10.20856/jnicec.3603

Narrowing participation? Contesting the dominant discourse of employability in contemporary higher education

Steve Rooney and Mark Rawlinson

This article considers the various roles the so-called 'employability agenda' plays in helping to narrow the terms of participation in higher education (HE) around definitions of educational value dominated by neoliberalist notions of 'human capital'. The article argues that as these definitions become naturalised in the behaviour of learners and their teachers it behoves us (academics, careers educators, learning developers *et al.*) to draw attention to the conditions of learning and to the broader scheme of values around work and identity, and models of success, which shape them in the 21st Century university.

Introduction

> One of the purposes of the university has been to hold a critical lens to society… and so one function of the university has also been to teach students to critique society, and their own role and the role of their chosen profession in that society.
>
> (Jones, 2007: 220)

'Employability', as Beck and Quinn (2011) point out, is 'a widely-used but poorly defined concept.' Social scientists, in their treatment of this concept, have tended to consider the complex interactions between both 'demand side' (macro-level social, economic and labour market conditions) and 'supply-side' (people's credentials, abilities, career-management skills etc.) factors (McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005). This more expansive, complexity-acknowledging, approach is also evident in Yorke's influential work (e.g. 2006) which focuses on supporting higher education (HE) students' employability. What follows here, then, is not a critique of employability *per se* – we write, after all, as educators engaged in supporting students' academic and career development. Still less is it a critique of careers guidance and education – a field that often attends explicitly to the socio-political contexts for, and implications of, its theory and practice (e.g. Hooley, 2015; Sultana, 2014; Watts, 2015). Rather, our focus is on a particular and pervasive 'discursive framing' of employability (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006: 310) – one 'dominated by employer concerns about the supply of graduates' (Brown and Hesketh, 2004: 7) and informed by highly contested theories of 'human capital'. Drawing on research and insights from existing critical scholarship, we will argue that this framing serves to narrow the terms of participation in HE by: i) limiting the forms of knowledge and learning that are valorised; ii) prescribing and privileging certain kinds of student identities; and iii) reducing complex questions of social justice to the simplifying and individualising ideology of 'meritocracy'. As many before us have observed, these inter-related phenomena serve to situate dominant conceptualisations of employability within the broader context of the ongoing neoliberalisation of higher education. The article will conclude by considering ways of nurturing more critical and expansive forms of engagement with questions of employment, work and career planning. Firstly, though, we will attempt to define what we mean by the phrase 'the ongoing neoliberalisation of higher education'.

Defining neoliberalism

It is beyond the scope of this article to offer a comprehensive or exhaustive definition of such a

complex and contested concept as neoliberalism.[1] Here we use term with the following meanings in mind: [2]

- as the legacy of a set of economic and political responses (e.g. 'Thatcherism' in the UK, 'Reaganism' in the US) to various crises in post-war democratic capitalism (Streeck, 2014) - responses which have entailed the extension of 'the market', and of market rationality, as the dominant bases for organising and regulating social, political and (increasingly) personal life (Davies, 2014b);
- as a 'technology of government' (Foucault, 2000: 76) – a technology which, as Lorey (2015) (drawing on Foucault) argues, functions largely via conditions of social insecurity and precarity, against which people are required to take *self-governing* responsibility for insuring themselves, not least by attending to their employability.

As numerous authors have commented, contrary to the anti-statist rhetoric that often surrounds various neoliberal 'reforms', neoliberal capitalism involves the state taking an active role in creating and sustaining its conditions of possibility (see, for example: Olssen and Peters, 2005; Harvey, 2007; Streeck, 2014; Davies, 2014b). Where UK HE is concerned, this has involved, among other things, the creation of a market of 'providers' - albeit a somewhat contrived and contorted market (McGettigan, 2013) – and a framing of HE's purpose and value around notions of 'human capital' development (Heaney, 2015).

