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Contents

The future of career development

This edition starts with two articles arising from a recent conference on the future of career development. These are followed by some recent research on the importance of celebrity culture in the career-related learning of young people. The next three articles all broadly cover the topic of career education in contrasting contexts within higher education and schools. There is also an article on young people and labour markets. We conclude with two extra sections in this edition: a research update and three book reviews. Any feedback on these additions or any aspect of the issue would be most welcome.

Lyn Barham and **Wendy Hirsh** provide a helpful overview of the *Careers 50/50* conference held in Cambridge (UK) in July 2014. This event was organised jointly by the Careers Research Advisory Centre (CRAC) and the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC). A number of key themes were identified including the politically situated nature of careers work. This gave rise to critical questions about responsibilisation, beneficiaries and vested interests.

In a further paper arising from *Careers 50/50*, **Stephen McNair** identifies four key challenges for our field: definitions of "guidance"; the notion of "adultness"; the relationship between learning and career; and the nature of professionalism. He discusses each in turn and considers implications for the future, for example, better use of existing longitudinal studies to inform lifelong career development.

Kim Allen and **Heather Mendick** report on their research with young people in relation to celebrity culture. This ground-breaking work enables us to hear about the ways young people make sense of celebrity culture such as TV shows (e.g. *Judge Judy* and *The Hills*) in career terms. The authors acknowledge that popular representations of success are not necessarily unproblematic (e.g. representations of Will Smith) and use this to argue for a critical and creative approach to career education through which young people are supported to arrive at their own definitions of success.

Laura Brammar and **David Winter** report on a significant career education innovation using a massive online open course (MOOC). They state that it is the world's first career and employability skills MOOC with around 90,000 participants from 204 countries. In addition, although working within a traditional career

education paradigm, the authors synthesise bold new claims concerning contemporary career management focusing on: control, clarity, confidence and courage. They also discuss how users have been enabled to evaluate aspects of career development theories.

Morag Walling, Chris Horton and **Nigel Rayment** discuss a new approach to employer engagement with young people in schools. An overview of the programme and its underpinning rationale in experiential and co-operative learning is provided. They explain how an invitation to play the role of 'Young Consultant' led to the students engaging in research and making recommendations to the company. The role of the employees as co-learners is also extensively considered.

Paula Benton explores work placement experiences within some higher education student groups. She argues for a richer conception of employability that includes critical reasoning and evaluation. As part of this, she identifies and need for a *rapprochement* between employability and career development learning. Paula takes a social learning and constructivist approach through which students are supported to reflect upon how career development theories (e.g. matching, developmental and planned happenstance) relate to their career journey.

Gill Naylor engages in a critical analysis of the changing nature of the youth employment market and its impact upon the lives of young people on the economic margins of society. She argues that the routes from education to the labour market are seriously flawed. She identifies persistent attempts to pathologise groups of young people i.e. to see them in deficit and not the labour market, government or businesses. It is, she argues, only when the needs of young people are given equal status that the problem can begin to be addressed.

Finally, **Ruth Mieschbuehler** and **Rob Vickers** take an overview of recent research in our field and relate this to careers work practice. Book reviews are provided by **David Winter, Phil McCash** and **Lyn Barham**.

Phil McCash, Editor

Career development learning in higher education: how authentic work experiences and opportunities for career exploration can increase self-efficacy and inform career identity

Paula Benton

A recent study suggests that enhancing career development is a key motivator for students entering university (Kandiko & Mawer, 2013). This article discusses the place of career development learning within the 'employability' agenda. It draws upon social learning and constructivist theories of career development in a qualitative case study exploring undergraduate students' experiences of placements in relation to their career development learning and employability. Findings suggest significant value in providing authentic work experiences and opportunities for career exploration (to 'broaden their horizons' rather than narrowing down choices) to inform career identities and increase self-efficacy and motivation.

