Exploring the practical and philosophical implications of the employability concept for stakeholders in higher education

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Abstract

Employability is a familiar theme in higher education practice. In addition to the acquisition of knowledge, studies in higher education have been linked with the future activities and employment of students; this has been demonstrated in historical practice and is acknowledged in UK policy. Increasingly the purpose of higher education appears to be associated with employment related success. As universities are still major protagonists in higher education provision within the U.K. employability related discourse affects them. Universities are evaluated on the employment status of their graduates and teaching quality is appraised by its association with employability. As a result, many universities incorporate strategies that are thought to encourage employability related success. Examples include work placements and embedding skills into programs of study that are seen as both attractive to employers and thought to be transferable from one context to another. This paper recognises that there has been an ongoing debate regarding the possible effects of increasingly instrumental approaches towards learning within higher education. Discussions commonly focus on the potential eclipse of other functions that have been associated with a university's purpose such as knowledge creation. This article explores the concept of employability through relevant literature. The complexity and ambiguity of the concept is revealed along with the possible benefits and challenges for those associated with higher education.

Keywords: Employability, Higher education, Skills acquisition, Labour market

Introduction

The functions of the university and the increasing emphasis on employability
The purpose of a university and the nature of activities taking place in the university environment has been explored by numerous authors. (Newman, 1852; Maskell and Robinson, 2002; Williams, 2013). Bell (1970) cited in Docherty (2011) claimed there were essentially two authentic models of a university's function. Bell referred to these models as the classical and the pragmatic. The classical model perceived the university as rightly separate from the rest of the world and a place for the 'searching of truth and evaluating the culture of our times' (p.11). The classical model does not recognise a particular practical role of the university rather the institution acts as 'the conscience of the society' (p.11). Conversely the pragmatic model sees the university as a resource to society that does fulfil certain practical functions including the training of many people and the application of certain knowledge for example in meeting govern-

mental needs. The perceived connection of the university to the outside world recognised in the pragmatic model is a long standing one. It can be seen in the United Kingdom's oldest institutions that are perhaps most associated with the classical model: Oxford and Cambridge. Both were involved in developing knowledge however there were still practical elements. Application of knowledge took place through the work of priests in   their chosen vocations.

The relationship between a university education, future employment and changes in society was also evident in the redbrick universities that emerged later during the 1870's, their rapid expansion has been connected to increased industrialisation and advances in scientific knowledge (Williams, 2013). Despite an ongoing connection between activities within a university and the wider world universities are also valued for provision that fits more with the classical model. This view accepts that a university education has a value in its own right (Newman 1852). Ideas about the importance of education in its own right link back to the beliefs of Plato and Socrates who advocated that an education equipped a man with a better understanding of the world and therefore made him a better human being (Barnett, 2011). Newman's famous and influential text (1852) which explored the nature of a university education demonstrated values related to both the classical and the pragmatic models. Newman believed that the university did have an influence on a student's future activities but this should not simply be curtailed to the acquisition of certain competences required for future employment related duties. Newman promoted a broad universal education within a university that he felt would provide a former student with more than the certain skills needed for particular employment. Newman advocated an education that had breadth, encouraged sophisticated analysis as well as an opportunity to problem solve. He felt this provision would offer a deeper understanding of the world and would equip that person with the necessary resources to respond well whatever role society required of them. This broader understanding of preparation for the wider world can be seen in the work of educational philosophers such as Dewey (1916) and Doherty (2011) who advocate that a university education prepares the student for citizenship. Dewey believed it is education that facilitates effective participation of the citizen in democratic societies. Central to Dewey's philosophy was his idea that a quality education could provide students with the ability to think through contemporary societal issues and subsequently contribute effectively to the decision making of a democracy. Therefore, Dewey advocated that successful education should be concerned with more than vocational training (Hildebrand, 2008).

Early ideas linking education to having a value in its own right, preparing people for future employment and citizenship are a feature of the Robbins report (1963). The Robbins report precipitated an expansion of higher education in the 1960s however in more recent government documents also linked to the expansion of higher education it is employability and the duties of universities to prepare individuals for employment that is most dominant within the text (Dearing, 1997). In recognition of the increasing connection between employability and the role of universities it is important to explore   the nature of this concept. A greater comprehension of the concept can provide relevant stakeholders such as students and university staff with a clearer vision of what is being expected of them. Importantly this enhanced understanding can uncover potential difficulties as well as benefits. Perhaps an increased conceptual understanding will assist those affected by possible struggles associated with the advancement of the employability agenda including its clearly identifiable focus on the applied and pragmatic model of higher education responsibilities to the possible detriment of the classical model.

