content. This symposium has two purposes: one is to question the intellectualist account of knowing how, particularly its inability to account for the evaluative aspect of ascriptions of know-how and secondly to draw out the implications for vocational education of an anti-intellectualist account of knowing-how.

X argues that the intellectualists like AR White and Stanley and Williamson have failed to deal with one key aspect of Ryle's account of the distinctiveness of knowing how, namely that to say that someone knows how to do something is to leave the possibility that one may also evaluate their know-how or the action that results from it. These evaluative forms of language Ryle terms 'intelligence epithets'. Thus it is possible to say, not only that John can run, but that John can run gracefully or with a competitive spirit. This failure means in turn that a central feature of knowing how to do something is missing and the practical consequence of this in vocational and professional education if the intellectualist position is taken seriously is that there is no room for the development of expertise rather than the mere acquisition of technique. Not only does this suggest an impoverished account of vocational and professional education but also one that does not do justice to actual practice. Vocational education consists, not merely in the enabling of someone to master a technique, but to become expert in a field and an exemplar of excellence in the practice of that field. The implications of this view for both initial and continuing vocational education are drawn out.

Y will argue that the assumption that knowing how and knowing that represent two forms of knowledge entails a number of errors and that the distinction should more properly be seen as indicating the evidential conditions of our claims about the knowledgeable states of others. As Ryle himself was at pains to emphasise, we do not have direct access to other minds hence the idea that knowing how and knowing that denote a fundamental epistemological division points to something of an inconsistency in Ryle's account. If we take seriously Ryle's point about access, as it seems we must, the division might reasonably be said to apply to the kind of evidence we have of someone's knowing. The question then is whether we are justified in assuming a corresponding epistemic division; here it will be argued that we are not. However this is a very different thing from saying that one notion is reducible to the other. Indeed, it will be suggested here that this kind of reduction is only possible when one notion is conceived of in terms of outward manifestations while taking the other to refer to the knowledgeable states which give rise to those manifestations, it being thereby assumed that the latter is the more fundamental. It would seem, therefore, that such attempts at reduction are symptomatic of a certain kind of

ontological confusion, a failure to distinguish between knowledgeable states and the outward manifestations of those states, a confusion evident not only in Ryle's own work but in much recent policy and practice in education.

Indeed, the increasing tendency of late to resort to this kind of distinction (for it has a number of latter-day equivalents) can be seen to have profoundly negative implications for curriculum design, assessment and even the very aims of education. It will be argued that our conceiving of knowledge in these dichotomous terms leads inevitably to an educational enterprise which is impoverished and inadequate – failings which are perhaps at their most apparent in the vocational curriculum. Of no lesser concern, the assumption that the distinction denotes two kinds of knowledge can be seen to have intensely divisive educational and social consequences. The work of Michael Oakeshott and Martin Heidegger will be invoked by way of demonstrating how it is possible to escape the divisive and obstructive consequences of dividing knowledge in this way.

The intention of this symposium is thus not only to extend the ongoing contemporary epistemological debate on practical knowledge, but to show how it is of particular relevance to current issues in vocational education. These issues are distinct but related: first, what role does propositional knowledge play in professional judgement; second, how is expertise to be recognised and developed within vocational programmes, both initial and continuing. The discussion will be related to such contemporary developments as the Diploma qualifications, UKCHES's 20/20 vision publication and the 'Train to Gain' programme endorsed by the Leitch Review of 2006.

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