Human capital theory, the instrumentalisation of learning, and the so-called 'knowledge-economy'

Contemporary human capital theory has its origins in the work of so-called 'Chicago School' economists (e.g. Becker, 1962) – work which has, as Davies (2014b) points out, been integral to the development of neoliberal thought and policy. Education, according to this theory, is viewed chiefly as an investment in our own production as more economically viable, competitive and productive subjects (Baptiste, 2001). From this, it follows that the knowledge, practices, dispositions etc. we develop through education are valuable inasmuch as they contribute to our individual development *as capital* (Rikowski, 2003). Given this somewhat stark and reductive view of both the human and of the value of learning it is perhaps, as Holborow (2012) suggests, unsurprising that the theory is still not referred to very widely outside of specialist contexts. As Holborow asks: 'Who, indeed, would spontaneously describe themselves as human capital?' (101). Nevertheless, the assumptions underpinning human capital theory are present in much state and institutional-level discourse regarding both the purpose of higher education and the kinds of students HE should aspire to 'produce' (Holborow, 2012; Heaney, 2015). Whilst we are mainly concerned, here, with the implications of this discourse for UK HE, it is worth noting that its reach is global - largely as the result of responses to the perceived challenges and opportunities of globalisation, with governments across the developed and developing world advocating for HE as a producer of a) the kinds of knowledge, and b) the kinds of graduates that will fuel economic growth and productivity (Naidoo, 2010).

Consider, for example, the following extract from the UK Government's *Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*:

> Higher education providers need to provide degrees with lasting value to their recipients. This will mean providers being open to involving employers and learned societies representing professions in curriculum design. It will also mean teaching students the transferrable work readiness skills that businesses need, including collaborative teamwork and the development of a positive work ethic, so that they can contribute more effectively to our efforts to boost the productivity of the UK economy.
>
> (Department of Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS), 2015: 11)

The ideological 'work' being carried out in this extract can be observed in the meanings it fixes (Laclau

1 For a superb and accessible introduction to the history and genealogy of neoliberalism as a concept, see Davies (2014a).
2 Given the context for this paper, we have focussed on the aspects of neoliberalism that pertain to advanced capitalist countries like the UK.

and Mouffe, 2001; Fairclough, 2003) around certain 'contested signifiers' (Rear and Jones, 2013). For example, whilst few would disagree with the notion that students should derive 'lasting value' from their education, we might well disagree strongly on what we mean by this term. Some of us, for instance, would argue that the true 'lasting value' of HE lies, in part at least, in how effectively it empowers students to critique and challenge the kinds of assumptions and ideologies encoded in the discourse produced by government departments such as BIS. This relates to our broader commitment to maintaining the university as a space for critical thought and as a 'democratic public sphere' (Giroux, 2010). For BIS, though, the meaning of 'lasting value' is fixed firmly around the exclusive aim of boosting 'productivity' by instilling in graduates the 'work readiness skills that businesses need' and the requisite 'positive work ethic'. Absent from this framing is any notion of the university as a space for critique – as a space for questioning, for example, how and why economic productivity is viewed as an axiomatic 'good' in the first place, or what alternative social, cultural or moral ends productive human activity might serve. The extract is illustrative, in other words, of the kind of narrow instrumentalisation of learning that dominates much contemporary discourse regarding HE (Giroux, 2014; Mavelli, 2014).

We should state, here, that we do not write from the misty-eyed perspective of some imagined 'pre-neoliberal' age of innocence and intellectual autonomy. As Collini (2012) has ably demonstrated, such an age has never existed. Nor are we rejecting the notion that universities should engage with the social and economic contexts in which they operate – far from it. Rather, and following McArthur (2011), we are simply asserting the value of engaging with these contexts *critically*, in ways that allow us and our students to ask more than simply: 'how do we comply with the demands of government and business?' Providing spaces to think beyond adaptation to the status quo – to ask critical questions about, and to consider alternatives to, this status quo - is central, after all, to any conception of HE as an agent of social justice.

