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Redefining 'Employability' as something to be achieved: utilising Tronto's conceptual framework of care to refocus the debate.

Purpose – This paper contributes to a broader understanding of the complexity in relationships of power and responsibility in employability in Higher Education contexts and posits a conceptual framework for employability as a process, something to be achieved.

Design/methodology/approach – This conceptual paper arises from experience of and research into placement practices and draws upon Joan Tronto's feminist epistemology (1993, 2012) to argue for a critical understanding of employability.

Findings – There is little in the literature that discusses employability as a process involving moral and political work. The conceptual framework offers a process of five phases to provide a foundation for understanding employability that moves beyond a focus on skills and attributes.

Research limitations/implications – The conceptual framework enables all employability professionals, including researchers, to think beyond skills and attributes for employment to explore the implications of the relations that shape the need for employability within and outside their sphere.

Practical implications – Developing a conceptual framework enables employability professionals to evaluate their practices and evaluate: if practices are inclusive or

excluding; the implications of power and responsibility; and, the tensions arising because of the diverse nature of need in employability work.

Originality/value – This paper posits a conceptual framework for understanding the process of employability work as something to be achieved.

Keywords:

Conceptual framework, Employability, Higher Education, moral, political, process.

Introduction

There continues to be a significant demand from government, business and university regulators (HEFCE 2011) that universities respond to the employability agenda so that employability can be understood in a number of ways. Firstly as an aspect of global political and economic ideology meeting the needs of the market (Aamodt, Hovdhaugen and Bielfeldt 2010; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014); secondly as a response, particularly by universities, to the political imperative (Olssen and Perters 2005, Scott 2012); and finally, as the individual skills and attributes of students in gaining and maintaining employment (Yorke 2006; Tomlinson 2007). Accordingly the debate continues about the need to develop a definition of employability that avoids confusion and misunderstanding (Tibby 2012).

The purpose of the article is to move discussion about employability away from the terms it is usually understood to argue that it should be considered as a process involving the needs of a range of stakeholders; business, universities and students, alike. Consequently definition becomes a matter of explaining how the need for employability arises and how this need is met, rather than as a matter of economic, institutional or individual concern. As such employability is posited as political and moral process since questions arise about how employability needs are being identified in relation to whom, by whom and to what ends. The framework for achieving this understanding is developed from Joan Tronto's (1993, 2012) political argument for an ethic of care.

The significant ideology organizing all levels of education in westernised industrialised countries in recent years is that of neo-liberalism (Olssen and Peters

2005; Ball 2012) so that managerialism and performativity are dominant in the everyday needs and experiences of those who both work or are educated at all levels (Ball 2003; Biesta 2004). Feminists have argued that the normative ethic at the foundation of this approach to education is based upon theoretical-justice concerns for rules and duty (Gilligan 1982). This is argued to promote masculine universalism since policy is posited as gender neutral, applying to all equally and without discrimination, yet the alternative to rules and duties, a relational ethics, is ignored. In this article this alternative political and moral understanding is used to frame the development of a conceptual framework for critically understanding employability. Current critical discourses in higher education are used to illustrate the potential of the framework in achieving new understanding and redefining employability.

A Collaborative and Political Model for Understanding Employability

Feminist debates about moral, political and caring practices offer a way towards a more democratic understanding of employability. Margaret Urban Walker (1998) posits the expressive-collaborative model which situates morality as practice and in particular the practice of responsibility. Responsibility implies a hierarchy in both power and relationships and her approach seeks to reveal how people are positioned in relation to each other and through what understanding of responsibility. Consequently, hierarchical practices of responsibility are moral practices since there are those who do employability, those who receive employability, and those who seek to direct and control employability but who are removed from the intimate relations of its work. Walker's approach can be utilized to situate employability work

in relational practices of responsibility and power and requires us to recognise that practices of responsibility are governed by the prevailing politics.

This approach is developed by the work of Joan Tronto (1993) adapted here to provide the basis of a substantial conceptual framework for understanding employability. Although Tronto's focus was on care this was conceived as any activity that enhances human experience (Tronto and Fisher 1991) and her approach has been used to analyse a variety of practices in higher education (for example, Mariskind 2014). Her definition therefore extends to employability. Importantly, to care about employability is to be engaged in an on-going process of practice that moves away from understanding it as a solely dispositional activity, or one focused on the attainment of skills or the development of relationships, that otherwise risks objectifying those who are subject to the work of those charged with assuring employability as a central tenet of higher education practice. In positing employability as a process it becomes something to be achieved in consideration of the needs and responsibilities of all involved in its reach.