The concept of employability, various definitions

Employability is a slippery and complex concept (Harvey, 2005; Holmes, 2006). Forrier and Sels (2003) describe how the term employability is evident in literature from the 1950s and 1960s. They recount how the term was initially equated to full employment and the economic advantages of a fully employed work force. In the early literature employability was also associated with government strategies aimed at engaging disadvantaged and unemployed members of society with the labour market. During the 70s with increasing levels of unemployment rather than employment the focus relating to employability changed. More attention was placed on an individual's ability to be employable in an ever-changing labour market rather than a society achieving full employment. Currently there are numerous definitions and many interpretations of what employability means (Tymon, 2013). Thijssen (2000) maintains that a connection between the term employability and full employment within a society still exists however the power to be employable in a rapidly changing, dynamic and increasingly connected world (Trought, 2012) is a more familiar idea. The contemporary link between the concept of employability and globalisation is very much a feature of the Dearing report (1997). Here retaining employment within an increasingly competitive international work force is presented as a requirement of young people and a challenge for universities who are identified as being key agents in facilitating employability. Forrier and Sels define employability as 'An individual's chance of a job in an internal and /or external labour market.' (2003:106). Forrier and Sels also associate the term employability with an extended time period. They talk of employability being related to an individual's ability to remain employable throughout their working life.

Trought and Thijssen also link employability with an evaluation of success from the employee's perspective, here employability is more than holding on to a job in adverse circumstances but the individual feeling a sense of satisfaction from their employment. The association between employment and satisfaction also brings into the concept of employability an aspect of individual development and potential fulfilment. Knight and Yorke (2004) also acknowledge that employability is more than just retaining employment. They write that employability involves a worker feeling some gratification with their chosen employment, the authors talk in terms of a fit between the employee and their occupation. Individual evaluations of success and elements of choice associated with employability indicate that despite the challenges of a competitive labour market there are ingredients of empowerment linked to this concept. Ideas linking a symmetry between an individual's capabilities, interests and their occupational roles are not new. A smooth fit between an individual's talents and their work has been seen as beneficial to society in general, offering both stability, positivity and possibly greater equality (Dewey, 1916). An essence of empowerment is evident in the policy documents written by both Dearing (1997) and Browne (2010) that link the acquisition of employment particularly graduate employment with social mobility. Social mobility in both reports is aligned to increased income.

Tymon (2013) acknowledges that there are numerous stakeholders for whom employability is a significant but varying concept. Employers are relevant to the concept due to their explicit desire for the right individuals to fulfil the right job roles and complete their duties to a satisfactory standard. As recognised by Trought, Knight and Yorke employability is associated with potential employees accessing satisfactory employment. This is an outcome also desired by government not least because employment particularly well-paid employment will be a source of income for the government via taxation (Dearing, 1997). The positive result of economic gain contributing to a generally wealthier population and achieved through enhanced employabil-

ity articulated in earlier literature is present in more recent work (Wilton, 2008). Tymon (2013) states that the differing perspectives of stakeholders on the concept contribute to its complexity.

Despite the presence of several stakeholders and their varying priorities employability as a concept within the U.K. is most commonly tied to the action of the individual. (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Frequently this focus on individual responsibility is demonstrated by an emphasis on the value of skills acquisition.

Individual skills acquisition is seen as a means of developing work readiness particularly in young people (Dearing, 1997; Trought, 2012), It is also regarded as a mechanism for increasing the fit between potential employee and the needs of the employer. Employability related skills and personal attributes are often presented like a list of ingredients. For example;
Team working, leadership, positive attitude, communication, problem solving, numeracy, cultural sensitivity, commercial awareness, computer literacy (Trought, 2012).

