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ASET Conference 2014, Northumbria University

Workshop Presentation, 3/9/14 12.15-13.00

Re-examination of employability as 'social' practice: re-shaping current understandings & facilitating enhanced practice across generic to specific perspectives.

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Overview

- Introductions
- Current perspectives on employability (10 mins total)
- Work in pairs (5 mins)
- A 'fresh start' using a social practice approach (5 mins)
- Group work (10 mins)
- Feedback (10 mins = 3x3))
- Open debate, summary
- References & Way forward (5 mins total)

Background & Brief Rationale

- Area needing more research (Tibby, 2012a; Hill 2012; Yorke & Knight 2006)
- Extension of evidence base and dissemination (Wilson, 2013)
- Relates to current HE policy and developments (Leitch, 2006; BIS, 2011; Wilson, 2012; HEAR, 2012; HEFCE, 2013).
- Possible benefits for HE and stakeholders
- Has potential for longer term, broader socio-economic benefits
- Links to possible enhancement of employability
- Has significance for the 'social revolution' (KIS & HEAR, policy, social media, digital learning, etc)
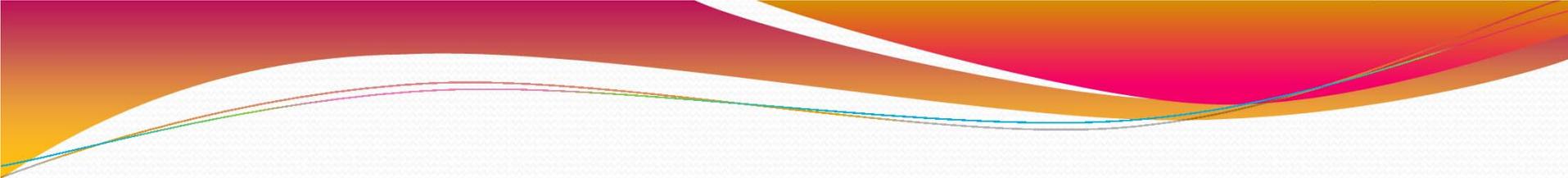
Workshop Research Questions

- How appropriate generically are the theoretical concepts and practical understandings of the terminology concerned with employability used in Higher Education, including by various stakeholders ?

- How can these be made more meaningful both generically and specifically through reflection and by adopting a social practice model?

Summary of Terminology Issues

- Large literature base
- Many variations in terminology
- Some core themes emerging
- Types of influences on different perspectives –
  - chronological
  - theoretical
  - HE Culture & sub-culture (policy, CoPs, local to global)
  - wider socio-economic aspects (business, consumerism, marketisation & social revolution aspects)
  - Variations in perceptions of different stakeholders
- ? Use of model (which?) including skills (which?)

Key Stakeholder Perspectives

- CoPs
- WRL
- Social Revolution
- Nutrition Placements
- Employability
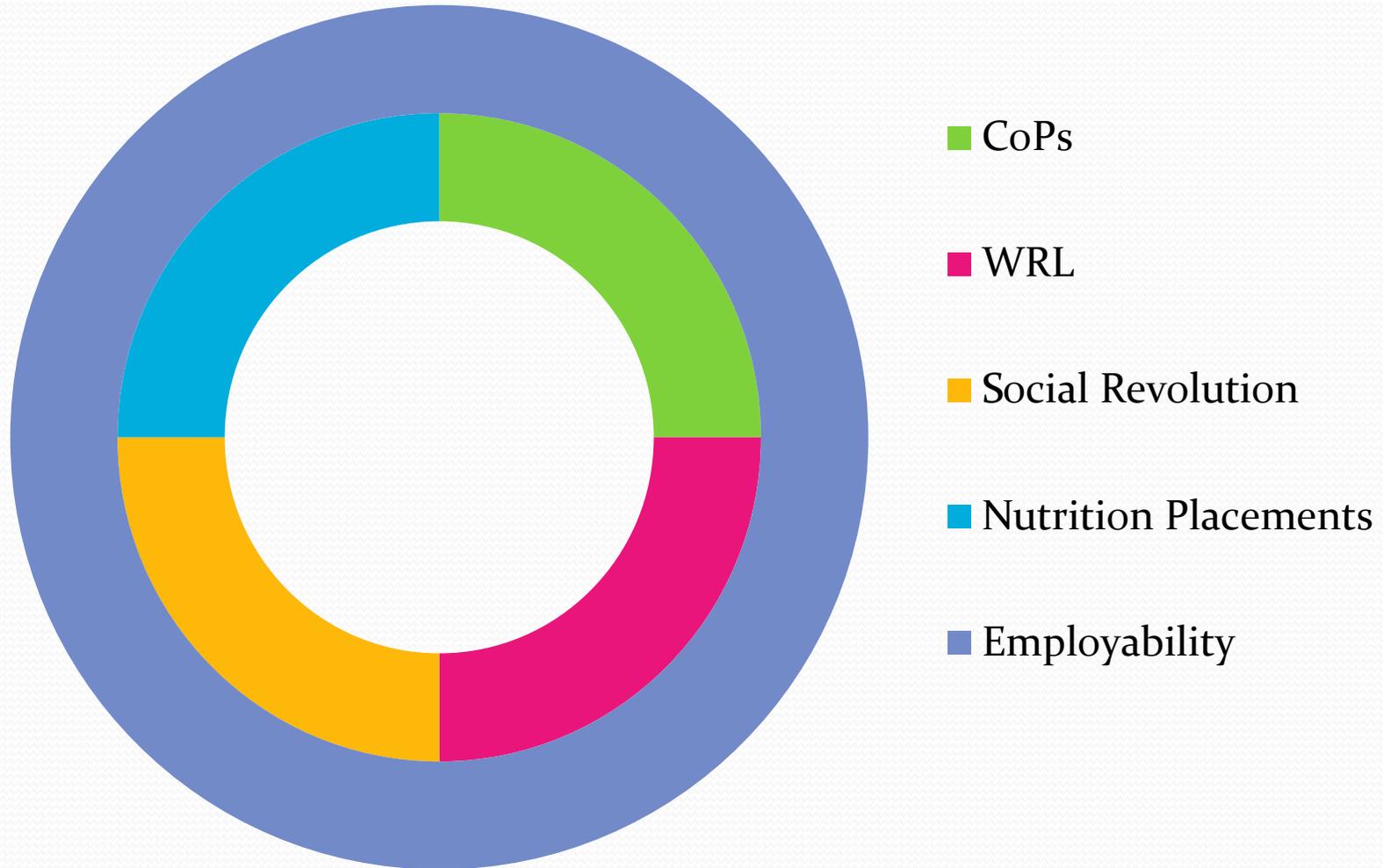
Concepts of Employability (1)