However, the spectre of instrumentalisation is only one reason to find a human capital theory's framing of HE's mission problematic. Another is a particular view of the 'knowledge economy' that forms the backdrop for this framing – an economy replete, according to popular representations, with an abundance of exciting, creative, personally-rewarding and well-paid opportunities for any graduate with the 'talent' to seize them. As Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011:16) make clear, this vision of an opportunity-rich, brave new world of work 'would be more fitting in a fairy tale than in an actual account of reality.' It is a tale in which the extent of the demand and opportunities for creativity and professional autonomy are over-stated, and in which the realities for most 'knowledge workers' of 'routinization, surveillance and exploitation' (Naidoo, 2010: 69) remain largely concealed. Tomlinson (2012), meanwhile, reports on the ongoing phenomenon of graduate 'under-employment', citing research which reveals that 'a growing number of graduates are undertaking forms of employment that are not commensurate to their level of education and skills'. As for the much-vaunted 'graduate premium' (that promise of higher salaries for those who choose to 'invest' in their education) - this too is somewhat misleading. The true picture becomes far more complex, and far less rosy, when, rather than relying on averages, the actual distributions of graduate incomes are considered (Brown *et al.* 2011; Standing, 2011). In addition, as Lauder, Brown and Tholen (2012) argue, any apparent premium may well, in many cases, be more reflective of declining earnings among the 'non-graduate' labour force. Finally, and as many have observed, the widening of participation in HE has decidedly *not* coincided with a dissolution of entrenched social inequalities where career outcomes are concerned. Tomlinson again:

> Wider structural changes [in the economy] have potentially reinforced positional differences and differential outcomes between graduates, not least those from different class-cultural backgrounds. While mass HE has potentially opened up opportunities for non-traditional graduates, new forms of cultural reproduction and social closure continue to empower some graduates more readily than others. (2012: 427)

As many academics and careers professionals will already be aware, these are sobering realities, indeed, for anyone whose work is informed by a commitment to social justice. Against a backdrop of persistent inequalities, and a 'knowledge economy' whose realities

stand a long way from popular (mis)representations, we are faced with a dominant employability discourse which tends represent these inequalities as problems for individuals to overcome by adapting more successfully (i.e. more *competitively*) to the conditions they find themselves in (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Boden and Nedeva, 2010; Wilton, 2011; Chertkovskaya, Watt, Tramer and Spoelstra, 2013). From this it follows that HE's role is simply to 'equip' students with the necessary skills and dispositions (which themselves are characterised as neutral, asocial 'assets', whose perceived non-possession is ascribed to deficits in individual 'ability, determination and aspiration' (Burke, 2013: 111)) to enable them to compete and prosper. This 'meritocratic' framing of education's role ignores, of course, the complex social, cultural and economic *bases* for social injustice (Burke, 2013; Brennan and Naidoo, 2008; Hooley, 2015). 'Justice', according to this framing, becomes understood as the opportunity to exercise mobility within existing, intersecting structures of inequality, rather than as an outcome of challenging these structures and uncovering the 'ideological strategies' that sustain them (Fraser, 2012: 51). As already noted, however, universities should surely be spaces where precisely these latter kinds of critical practices flourish. Employability discourse, at least in the dominant form discussed here, may in other words help to militate against the very forms of criticality upon which a genuinely social justice-oriented higher education would depend.