The association between Employability and employability related skills is very evident in the Dearing report (1997). Despite some positive recognition of university activities related to the classical model of a university Dearing prioritises the need for universities to prepare students for future employment. The rationale for this being that contemporary society with an increasingly international context including competition in international labour markets requires a more sophisticated and highly skilled workforce. The document promotes that universities fulfil their responsibility for employment preparation via the facilitation of skills acquisition. Within the skills acquisition agenda so evident in Dearing some differentiation is made between generic transferable skills and the more distinct skills that are required specifically in different employment fields.

The inclusion of skills development in the employability concept, their effective accumulation and a perceived link to an individual's future employability related success has implications. Positively there is potential for action and a possible clear formula for success. This is significant for students and due to the delegation of employability to universities for the institutions themselves. Destination figures for ex-students are already familiar statistics and are commonly used by universities to indicate their success (Times University Guide, 2016). The current emphasis on individual responsibility and the recognisable dominance of the skills agenda in recent conceptions of employability also presents challenges for those involved particularly those in higher education so tightly embroiled with the concept**.**

Challenges associated with the employability concept

Skills acquisition
Examination of the literature regarding the concept of employability unveils numerous problems associated with the concept not least the issue of skills acquisition. An immediate difficulty associated with the skills acquisition agenda is one of language. Holmes (2000) states that the term skill 'appears to be used to refer to (denote) some purported tool like entity possessed by an individual which is used in carrying out performances of particular kinds.' (p.202).   Despite his definition Holmes warns that although the word may retain a residual similarity in meaning it may be used differently in different situations, for example in everyday use or in pedagogical, political settings. Austin (1961) warns against a presumption that a consistent understanding of the word is always present, for example despite the rhetoric about employers desiring

certain skills from their potential workers, their articulation of need is not always expressed through skill requirements (Roizen and Jepson, 1985).

In addition, Tymon, Knight and Yorke recognise that disagreements exist between employers in what skills are actually desirable from potential employees, not just specific ones for certain jobs but skills identified as generic and valuable for most forms of employment. Many examples exist where a plethora of skills are seen as desirable (Tymon, 2013, Knight and Yorke, 2004; Holmes; 2000). There is also evidence to suggest that disagreements on necessary skills exist between graduates in different countries (Little, 2003) and various academics (Barrie, 2007). Other variations on terminology exist when describing the nature of the skills, phrases range from key skills, generic and soft skills (Knight and Yorke ,2004) to basic and employability skills (Miller Biggart and Newton, 2013).

A lack of agreement on the necessary skills themselves and the terminology associated with them presents problems for all stakeholders, for example how do employers determine and articulate what they need from their workforce? Importantly how do those individuals seeking work and navigating their way through the world of employability prioritise their areas of development and how do universities determine which skills to facilitate? There are numerous examples of universities embedding activities within the curriculum that are believed to facilitate employability, for example more interactive learning methods such as ones that will encourage problem solving (Fernandez, Lopez – Miguens and Lampon (2014). Case studies have been used (Glover and Boyle, 2000). These kinds of strategies have been positively evaluated. Cretu and Agheorghiesei (2014) found that the inclusion of employability related skills within the curriculum was well received by students. Sandwich courses offering work placements have been popular (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). Never the less despite some positive feedback the sheer number of potentially valuable skills offers a problem for all involved. It would be impractical to try and develop every skill that has been described as potentially useful therefore there will inevitably be some confusion or possible mismatches as different individuals, institutions make different choices about which skills are the most important for development.

Another difficulty associated with skills acquisition is proof of their presence. As Holmes (2000) describes a skill can be an instrument used in offering proof of certain capabilities however the skill remains invisible unless it is demonstrated. The skill can be revealed through performance but for validation of the skill's presence that performance needs to be observed. Skills assessment and observation in itself is not a straight forward process. It is not objective but 'involves interpretation by those who are party to the situation' (Holmes, 2000:208) therefore Holmes states that to enhance the assessment of skills acquisition reflection is needed on how these skills are verified and what levels of performance are required from graduates. Knight and Yorke (2004) Forrier and Sels (2003) agree. They state that an individual's ability to articulate the possession of skills is instrumental in the contribution that skills acquisition offers to employability.

The complicated nature of skill development and demonstration should not be underestimated. Universities have developed strategies to try and address this issue, for example learning objectives for relevant skills have been made explicit at modular level and marking guides provided that articulated how a student's skills as well as their content knowledge was being assessed (De La Harpe and Radloff, 2000). Despite such efforts difficulties remain.