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Introduction

In the context of a more challenging, uncertain graduate labour market and considerable changes in higher education funding, employment related motivations for undergraduate study appear to be strengthened. A recent study of 150 students by Kings Learning Institute/Quality Assurance Agency suggests that improving career prospects and enhancing career development is the primary focus for students entering higher education (Kandiko & Mawer, 2013).

The higher education sector has placed graduate employment 'centre stage' (Pegg, Waldcock, Hendy-Isaac and Lawton, 2012: 4) and the term 'employability' has become increasingly dominant as a key contributor to career success (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; McArdle, Waters, Briscoe and Hall, 2007). Indeed, the Higher Education Funding Council for England's strategy statement asserts that 'embedding employability into the core of higher education will continue to be a key priority of Government, universities and colleges, and employers' (HEFCE, 2011: 6).

There has been significant interest in the pedagogy of employability over the last few years including a number of initiatives and publications to support universities to develop and integrate employability into the curriculum, however the focus on 'career development' is less apparent. This paper seeks to explore the place of 'career development learning' within the employability agenda, and, drawing upon social learning and constructivist theories of career development, consider implications for practice. A small scale qualitative case study exploring undergraduate students' experiences of a placement module, which aimed to enhance career development learning and employability, will be used to highlight issues for consideration.

Employability

Employability is a much debated concept. There has been some departure from the discourse of employability as primarily a matter of an individual's skills, measured by the potential of graduates to obtain

a 'graduate job' to a more holistic interpretation which includes skills and attributes but also encompasses values, engagement and critical reasoning (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Reddy, Lantz and Hulme, 2013). Indeed, the emotional and affective aspects of employability appear to be recognised more fully in the literature, as Pegg et al. state, 'the ability to articulate learning and raising confidence, self-esteem and aspirations seem to be more significant in developing graduates than a narrow focus on skills and competences' (2012: 9). Several valuable models have emerged which place a greater focus on career development and career management. Dacre Pool and Sewell's CareerEDGE model (2007) emphasises the central role of self-efficacy (incorporating self -esteem and self-confidence), the importance of reflection and evaluation and the role of 'work and life experience' and 'career development learning'.

Career development learning as a central component of employability

The term 'career development learning' is fairly new term within higher education and marks a move away from the aforementioned limited 'skills' focus of employability (Watts, 2006: 9). For some, it is seen as a key component of employability (Watts, 2006; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) and can incorporate self-awareness, occupational exploration, decision making and career management (e.g. using social networks, adapting to change, taking risks). Bridgestock (2009: 34) suggests that career management is *central* to employability and offers a slightly different conceptual model, emphasising the importance of equipping graduates to 'proactively navigate the world of work and self-manage the career building process'. She argues that 'for universities to effectively engage with the graduate employability agenda, they must recognise the importance of a wider skill set… and move into the realm of lifelong career development' (Bridgestock, 2009: 40). Interventions that are concerned with helping students to explore possible future career directions help them to see the relevance of employability and the benefits it may offer them (Watts & Hawthorn, 1992 cited in Watts, 2006: 16). In short, career development learning can offer a focus for students in developing their own employability.

Career development theory

In seeking how best to support students in relation to employability and career development learning, it seems pertinent to draw upon career development theory to review and inform practice, something which appears to be overlooked within the employability agenda. Career development theory has moved away from the positivist, rational view of career choice (as adopted in 'trait and factor' approaches in which individuals are matched to their 'perfect' job) to social learning and constructivist theories which acknowledge the impact of learning experiences upon occupational choice and the social and psychological constructs that inform the active process of constructing ones career (Bassot, 2012).

Social learning theory and self-efficacy

Lent, Brown and Hackett's Social Cognitive Career Theory (1994) builds on the work of Bandura (1977) in emphasising the importance of learning experiences, contextual and interactional factors in guiding career development, emphasising self-efficacy as a major mediator of career choice and development, more powerful than interests, values and skills (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994: 85). Self-efficacy refers to 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' (Bandura, 1997: 3) and is considered a key component of career identity, facilitating the identification and realization of career opportunities (Savickas, 2002; Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004). Career self-efficacy is developed through four main sources; 'mastery experiences' (experiencing and doing well at the task in hand); vicarious learning or modelling (seeing others succeed at tasks); social persuasion (encouragement and support from others); and psychological states and reactions (less anxiety in connection with the task) (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994; Betz, 2004).