As well as individualising responsibility for employment, this discourse also tends to emphasise the need for individuals to act as self-regulating sites of human capital - measuring the value of various forms of 'personal development' chiefly or exclusively in terms of the latter's contribution to this capital (Boden and Nedeva, 2010; Clegg, 2010). Definitions and explanations of employability in HE place a strong emphasis on the graduate's 'attributes and attitude' and on qualities such as: 'team-working', 'problem solving', 'communication', 'innovation', 'collaboration', and 'intellectual risk taking' (Cole and Tibby, 2013: 8). These are, once again, terms whose meaning is contested. Such qualities could, depending on the bearer, relate to all manner of beliefs and practices, some of which might be deemed antagonistic to the interests of certain employers (including, potentially, those BIS is so keen to see involved in 'curriculum design'). For example, collaborative, innovative, 'intellectual risk taking' students, imbued with excellent 'communication' skills might prove to be doughty campaigners against particular employers' business practices or, indeed, the system that gives rise to these practices in the first place. Employability discourse, however, works to define such contested and context-dependent attributes exclusively in terms of their transferrable exchange-value as 'soft' employability skills (Cremin, 2010). The emphasis on students' dispositions, attitudes, personal qualities etc. implies, also, a particular type of neoliberal subjectivity – one that views more and more aspects of personhood as functional forms of competitive advantage (Urciuoli, 2008; Moore, 2010; McArthur, 2011). As Lorey (2015) observes, one of the effects of the growing demand that we become – in conditions of systemic insecurity - self-entrepreneurial 'virtuoso workers', compelled to perform various personal, social and affective qualities in order to obtain and retain employment, is that: 'the entire person, with their knowledge and affects, becomes part of the capitalist production process.' (83-84).

This is not to suggest that support for students' career development need *inevitably* involve compelling students to submit their 'entire person' to the logic of human capital theory. As educationalists working in the neoliberal academy (whose own cognitive and affective labour is increasingly disciplined by regimes of market rationality) we recognise that whilst our work is inescapably implicated in the reproduction of neoliberal norms and values, it is in no way *reducible* to this role. As noted in the Introduction, employability is itself a contested concept. This contestation creates spaces for those of us working 'on the ground' to interpret it in a variety nuanced ways, including those which challenge, question and problematise interpretations dominant at state, or institutional, levels. Indeed, careers education already contains currents of thought which encourage us to look beyond simply facilitating individual adaptation *to* the existing order, and towards critique and transformation *of* this order (see, for example: Sultana, 2014; Hooley, 2015). The challenge lies in creating spaces where more critical, expansive and emancipatory forms of learning about work, employment and career development might flourish (McArthur, 2011).

Employability: Structure and Agency Reconsidered

If the foregoing is an adequate and necessary description of the contemporary university, in particular of the terms in which learning and future employment and employability are articulated, what would be an appropriate form of curricular and pedagogic counter-weight? Notwithstanding the possibility that *any* curricular or credential-bearing activity may be mobilized as evidence of learning for employability (though the everyday libidinal resistance of students to learning designs suggests that this is not likely to be the case), what learning activities would help students and teachers recognise the framing of their learning as employability, and to take responsibility for the meanings which attach to notions such as work (both in its connection with identity, and in its social dimensions), well-being, and success?

We will conclude, then, by reflecting on and critiquing our current plans to cultivate more critical approaches to employability - approaches which include explorations of the very social and structural perspectives often missing from the narrow, individualistic and meritocratic framing discussed above. These plans stem, in part, from insights arising from an earlier, so far rather informal, project on transitions to employment. Observations of corporate graduate selection centres, together with audits of the alignment of programmes of instruction and assessment with a transferable skills framework for higher education, led to reflection on the use and potential of the seminar as a vehicle for learning in the humanities. The structural passivity of the seminar student in the teacher/student couple mapped poorly onto claims about independent learners and their enterprising competencies (compare Bell, 2007). This was particularly the case with respect to team working and 'learning agility'. It was commonplace for the seminar to be nominated an instance of group work, but in practice the distribution of responsibility for the activity of the group often contradicts this assumption.