Significantly for universities there is a debate that questions if skills learnt and demonstrated in one area can indeed be useful within another context? Communi-

ties of practice theory (Wenger ,1998) emphasises the contextual significance of learning claiming that tacit knowledge particularly unspoken truths about work culture can only be gained via immersion within that particular context. Sternberg et al. (2000) express similar ideas. Sternberg and colleagues refer to practical intelligence and its value in the work place. They believe that a significant contribution to practicalintelliegence is tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge for Sternberg and team is the routine knowledge acquired through everyday life and this includes an understanding of when to express yourself and when to remain silent. Like Wenger Sternberg et al. recognise the domain specific character of practical intelligence and they argue that skills learnt within alternative environments such as the university can be a poor fit when applied to the reality of the work place.

Disagreements about the dominance of skills acquisition within the employability concept

In addition to the recognised practical challenges and perceived limitations connected to skills acquisition and employability. There are more fundamental differences in opinion that challenge the emphasis on skills acquisition and claim that the concept essentially involves more than skills development. Mc Quaid, Green and Danson (2005) describe how employability strategies such as skills acquisition focussing on readiness for work and a match between employee and employment offer a   supply focussed perspective on employability and this is only part of the picture. The authors claim that the demand focus on employability is also of considerable importance. Demand focus perspectives on employability particularly recognise the dynamic requirements of the labour market and importantly this broader perspective on employability acknowledges that central to the employability concept is a relationship between potential employees and the labour market. This appreciation reveals that individual development of the potential employee in response to the expressed needs of employers may not fully address the employability issue. Vital to the theory of employability is the idea of a fit between employee and their occupation, that they feel successful and engaged however an appreciation of the labour market's influence and fluidity shows how challenging achieving a match may be and how difficult for an individual this goal is. Mc Quaid and Lindsay (2005) identify some of the difficulties, for example employers have preferences such as flexibility. Many people in search of employment have additional responsibilities such as carer duties this would limit their ability to be flexible and possibly exclude them from certain employment. Research has also identified   certain disadvantaged members of the population within the labour market including women and ethnic minorities (Flecker, Meil and Pollert, 1998; Badget, 1994). The existence of disadvantaged groups demonstrates the lack of success in achieving Dewey's philosophical idea of a successful democratic society which results from fulfilment of individual potential and appropriate occupation**.** Mc Quaid and Lindsay particularly acknowledge that due to the fluctuations in the labour market there can be a spacial disparity between available work and those needing employment. They add that many young people in poorer communities which lack employment opportunities are reluctant to travel far or relocate for employment compounding the mismatch. Forrier and Sels in their analysis of the employability concept recognise that both space and time are of significance. A person's Social capital is also seen as influential in gaining entry to the labour market. This can include an awareness of employment opportunities and the means of gaining access (Forrier and Sels, 2003). DeFillippi and Arthur (1994)   place great significance on the contribution of an individual's social connections to employability. The need to acknowledge the power of the labour mar-

ket on an individual's ability to achieve employability related success has been emphasised by Serrano Pascual (2001) cited in McQuaid and Lindsay (2005). Serrano Pascual is especially critical of the emphasis on supply focussed employability. He believes this focus apportions blame for an individual's unemployment on that person rather than questioning 'a lack of opportunity within the labour market' (p.204). Labour market influences are evident in policy documents within the U.K. Dearing mentions the knowledge economy and the need for a highly skilled work force however the emphasis is placed on the necessity for graduates and universities to respond to that need, responsibility for employability related success is firmly placed on their shoulders. Other governments take a different approach. The Canadian government's Labour Force Development Board acknowledge more explicitly the symbiotic relationship between the individual and the labour market within their employability definition. They state;

'Employability is the relative capacity of an individual to achieve meaningful employment given the interaction of personal circumstances and the labour market' (1994, viii). The Canadian labour force development board definition which does emphasise both supply and demand focussed employability also illustrates how an understanding of employability as a concept can vary from one country to another.