Also drawing upon the work of Bandura, Krumboltz, Mitchell and Jones' Social Learning Theory of Career Selection (1976) and Mitchell and Krumboltz's Learning Theory of Career Choice and Counselling (1996) claim that instrumental and associative learning experiences result in occupational choice and focus

on 'career exploration' as an important part of career development learning. Indeed, Krumboltz then developed his initial ideas in Happenstance Learning Theory (2009) which moves away from the focus on the process of occupational choice and decision making to the importance of being flexible and open minded about career opportunities due to the prevalence of unplanned events and uncertain labour markets.

The importance of proving students with work related experiences, which give opportunities for career exploration, increase self-efficacy and guide career choice and development is an important part of career development learning and employability. Such 'mastery experiences' are a key concept throughout this study and constructivist theories can help us to understand how students make sense of these to inform their career identities.

Constructivist theories and career identity

Central to the Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2002) is the role of the individual in constructing their careers by imposing meaning on their work experiences. 'Careers do not unfold; they are constructed as individuals make choices that express their self-concepts and substantiate their goals in the social reality of work roles' (Savickas, 2005: 43). In the constructivist view, meaning is constructed by creating a story from information through a dialogue with one self and others about real-life experiences (Kuijpers, Meijers and Grundy, 2011).

Career identity (often articulated in the form of narratives and closely related to Savickas' 'vocational personality') represents the way individuals define themselves in the career context and can be defined as the commitment a person has to a specific career or career area (McArdle et al., 2007; Meijers, Kuijpers and Grundy, 2013). Career identity incorporates one's broad career interests, motivations, personality traits, values and beliefs (Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle et al., 2007). It is a dynamic construct which changes over time (Savickas, 2005; McArdle et al., 2007; La Pointe, 2010; Meijers & Reinekke, 2012) and 'might alert us to possibilities rather than predict the future' (Savickas, 2005: 47).

The following case study draws upon social learning and constructivist perspectives in seeking to explore how providing authentic experiences of work (through a placement) could facilitate career development learning and employability.

Case study: placement opportunities for undergraduate students

The placements were offered as part of a module within a large undergraduate joint honours degree programme in which students choose two subjects (from Early Years, Childhood Studies, Disability Studies, Guidance and Counselling and Health in Contemporary Society). The degree is primarily an academic programme without compulsory placements and this presents challenges in relation to the employability of students. Students do not have one defined career path but enter a range of professions after graduation within education, health, social care and the voluntary sector.

Within the degree, students are actively encouraged to explore a range of careers and are supported to reflect upon how career development theories and approaches (e.g. matching models, developmental models and Krumboltz's 'planned happenstance') relate to their own career journey. In addition to this, a number of teaching and learning strategies to enhance the employability of students have been developed, one of which was an optional module which included a placement within a health, education or community setting. The aim of the module was to provide students with the opportunity to contextualise their learning and to provide direct experiences of work. The nature of the placement aimed to reflect individual study interests, career aspirations and experiences but unlike similar placement modules, students were not assessed on their competence in the workplace but were required to identify and reflect upon their own professional development targets and make sense of their experience in relation to key concepts within their degree subjects. Students attended a series of lectures and undertook 50 hours of placement over a sixth month period. They reflected on their placement experience through seminars, group and individual tutorials. Assessment was in the form of a completed

placement diary, written reflective summary and interview.