Ironically, the initial confirmation of a difference between educational and enterprising work – between the classroom and the corporation – opened the way to contemplating, under another description, the deeper continuities between these realms of activity. The practices of the classroom appeared to be significantly under-examined by its inhabitants in terms of the dynamics of the group, student and teacher identities, hidden curricula and the cross-cutting incentives which shaped different kinds of participation or 'engagement' in academic behaviour. So too were the values of work in the 'real world', together with the identities and incentives associated with institutional/professional labour, occluded by the vestigial imperatives of 'the work society' (Beck, 2000) and by the near universal veneration of work and wealth which Seabrook has analysed as a form of secular salvation in *Pauperland* (2013). How could the very texture of life be so invisible? We were aware of the extent to which the work of learners is discounted, not least by the processes of correction and other disciplines of assessment – Welch's (1945: 82) fictional description of an art teacher 'finishing' a schoolboy's drawing is emblematic: 'His work was being spoiled for him. Masters never understand this.' But could work, which everybody talks about, in the rarer intervals when they are not doing it, be as hard to see? Indeed, Siegfried Kracauer diagnosed the problem nearly a hundred years ago, exploring white-collar work in twenties Berlin:

> And how about the employees themselves? They are least conscious of their situation. But surely their existence is spent in full public view? It is precisely its public nature that protects it from discovery, just like the 'Letter to Her Majesty' in Edgar Allan Poe's tale: nobody notices the letter because it is out on display. Powerful forces are admittedly in play, anxious to prevent anyone noticing anything here.
>
> (1998: 29)

It follows from the condition of being hidden in plain sight that the relationships between work for examination, and work for salary, might repay further investigation, in particular at the site of their contemporary conjunction as an explicit discourse of employability in higher education. We doubt that students, and indeed their teachers, have sufficient opportunities to understand their behaviour as learners, and the values and identities which accrue to their work, especially given the compulsive repetition of the unexamined distinction between the supposed unreality of academic labour and the ontological gold-standard of work in the 'real world'.

An expanded employability education would provide an opportunity for students to identify and assess what is at stake - both the psychic and economic investments as well as the potential or imagined returns - in acquiring or performing the employability 'skills, understandings and attributes' which make 'graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations' (Knight and Yorke, 2003: 5). Such an approach would explore the very terms of transition from formal education to the workforce, in particular education itself, vocation, values of work and working identities. A module in development as a second-year undergraduate elective has the working title 'Work and Well-Being: Literary and Sociological Approaches to Labour, Health and Happiness'. This is being designed in such a way as to bring about the collaboration of students of literature and of sociology in thinking though the terms in which their future in the labour market is framed by the educational career that has brought them to university, but also learning how to contextualize and account for their own experiences of paid and unpaid work, including their academic work. Learning across disciplines, and the reflexive focus on the conditions of academic work itself, has a double significance. Firstly, this framing produces some of the material of the module. This includes the palpable differences students will encounter between the methodologies and working assumptions of social studies and literary studies, in particular their several orientations to the aggregate and to the individual. Additionally, immediate examples of aversive but (ultimately or immediately) rewarding effort, such as academic or term-time paid work, will provide practical contexts for testing theoretical and critical accounts of the values of work. Consideration of evidence such as the *Prospects and Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education* (DLHE) profiles of the 'destinations' of English and Sociology graduates will also help to generate reflection through difference. Secondly, the cross-disciplinary encounter provides the form of the module. The deliberate alternation of social and individualistic perspectives on theoretical and narrative texts is designed to open a dialogue amongst the contradictory values of work which themselves structure commonplace understandings of the relations of the personal and the public, for instance work as a source of satisfaction and as a source of status, work as gratification and as duty.

The teacherly conception of the module – by which we mean the goals of its designers, rather than the manifold and unpredictable uses to which it may be put by learners - is that, using literary representations of work and society, together with sociological descriptions and analyses of work as practice and as structure, students will learn to unpack the imperatives, values and fantasies which continue to shape their own, and their culture's, formal and informal preparation for individual and collective futures. In this sense the module is positioned as a co- or even anti-employability module, a demythologization of what Frayne (2015: 5) calls 'the dogmatic nature of work'. For instance, students would be invited to investigate the implications of the over-determination of higher education as a policy instrument for the design of an internationally competitive work force (Robbins, 1963), as a vector of individual positional advantage and as a humane or social good. In another example, the supposed independence of the learner in higher education might be juxtaposed with the structural 'necessity' of higher education as a meritocratic 'resolution' of the contradictions of scarcity and opportunity (Young, 1958). Module assessment is designed to recruit both the resources of the group, and to set up encounters with key issues from a variety of perspectives and in a variety of voices. Students would be expected to write an essay or report in which they unpacked a problem, developed an analysis or teased out a contradiction in the field of work and well-being using literary and/or sociological ideas and texts that they had studied. They would also create a reflective journal on their own work (paid, voluntary or academic), but the group would first have to generate a framework or checklist of criteria for the practice of that reflection on work. Finally, students would be required to perform their employability in a covering letter addressed to the contemporary labour market – again the group would first need to carry out research to generate a set of graduate 'roles' or 'opportunities' to be applied for (and negotiate the range of that set, whether for instance it could include volunteering, co-operative employment and so on).

