Articulating Competencies Confidently: Employability in the Curriculum

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Abstract : There is a significant debate on the role of University education in developing or teaching employability skills. Should higher education attempt to do this? Is it the best place? Is it able to do so? Different views abound, but the question is wrongly posed – one of the reasons that previous employability initiatives foundered (e.g., in the UK). Our role is less to teach than to guide, less to develop and more to help articulate: "the mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be lit" (Plutarch). This paper then addresses how this can be achieved taking into account criticism of employability initiatives as well as relevant learning theory. It discusses the experience of a large module which involved students being assessed on all stages of application for a live job description together with reflection on their professional development. The assessment itself adopted a Patchwork Text approach as a vehicle for learning. Students were guided to evaluate their strengths and areas to be developed, articulate their competencies, and reflect upon their development, moving on to new Thresholds of Employability. The paper uses the student voices to express the progress they made. It concludes that employability can and should be an effective part of the higher education curriculum when designed to encourage students to confidently articulate their competencies and take charge of their own professional development.
Keywords : competencies, employability, patchwork assessment, threshold concepts
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