Initial evaluation of the module suggested significant learning experiences which include reference to facing personal challenges, increased confidence and career aspirations. One student commented 'this has significantly improved my aspirations in the future'. Another stated that 'the confidence, experience and professional knowledge has enhanced my life skills and broadened my career aspirations'. Feedback from students and from academic staff suggests that the placement experience had a significant impact on students' cognitive and affective learning. Students reported increased confidence in 'building professional relationships' and 'working with challenging clients' and one student claimed it 'changed my own way of thinking'. It appeared to go further than developing employability skills; for many it had an impact upon their career development learning and served to either confirm their current career aspirations ('I learnt that a career working with young people is definitely what I want') or develop new areas of interest ('it guided me in what I want to do as a career'). This seemed to impact upon their self confidence and motivation and academic tutors reported improved attendance and motivation across other modules. One student commented 'this module changed my perspective on the overall course'.

The research

A small scale qualitative research project sought to build on the initial evaluation of the module and, through a qualitative case study, further explore students' experiences of the placement module in relation to employability and career development learning, in order to gain a deeper understanding and to inform and develop academic practice. The research was concerned with students' subjective understandings; how students interpret the social interactions associated with the placement experience and how this informs their understanding of themselves (in relation to career identity and self-efficacy) and the world around them (their place as graduates within the graduate labour market, for example).

Data was collected in the form of semi-structured interviews and documented 'reflective summaries'

from five participants (from a cohort of 25 students) who had undertaken the placement module in the second year of their degree. Due to the reflective nature of the module, and the fact that assessment takes the form of an interview, only students who had completed the module were invited to take part so as not to influence the assessment process. Involvement in the study was on an 'opt in' basis and entirely voluntary. An email was initially sent to all 25 students who had completed the module inviting them to take part. Initially two students came forward and so a follow up email was sent, resulting in a further four responses. This allowed for a pilot interview in addition to the five interviews for the study itself. Fortunately the participants that came forward were from a range of placement settings and at different stages in their career development (for example those who were undecided about their future career aims and those who had more developed career ideas), as intended. It was therefore not necessary to exclude any participants.

The interviews ranged from 14 minutes to 27 minutes long. Each was recorded using a dictaphone to ensure an accurate record of the discussion and then transcribed onto a Word document. Reflective summaries, completed as part of the module assessment, were used to inform the interviews and also provide data for the study. It must be noted that, as an assessed piece of work, aimed to meet learning outcomes of the module, the content of the reflective summary must be treated with some caution. It was considered, however, that this additional data provided some level of methodological triangulation.

As a multiple case study, each case was initially treated as a single case, the findings of which contributed to the whole study. Individual cases were analysed initially before themes were identified and examined across and between cases. Constant comparative analysis took place once the data was gathered which led to 'open coding', identifying discrete concepts. Once the concepts had been identified for each participant, cross case analysis began and the concepts were then grouped into categories. In an attempt to ensure the confirmability and dependability of the data, the emerging themes from the analysis were fed back to participants for comment and adjusted accordingly.

Findings

Self-efficacy

The placement, as a 'mastery experience' appears to have been significant in developing participants' self-efficacy. One student reflected that 'I had never had the self-belief to take on leadership responsibilities' prior to the placement but that her 'confidence developed by undertaking tasks that I would previously have considered not to be within my abilities'. Another explained that the placement 'boosted my confidence' in speaking to different people and trying out different tasks, 'I would never have been able to do that [before the placement]'. In support of existing literature, one of the factors influencing self-efficacy was the opportunity for participants to gain authentic experience of a work setting and, in particular, be included in activities rather than taking an observational role. In doing this, it was important for participants to try new experiences and 'step out of their comfort zone'.

Another significant factor in the development of self-efficacy was feeling part of the setting and being valued by professionals. Students appeared surprised, at times, that colleagues treated them as equals and valued their contributions. This appeared to be quite significant in their assessment of their own abilities, and appears to suggest that the power of 'social persuasion' in the context of 'mastery experiences' were significant sources of self-efficacy.