But what would the learners actually be doing that would support their questioning values attributed to work which are ideological in the sense of going under the guise of facts or necessities? It is the perennial

concern of University careers services that students delay their preparation of a portfolio representing their employability – evidence that they have worked, know how to work, and wish to work - how much more difficult to instil a critical suspicion of the one true source of our purchasing-power, our status, our self-respect and our guilt! And one cannot assume that reading Zola's *The Ladies Paradise*, a late C19th novel of career and consumption - set as a primer for students of retailing in mid-century America - will inevitably provoke reflection on the interrelation of the opportunity costs represented by limitless calls on dutiful labour and the price of the limitless desire of the consumer. And what would be in it for the learners? (After all, we are working, as we write about the module one of us has designed and intends to teach). It is our hope that students taking the module would be in a position to make better decisions about what they were seeking in their work because they had negotiated some of the contradictions inherent in the competition for gratifying work in an increasingly precarious labour market, characterised by growing inequalities of security and remuneration. This broadening of the range of perspectives students are encouraged to consider in relation to work and to their own and their peers' employability would, we believe, provide an important and valuable challenge to the narrower conceptions of employability we have critiqued elsewhere in this article.

What relationship does this projected module bear to generic or embedded employability learning? Comparison with a design for a sequence of employability workshops launched recently in Eire points to two significant differences, the latter's explicit alignment with guidance, and its implicit affirmation of the 'mythology of work' (AHECS 2014, Fleming, 2015). The sequence of AHECS workshops was designed to support a range of educators with responsibility for employability in HE learning to inculcate an employability 'literacy' (in contemporary parlance), equipping undergraduates with concepts, examples and confidence in respect of their agency as a career-maker, as well as in their relations to the structure of the labour market. Students are supported in learning to make use of some concepts and values of career guidance in taking responsibility for their individual futures, ranging over career-choice theory, positive psychology, competencies, career development, 'future-proofing my career', 'building my brand', the recruitment and selection cycle and the theory of work adjustment. Alongside its contribution to the development of what testimonials refer to as 'market awareness' and 'self-awareness', the module is less explicitly about generating confidence in the concepts which rationalise and misrepresent work in our culture, notably the career itself, as well as competitive individualism, the values represented as facts which our module is designed to scrutinize (AHECS 2014: 7). By contrast, our approach is closer to some of the ideals outlined in the idea of 'career studies', an approach to careers education which aims at employability learning through a more holistic approach to work:

> Career Studies addresses aspects of how we live and what it is to be human. It is a transdisciplinary field of socio-cultural enquiry that focuses on life purposes and meanings and the more prosaic matters of achieving those ends (McCash, 2008: 6)

It could be argued that a career-studies module which persistently questioned the value, organisation and distribution of work (it would have to acknowledge the force, tenacity and moral significance of positive valuations of work as well) could not serve the interests of students making their way in the world: it would set up unresolvable contradictions between apparently inconsequential critique in the classroom and the more consequential competition for meaningful employment with an emolument exceeding the student loan repayment threshold. But how much better that students should have the responsibility for addressing those contradictions, not yet of their own (re) making, than that it should be camouflaged behind the projections of the employability boosters, which these days includes all of us.