Different international perspectives

Haasler (2013) recognises these differences. He describes how employability as a concept developed initially within the U.K. as a means of addressing rising unemployment has now been embraced at a European level including Germany however Haasler recognises that differences exist between Germany and the U.K. in both interpretation of and response to the concept. As in other areas of Europe employability in Germany is connected to the shift of responsibility for employment from the state to the individual however the U.K.'s focus on equipping the disadvantaged and unemployed with the means to gain employment and the development of high-level skills for the knowledge economy is not prevalent within Germany's response to the employability issue. Employability in Germany is more associated with the development of a more flexible workforce in response to the dynamic labour market and it is particularly associated with entrepreneurship and self-employment. Haasler's account provides another cautionary message to those interested in the concept of employability. It is a reminder that this concept can vary over both space and time. Young people, potential students are encouraged to think and act globally as far as employability is concerned (Dearing,1997) therefore they may encounter confusion regarding the employability concept as they move from one geographical space to another.

International differences regarding the interpretation of the employability concept also presents challenges for the institutions themselves. Universities are seen as international organisations, their success is judged against their international equivalents (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010). If the quality of an institution within the UK is going to be increasingly judged by its employability related success, for example teaching standards associated with employability (Office for Students, 2018) comparisons to international universities is going to be tricky as ideas about the nature of employability differ between countries.

Indeed the task of measuring employability related success/failure generally is a complicated one. Forrier and Sel's (2003) analysis provides some insight into how researchers have previously investigated the topic. Studies have hitherto explored the individual characteristics of people searching for work and their ability to gain employment (De Grip, Van Loo and Sanders, 1999 cited in Forrier and Sels, 2003). Other

researchers have looked at the impact of training on work transitions (Green et al., 2000 cited in Forrier and Sels, 2003). Career satisfaction has also been researched (Hillage and Pollard, 1998, cited in Forrier and Sels, 2003). The different approaches that have been utilized suggest that it is possible for universities to evaluate their own performance in facilitating employability related success but the numerous potential methods available also suggests that achieving consistency will be difficult. The complex and ambiguous nature of the concept particularly how employability has been associated with subjective perspectives such as job satisfaction adds to the challenges for any interested party trying to evidence the success of university involvement with employability.

Other issues

Examination of the literature illustrates that both skills acquisition and fluctuations in the labour market are central to the concept of employability. The literature also suggests that other factors are of significance to this concept. In addition to the various skills seen as desirable by employers there is an expressed preference for certain personal attributes. Personal attributes are associated with personality. French et al. describe personality as "The overall profile or combination of traits that characterise the unique nature of a person (2008:97) personal attributes contributing to an individual personality for example their outlook are considered inherent (Cattell,1943) or developed at a very early age (Rutter,1997) this indicates they cannot easily be taught. The inclusion of personal attributes within employability discourse also suggests that employability related success is associated with a certain type of person as well as their capabilities. This could mean that some individuals would be disadvanted due to their nature. Bateman and Crant (1993) developed the concept of the proactive personality, an individual with a propensity to take the initiative in influencing their environment. The proactive personality has been linked to career adaptability and success therefore employability.

Goleman's work on emotional intelligence (1996) challenges the supposition that personal attributes are not malleable. He argues that individuals who are emotionally intelligent can be more empathetic, more socially aware and can harness their emotions, for example create within themselves a positive outlook. Importantly Goleman argues that emotional intelligence can be learnt.

Self-efficacy has also been recognised in offering a significant contribution to employability (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Knight and Yorke, 2004; Turner, 2014). Self-efficacy involves self-belief and resilience. Importantly self-belief can have a powerful effect on performance (Haidt and Rodin, 1999). Forrier and Sels argue that motivation is integral to career progression. Turner states that self-efficacy stimulates action and could therefore provide the valuable motivation required for employability. Importantly Turner recognises that self-efficacy can be facilitated by the university. Positive feedback on academic work in the university contributes to mastery of experience and Bandura (1982) informs us that the self-efficacy achieved through mastery of experience in one context can be used in another.

In their analysis of the employability concept Forrier and Sels also refer to the issue of "shock events." As defined by Allen and Griffith theses are "Events which lead an individual to make deliberate judgements about remaining with or leaving their job." (1999:535). These events can emerge from within or without the work place, for example an opportunity for a promotion, the onset of carer responsibilities. Never the less these shock events are also found to stimulate action.