Career identity

Career exploration was both a motivator and outcome of the placement experience and a key part of the participants' evolving career identities. For some students, the career exploration process involved testing out current career ideas in a work setting, for others, it involved exploring a range of opportunities. All were keen to gain relevant 'real world' experience to support them in this and it seems apparent that the placement allowed 'actualization' in which they tested out ideas about occupations into reality (Savickas, 2002: 175).

The placement experience appeared to facilitate the process of career exploration and inform participants'

career identities. The students clearly state that the experience broadened their career ideas, alerting them to opportunities which they had previously no knowledge of or had not previously considered. One states that it 'opened me up to different ideas' and 'completely changed everything that I wanted to do'; another student also stated; 'I think I had a bit of a closed mind because I always wanted to do teaching and then doing this opened up different things'.

For the participants in the study, career identity certainly appeared to be a dynamic process which changed over time, 'alerting them to possibilities rather than predicting the future' (Savickas, 2005: 47). Interestingly, two students' initial career goals changed and, in a sense, became less defined (from 'teacher' or 'social worker' to 'some sort of family support work in a community setting'). However, their motivation and self-efficacy had increased considerably (they talk about 'passion', 'excitement', 'getting a real buzz' and feeling more confident to enter the graduate labour market).

This supports the work of McArdle et al. (2007) who suggest that career identity needs to be decoupled from a specific job or organisation, instead representing an individual's personal values, motivations and broader career interests. Krumboltz's Happenstance Learning Theory seems particularly pertinent to the experiences of participants in the study as he argues that career development is often the result of unplanned events and that, in a rapidly changing economy, individuals should be encouraged to be open minded about careers, rather than narrowing down choices, (Krumboltz, 2009). Indeed, social learning and constructivist theories focus on the importance of 'career exploration' as an important part of career choice and development and suggest individuals should be supported to explore new learning experiences rather than routinely directing them on the basis of measured interests (Zunker, 2012).

Conclusion

Improving career prospects and enhancing career development remains a key focus for students entering higher education and universities face the challenge of how best to support students in this. Social learning and constructivist theories are useful in helping to understand how we might support students in their overall career development learning and hence provide a focus for the development of employability skills and attributes. Findings from the case study suggest that placements ('mastery experiences') significantly enhance self-efficacy, which, as social learning theorists assert, is a major mediator in career choice and development. An important factor in addition to the mastery experience was social persuasion, suggesting value in providing supportive placement opportunities where students receive constructive feedback, gain 'hands on' experience and are encouraged to try new things.

Also apparent was the value of the placement experience in the process of career exploration (widening their horizons) to inform evolving career identities. In the instances where career identities became less defined, self–efficacy was still significantly enhanced. The findings support McArdle et al.'s views (2007) that career identity should be decoupled from a specific job title or organisation and Krumboltz's Happenstance Learning Theory (2009) which asserts that individuals should be encouraged to be open minded about career choices. This raises the question for academics as to how we can work with employers to offer authentic experiences of work which allow students the freedom to actively explore and test out a range of careers (by 'opening doors' and safely 'stepping out of their comfort zone') rather than narrowing down choices based on measured interests, skills and abilities.

Implications / moving forward

This was a highly contextualised, small scale study based on students' own interpretations at a single point in time and therefore cannot claim to be representative. It does, however, provide insight into students' experiences and raise some issues relevant to the higher education sector. It might also be of

interest to the school and college sectors, particularly in the light of the removal of the statutory obligation to offer a programme of careers education in years 7-11 and work related learning and enterprise at key stage 4. Suggestions for moving forward include:

1. In addition to the development of employability skills and attributes, attention should be paid to students' career development learning in which they are supported to access new work experiences to broaden horizons, engage in career exploration and in 'test out' career ideas.

2. Further opportunities to develop self-efficacy through mastery experiences, such as placements, where students are supported to 'step out of their comfort zone' and reflect on their experiences should be offered.

3. Recognising the resource (and other) implications of providing placements to large cohorts of students, further research into how students can be supported to develop employability and career development learning through a range of mastery experiences could be explored (e.g. fieldwork, project work or volunteering).

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