References

Association of Higher Education Careers Services (2014) *Crafting the Present for Future Employability: An AHECS Employability Module*, http://www.agcas.org.uk/agcas_resources/705-Crafting-the-present-for-future-employability (accessed 15 February, 2016).

Baptiste, I. (2001) Educating Lone Wolves: Pedagogical Implications of Human Capital Theory, in *Adult Education Quarterly*, 51, 3, 184-201.

Beck, U. (2000) *The Brave New World of Work*, Cambridge: Polity.

Beck, V. and Quinn, M. (2011) The Importance of Health in Promoting Employability in the East Midlands, in *Sociological Research Online* 16,1, http://www.socresonline.org.uk/16/1/8.html (accessed 12 December 2015).

Becker, G. (1962) Investment in Human Capital: A Theoretical Analysis, in *Journal of Political Economy*, 70, 5, 9-49.

Bell, M. (2007) *Open Secrets: Literature, Education and Authority*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boden, R. and Nedeva, M. (2010) Employing Discourse: Universities and Graduate 'Employability', in *Journal of Education Policy*, 25, 1, 37-54.

Brennan, P. and Naidoo, R. (2008) Higher Education and the Achievement (And/Or Prevention) of Equity and Social Justice, in *Higher Education,* 56, 3, 287-302.

Brown, P. and Hesketh, A. (2004) *The Mismanagement of Talent: Employability and Jobs in the Knowledge Economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brown, P. Lauder, H. and Ashton, D. (2011) *The Global Auction: The Broken Promises of Education, Jobs and Income*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burke, P.J. (2013) The Right to Higher Education: Neoliberalism, Gender and Professional Mis/Recognitions, in *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 23, 2, 107-126.

Business, Innovation & Skills, Dept. for (2015) *Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Chertkovskaya, E., Watt, P., Tramer, S. and Spoelstra, S. (2013) Giving Notice to Employability, in *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization*, 13,4, 701-716.

Clegg, S. (2010) Time Future - The Dominant Discourse of Higher Education, in *Time and Society*, 19, 3, 345-364.

Cole, D. and Tibby, M. (2013) *Defining and Developing your Approach to Employability: A Framework for Higher Education Institutions*, York: The Higher Education Academy.

Collini, S. (2012) *What Are Universities For?* London: Penguin Books.

Cremin, C. (2009) Never Employable Enough: The (Im)Possibility of Satisfying the Boss's Desire, in *Organization*, 17,2, 131-149.

Davies, W. (2014a) *Neoliberalism: A Bibliographic Review, in Theory, Culture & Society*, 31,7/8, 309–317.

Davies, W. (2014b) *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition*, London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Fairclough, N. (2003) *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Fleming, P. (2015) *The Mythology of Work: How Capitalism Persists Despite Itself*, London: Pluto Press.

Foucault, M. (2000) The Birth of Biopolitics, in Rainbow, P. (ed) *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, London: Penguin Books.

Fraser, N. (2012) On Justice: Lessons from Plato, Rawls and Ishiguro, in *New Left Review*, 74, March-April, 41-51.

Frayne, D. (2015) *The Refusal of Work: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Work*, London: Zed Books.

Giroux, H.A. (2010) Bare Pedagogy and the Scourge of Neoliberalism: Rethinking Higher Education as a Democratic Public Sphere, in *The Educational Forum*, 74(3), 184–196.

Giroux, H.A. (2014) *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Harvey, D. (2007) *Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 610(1), 21–44.

Heaney, C. (2015) What is the University Today? in *Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies,* 13,2, 287-314.

Holborow, M. (2012) Neoliberalism, human capital and the skills agenda in higher education – the Irish case, in *Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies*, 10,1, 93-111.

Hooley, T. (2015) *Emancipate Yourselves From Mental Slavery: Self-Actualisation, Social Justice and the Politics of Career Guidance*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

Jones, A. (2007) Looking over our shoulders: Critical thinking and ontological insecurity in higher education, in *London Review of Education* 5, 3, 209-222.