In considering how practices of responsibility are undertaken by all stakeholders in employability work we explicate any framing of needs that supports the position of particular individuals over those of others. Tronto promotes practices with people as: particular and plural; moral and engaged with the politics of power, institutions and structures; and, relevant to all in its purpose. While employability can apply to a particular student in a particular context it is also plural since it applies to all. There is a danger in thinking that the same institutional approach works for every student since people's needs for employability are diverse. Consequently decisions about

how particular needs are met through the plural institutional context of higher education are moral decisions since questions over the allocation of resources and how employability is being actioned arise. It is interesting to consider, for example, if all students regardless of sex, age, socio-economic background, ethnicity, type of course, have access to employability opportunities of the same value and same terms relative to each other.

Tronto views those engaged in the exercise of power whilst claiming to meet the needs of others, usually from a distance, as the work of 'privileged irresponsibility' (Tronto 1993, 146). In these terms employability involves the work of people in relation and it is possible to develop a critical approach that enables understanding of how relations are set for one another. This involves viewing employability, not as a set of skills or personal attributes to be evidenced, but work involving five phases in which the needs of all stakeholders are expressed and understood, and outcomes are achieved in collaboration. The five phases and their relevant concerns are illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Employability as a process developed from Tronto (1993/2012)

5 Phases of Employability	Concerns
<p>Caring About Employability</p> <p>Noting and making an assessment of an employability need. If a need isn't recognised employability cannot occur.</p>	<p>Attentiveness and Conflict</p> <p>How is the need for employability recognised, defined, and to what purposes? This aspect of the process concerns the institutional relations and power that organise people's work. It is also important to recognise how those who organise employability balance their own employability needs with those of the students who ultimately receive employability.</p> <p>Typical concerns: ideology and epistemology</p>
<p>Taking Care of employability</p> <p>Tutors, mentors, employability organisers and others involved in organizing employability</p>	<p>Responsibility or 'Privileged irresponsibility' and Particularity or Universality</p> <p>Important in defining a need is how people are situated in relation to each other and how responsibilities are set and understood. There are those who privilege employability yet do not become involved in</p>

assume a moral, legal and contractual responsibility as an aspect of their work.	the intimate relations of its work. Employability is a particular feature of higher education provision yet it must account for diverse needs and experiences delivered in diverse ways. Typical concerns: who is included and who is excluded?
Enabling Employability Means coming into contact with students. Simply “caring about” and “taking care of” can be achieved through a financial settlement. Not to move beyond these two phases and to be involved in enabling employability is to potentially ‘other’ and a consequence of the powerful engaging in ‘privileged irresponsibility’	Competence and Resources Competence in this regard means both quality practice; having the requisite knowledge, skills and attributes; and a reflexive practice, for example, thinking about the disjuncture between one’s own needs in working in the field of employability, the needs of the institution, and the needs of the students. There are those who, through their privileged positions, avoid taking a ‘hands on’ or ‘face to face’ role in enabling employability yet who control the resources necessary for employability to occur. The allocation of resources are political and moral decisions since they involve priorities, dilemmas and conflicts, and cultural, organisational, institutional and other social mores Typical concerns: cultural relativity versus cultural specificity
Receiving Employability The student is open to the services and support offered. However this should also include the participation of the end user, e.g., children.	Responsiveness and Standard This involves understanding employability needs from the standpoint of the students but importantly of the end user who, in an education context for example, are the pupils in a school. How and by whom are quality outcomes measured and standards set? Typical concerns: embodiment, strengths and deficits
Achieving employability with Involves the temporal dimension of employability where trust and solidarity are developed through the experience of employability practices.	Integrity and Practice Integrity is achieved if the employability process is integrated in light of conflict, resource issues and competence. It is something to be achieved over time, collectively. Employability is not just cerebral, or a matter of ideology or individual moral debate and practices; it is the work of all involved it its aims and it is achieved when the process fits together as a whole. Typical Concerns: Particularity, plurality and purposiveness

This is a representation of the process of employability. For ease of illustration the five aspects of phases have been arranged to correspond with particular concerns, however these are relevant across the employability process and not specific to a particular phase.

To understand employability requires us to consider both the practices within each of the five phases and also how they operate as a process across all five phases. The outcome of the process is the achievement of employability involving; how the need for employability and its purpose are framed, the nature of power relations and collaborations in our work, and how the individual’s needs are being met within a plural context and with the available resources. A critical discourse of the

employability agenda is offered before utilising this to illustrate the application of the employability process.