Exploration of the employability concept within relevant literature reveals many practical issues for all involved. Variations in employability definitions exist and they range from acquiring a job, retaining employment over a life time to participating in work that offers opportunity for significant self-fulfilment. Although actually getting a job is significant, the literature does suggest that the employability concept involves more. Economic gain is a feature of government policy but also the promise of self-fulfilment is present within the literature. Although this does appear for some achievable and as such the employability concept promises much such a strong association between a good job and a sense of well-being may be at times be inaccurate and on occasions risky. Some people may feel completely self-fulfilled who are not in work or their sense of self-fulfilment may come from elsewhere. Others may find their sense of well-being challenged by the very fact that they have not achieved their career goals.

Skills acquisition is very much associated with employability. Many strategies have been used by universities to try and upskill students with some evidence of success. This also offers a sense of optimism as it provides opportunity for employability related achievement which may in turn foster resilience in students as they have undergone some mastery of experience. Again, there are challenges for all concerned; language, different interpretations, the sheer number of skills involved. Practical challenges include the difficulties in teaching skills in one context that can be transferred to another, for example problem solving. Using case studies within the university can provide valuable opportunities to discuss ideas with other students but cannot create environmental factors that occur in workplace contexts such as different distractions, shortage of time, cultural priorities of a particular work place. In the field workers gain tacit knowledge (Stern berg et al., 2000) through daily interactions and this informs individuals what is required of them. Theorists such as Schon (1991) argue that the ability to expertly problem solve in the work place requires experience.

The individual responsibility associated with employability concept is a concern, it can be a mechanism for shifting blame for unemployment and its associated challenges such as poverty and unfulfillment from government to the individual, this could compound feelings of distress when employability related goals are not met. Blame may also be placed on   universities who cannot mediate for other factors such as spacial disparity in employment opportunities and employer preferences. Barriers to employability such as fluctuations in the labour market should be and are at times given greater credence. A reluctance to do so by governments may be due to a reluctance in acknowledging needs for investment in deprived areas. It appears that both students and universities are judged by their ability to facilitate employability related success despite the many contributory factors. This is challenging for both. For universities who are encouraged to produce employability outcomes data the literature suggests that even the accurate measurement of employability related success is difficult.

The potential eclipse of the classical model
The increased association between the employability concept and the activities of universities raises philosophical as well as practical issues. Philosophical concerns commonly cited in the literature involve a recognition that an increased employability focus will inevitably lead to more time, energy and resources being channelled into   the pragmatic model of a university's function. A negative consequence of this is a possible imbalance between the pragmatic and classical models resulting in diminishing value placed on university functions that are akin to the latter (Williams, 2013; Maskell and Robinson, 2001; Collini, 2012). The functions associated with the classi-

cal model include the value of education in its own right, preparation for citizenship and the search for truth. Within higher education policy documents including Robbins (1963) and Dearing (1997) there was acknowledgement of a university education being valuable in itself and both reports also link engagement with higher education to future citizenship however in Dearing's more recent report the emphasis is very much on the economic element of citizenship. This increasing association between economic contribution and citizenship is recognised by Serrano Pascual who states that the employment of an individual is now seen as almost essential for their recognition as a citizen.

Serrano Pascual (2007) argues that this contemporary emphasis on an individual's responsibility for gaining employment, producing wealth and the associated route to citizenship has highlighted the economic duties of citizenship to the detriment of the social and political responsibilities, for example voluntary work and unpaid carer responsibilities. Social and to some extent political obligations are necessary in Dewey's view of citizenship which stresses the need for reasonable decision making and emphasises the participatory nature of citizenship, for Dewey participation is less about formal political involvement and more about joint responsibility and accountability within a democracy. Dewey (1916) believed that education was crucial in the creation of independent thinkers who had the ability to successfully engage with and respond carefully to societal problems. The creation of independent thinkers was also advocated by Newman importantly Newman believed this was good in itself. Newman thought that developing in people the ability to think deeply, analyse and problem solve was of value whatever their role in the world. Williams (2013) accounts for the classical function of universities in her recognition of how universities have contributed to the search for truth and developing knowledge. This involves critiquing and challenging different theories as they are developed over time. The dominance of one model over another within contemporary higher education practice has implications for stakeholders. The advantages of individual student investment and future employment opportunities articulated as a rationale for students embarking on a degree in policy documents such as Dearing (1997) could lead to the increasing priority within universities of tasks that on the surface do appear to provide clear cut opportunities for employment preparation. Opportunities such as skills development, career workshops, placement preparation; this has implications for staff time. As more time is dedicated to these functions less is available for other duties such as research. There are also implications for recruitment; careers advisors, placement facilitators may become increasingly attractive rather than traditional academic staff.