- Again a focus of attention in policy &, large literature but no consensus.
- Construct from a book on unemployment by William Beveridge (1909).
- Philpott (1999) described employability as '...*a poorly understood buzzword*'.
- Tibby (2012b): '*defining what is meant by employability remains as much of an issue today as it was 30 years ago*'.
- Affected by a considerable variety of factors (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005: 209-10) and
- Its interpretation has evolved over the years (Gazier, 1998): describes 7 chronological stages of employability in the last century.
- HE interpretations largely based on attributes & skills
- Variations in skills identified. ^ supply & demand etc.

Working definition of Employability

= Amalgamation, defining (Graduate) employability as:

- *'a set of achievements - skills, understandings, personal attributes* and **development of critical reflective abilities enhancing and empowering the learner,** *that* depending on contemporary supply and demand plus their availability (geographically or otherwise) *make Graduates more likely to* be able to select and *gain employment and be more successful* and satisfied *in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the* wider *community and economy'.* [Modified from Yorke (2006), Harvey (2003) and Dacre Pool (2007) with acknowledgment].

- Skills models: Dacre Pool (2007) very comprehensive.
- International skill development (business management) Andrews & Higson (2007) – MISLEM project.
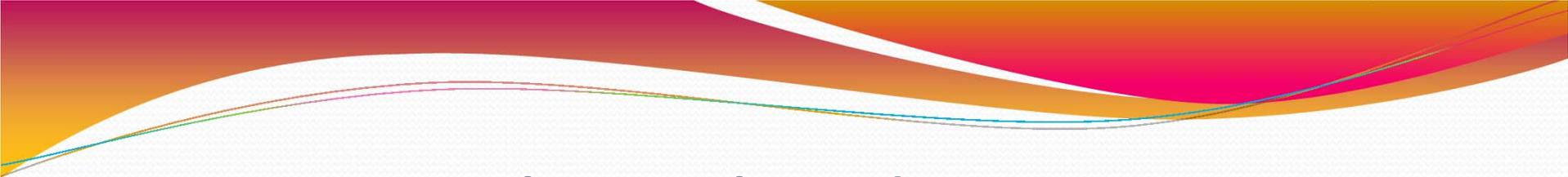
Other related issues

- Measurement
- Barriers
- Possible enhancers and/or other outcomes
- Need for more research
- Extrapolation?

Concepts of Employability (2)

- Social and relational (a verb not a noun!)
- Placement – emplacement - displacement
- 'treason of the intellectuals' (Benda 1927/2006)
- 'docile citizens' (Baltodano 2012)
- Quality of work is constructed on the basis of pupil outcomes
- An individualist discourse of responsibility
- 'individual fault' and 'private worry' (Bauman 2008)
- Conflict
- Needs – defined by who? Whose are being met?
- Political and moral
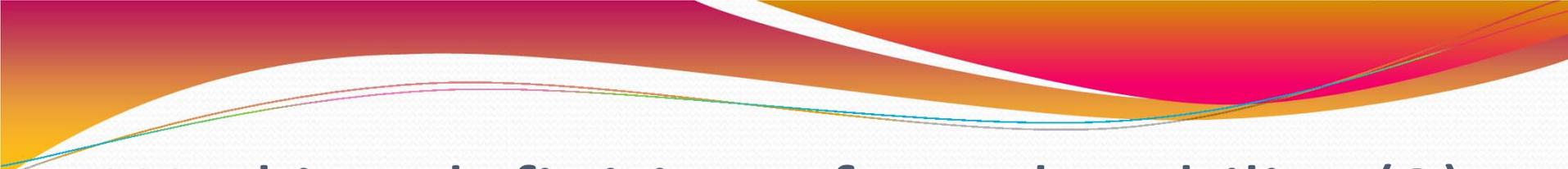
Working definition of Employability (2)

An inclusive approach to employability requires consideration of all actors' responsibilities and develops understanding of the experiences and responsibilities of all people involved; including how these responsibilities are placed with respect to each other. Employability is therefore not just a matter of student achievements but also of 'who' is putting people and their responsibilities in what place.

Social Revolution

- KIS collections & Hear (2012)
- Wilson (2012)
- Social media
- Digital learning
- Other policy e.g. WP.
- Various socio-economic aspects

- What understanding of 'social' is being employed and whose 'revolution' is it?

Feedback & way forward

- More consensus and research needed

Key References

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