Knight, P.T. and Yorke, M. (2003) *Assessment, Learning and Employability*. Maidenhead: SHRE/Open University Press.

Kracauer, S. (1998 [1930]) *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. (2001) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2nd edn). London: Verso.

Lauder, H., Brown, P. and Tholen, G. (2012) The Global Auction Model, Skills Bias Theory and graduate incomes: Reflections on methodology, in Lauder, H., Young, M., Daniels, H., Balarin, M. and Lowe, J. (Eds.)*Educating for the Knowledge Economy? Critical Perspectives*, London: Routledge.

Lorey, I. (2015) *The State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious,* London: Verso.

Mavelli, L. (2014) Widening Participation, the Instrumentalization of Knowledge and the Reproduction of Inequality, in *Teaching in Higher Education*, 19,8, 860-869.

McArthur, J. (2011) Reconsidering the Social and Economic Purposes of Higher Education, in *Higher Education Research and Development*, 30,6, 737-749.

McCash, P. (2008) *Career Studies Handbook: Career Development Learning in Practice*, York: Higher Education Academy.

McGettigan, A. (2013) *The Great University Gamble: Money, Markets and the Future of Higher Education*. London: Pluto Press.

McQuaid, R.W., Green, A. and Danson, M. (2005) Introducing Employability, in *Urban Studies*, 42, 2, 191-195.

Moore, P. (2010) *The International Political Economy of Work and Employability*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Moreau, M-P. and Leathwood, C. (2006) Graduates' Employment and the Discourse of Employability: A Critical Analysis, in *Journal of Education and Work*, 19,4, 305-324.

Naidoo, R. (2010) Global Learning in a NeoLiberal Age: Implications for Development, in Unterhalter, E. and Carpentier, V. (eds) *Global Inequalities and Higher Education*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Olssen, M. and Peters, M.A. (2005) Neoliberalism, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy: from the Free Market to Knowledge Capitalism, in *Journal of Education Policy*, 20,3, 313–345.

Rear, D. and Jones, A. (2013) Discursive Struggle and Contested Signifiers in the Arenas of Education Policy and Work Skills in Japan, in *Critical Policy Studies*, 7,4, 375-394.

Rikowski, G. (2003) Alien Life: Marx and the Future of the Human, in *Historical Materialism*, 11(2), 121-164.

Robbins, C.B. (1963) *Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins.* London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Standing, G. (2011) *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Streeck, W. (2014) *Buying Time: The Delayed Crises of Democratic Capitalism*. London: Verso.

Sultana, R. G. (2014) Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will? Troubling the relationship between career guidance and social justice, in *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 14, 1, 5-19.

Tomlinson, M. (2012) Graduate Employability: A Review of Conceptual and Empirical Themes, in *Higher Education Policy*, 25, 407-401.

Urciuoli, B. (2008) Skills and Selves in the New Workplace, *American Ethnologist*, 35,2, 211-228.

Watts, A.G. (2015) Career Development: Moving Forward; Looking Back, in Hooley, T. and Barham, L. (eds) *The Tony Watts Reader,* Staffordshire: Highflyers.

Welch, D. (1945) *Maiden Voyage*. London: Routledge.

Wilton, N. (2011) Do Employability Skills Really Matter in the UK Graduate Labour Market, in *Work, Employment and Society*, 25,1, 85–100.

Yorke, M. (2006) *Employability in Higher Education: What it is – What it is not*. (Learning and Employability. Series 1), York: The Higher Education Academy.

Young, M. (1958) *The Rise of the Meritocracy 1970-2033: An Essay on Education and Equality*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Zola, E. (2008) *The Ladies Paradise*. Oxford: World's Classics.

For correspondence

Steve Rooney
Learning Development Manager
Leicester Learning Institute
University of Leicester

steve.rooney@le.ac.uk

Dr. Mark Rawlinson
Reader in English Literature
School of English
University of Leicester

mjr1@le.ac.uk