Despite some of the positive elements associated with skills acquisitions that are revealed in the literature. The tagging on to an individual a plethora of skills favoured by different employers contrasts with Dewey's in my opinion less limited and more humanistic belief that education and knowledge development can in themselves reveal for each learner their own strengths which they may then apply to the world around them.

Reassuringly examination of employability related literature illustrates how this concept can involve more than employment, economic gain and job satisfaction. Employability related literature does encompass broader issues associated with individual well-being (Trought, 2012). This appreciation of individual satisfaction and fulfilment does offer potential for broader far reaching benefits associated with the concept. The positive emotional impact of job satisfaction should also not be underestimated. People spend a lot of time at work therefore if they feel generally happier as a result of greater matches between their knowledge, skills and their work this could

lead to a general enhancement in wellbeing of a population, this fits with the classical model of a university's function that education is good. Some authors also suggest that skills required for effective employment are connected to those required for effective learning (Fallows and Steven, 2000). It is effective learning and the creation of thinkers that has been associated with an ability to fulfil the broader responsibilities of citizenship (Dewey, 1916,; Newman, 1852) therefore it may be possible to do both. O'Brien (2000) provides a specific example of how facilitating the development of specific competences very much associated with employability can also offer a more general benefit in helping prepare a person for their role in the wider world. O'Brien's example focussed on an all-female liberal arts college in America. Staff within the college recognised a changing role for women in society and they expressed a desire to prepare their students for this evolving role. The preparation involved the identification of certain abilities that were seen as important and the curriculum was based around the explicit need to develop these abilities in their students, effective citizenship being one of them. The language differs as the term ability is used instead of skill however similarities in approach are evident. Obrien's example offers some optimism in illustrating how skills and the broader educational functions of a university may sit together. However too tight a link between citizenship and the possession of certain skills could lead to the oversimplification of citizenship preparation which importantly also involves participation, judgment and reason (Dewey, 1916; Newman, 1852).

Conclusion

Exploring the concept of employability through the examination of relevant literature supports a view that employability is a slippery and complex concept. Employability has had a long-standing association with the function of universities however over recent years it has become noticeably more dominant within U.K. government higher education policy. The complexity of the concept and its entwining with the role of universities presents a need for institutions and relevant stakeholders to consider in detail the challenges that are being given to them through this developing relationship. The concept of employability has numerous definitions including early ideas about maintaining full employment to more recent ideology which includes individual responsibilities for gaining and maintaining employment plus the relationship between the individual and the labour market. Skills acquisition is strongly associated with the concept and numerous universities have created packages of learning aimed at facilitating and assessing skills thought to be valuable within the work place. Despite the initial positive picture of skills acquisition as a road to employability related success for students there are numerous barriers including varying use of language and different interpretations that can change over both time and space. Critically there are some doubts that skills can actually be transferred for one context to another. Other issues thought to be of significance to employability include the nature of the person, their social capital and importantly employer preferences. These additional issues also require recognition to avoid an over simplification of the student's employability journey. Despite the long-established connection between universities and employment activities following graduation universities have been linked to other functions including the value of education in its own right rather than as a means to an end and broader roles within society including citizenship. There have been expressions of concern that employability will overshadow these functions that are mostly associated with the classical model of a university's purpose. The literature suggests that there is scope to successfully merge employability which fits with the pragmatic model of a universi-

ty's function and outcomes commonly associated with the classical model of education such as the creation of independent thinkers. The recognition of opportunities for successful combination includes an appreciation that it is complicated. Other potential difficulties include the evaluation of a university's achievements. The quality of each institution's teaching has now been linked so strongly to a complex concept. Numerous sources of information are available to potential students; these sources appear to illustrate the success of a university in this area. Yet researchers themselves state that measuring employability related success is complex. This paper concludes that employability and the facilitation of employability related success does have potential for positive outcomes but this is far from straight forward. Detailed consideration is required of this issue including recognition of the many obstacles faced by those involved not least the students.

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