A Critical Discourse of Employability

A common discourse in employability policy has been based around the relationship between the economy and higher education so that a function of the latter is the production of entrepreneurial, knowledgeable and skilled graduates (Tomlinson 2012). This discourse constructs learning in 'an economically instrumental way, based on human capital theory, and assum[es] a harmony of interests' (Benozzo and Colley 2012, 305) between student, tutors, employers and government. As a result many definitions of employability focus on skills, with increasing emphasis on 'soft' skills (attributes such as team working or time management) (Margo et al. 2010) that are the difference between doing the job and being good at the job. Employer bodies such as the Confederation of British Industry have been particularly keen on the development of soft skills to add value to business outcomes and productivity (CBI 2010) and have subsequently linked the development of skills and attributes as a matter of individual responsibility in gaining employment (CBI/NUS 2011) rather than as a broader concept involving congruent interests.

This gives rise to concerns about a masculinist version of employability policy for higher education based on distinct moral positions, primarily a justice orientated discourse of duty and consequence (Gilligan et al 1988). Students are encouraged to understand employability as a matter of holding the right skills to gain employment, to contribute and successfully participate in society and consequently obtain desirable rewards. The continuing rise of the power of the market has underpinned

the status of individual responsibility and individualism so much that the emphasis on 'individual fault' and 'private worry' (Bauman 2008, 6) can become a feature of students response and attention to employability policy (Tomlinson 2008).

Whilst university students value the opportunity to gain experience and develop the knowledge and skills that are necessary to employment and future prospects there is potential for disillusionment in a scenario where definitions of 'professional', 'competent' and 'skilled' are being restructured through relations of competition, productivity, accountability and control (Olssen and Peters 2005). Accountability has been promoted as a form of empowerment and in this regard empowerment includes the university's ability to respond to the perceived employability needs of students by taking the mantle of reform from the political sphere and perpetuating and developing it from within. Students are both the object of employability policy and practices and are expected to reproduce its relationships of power in their future employment. This disjuncture between the student as object and student as change agent is at the centre of training students to become 'docile citizens' (Baltodano, 2012, p. 492).

In this context, policy develops 'a notion of justice that is tied to a commodity [education] and exchange [market] notion of justice' (Tronto 1993, p. 139). In a system where education is a commodity and university staff are the workers who take care of employability, students can become passive recipients of that approach. Even if careers staff in a university work closely with students, faculty and those who manage resources and strategy may not. Indeed concern has been raised in the UK that some members of faculty feel unable to affect the employability of

undergraduates in light of the students' social class (Morrison 2014) or other aspects of social difference, and a differentiated university system (Boden and Neveda 2010). Moreover, the shift from the political and ideological sphere to one where the individual is tied to the state through systems of accountability involves a shift in structural and cultural functions from shared and collegiate practices to those that produce self-interested individuals. The key concern is that there has been a shift in the terms of power, role and responsibilities in relationships between the State, employers, universities and students in the production of human capital.

There is ambiguity in an employability discourse used to frame what are desired, appropriate and valued skills, attributes, actions and outcomes for students. A key concern must be to understand who is setting and organizing the employability agenda and how the needs of all stakeholders are positioned in relation to each other. Social, political and institutional interactions are the significant factors in the organization of employability, power is the significant normative factor, since if, in the division of labour, we are not all equally responsible for the same things, in the same way, for the same costs, at the same level of responsibility then the question of how the responsibility for employability comes to be understood and experienced are crucial concerns (Walker 1998). Important in this regard are questions of essentialism and parochialism so that we consider the key characteristics that are being foregrounded as essential to employability and the particular groups or individuals, who from their privileged positions, set the agenda and define the need for employability. Such concerns about parochialism can also lead to further concerns of particularity – of aspects of employability belonging to a particular group, of employability established in particular relationships.

In higher education therefore a consistent concern is the socially mediated relationship between politics, power and people's experience, in part because of the instrumentalist focus on managerialism as an appropriate approach to the provision of education (Scott 2012). Moreover, the chances of relationships between academics and students being based on mutual, reciprocal, and democratic understanding of responsibility (Biesta 2004) is endangered by contemporary approaches to individual consumer rights, entitlements and power. Employability must therefore be understood as a political and moral concern. The danger is that employability work in universities is increasingly orientated towards outcomes measured by an individual's knowledge, skills and values for gaining employment rather than an understanding of employability as a need which includes self-efficacy skills and evokes broader moral, collective responsibility and social responses.

This is not to suggest that engagement with managerialist processes is a form of moral detachment. On the contrary, people engage with moral actions constantly; however moral action is not homogenous or necessarily transferrable in all its forms across all situations. The suggestion is that those involved with employability work of any sort should take time to step back to consider the purposiveness in their work; to identify the inherent powerful forces and their connections with these, and how diverse particular needs are being met within a plural system (Tronto 1993). The shift in emphasis of universities as cultural spaces, from an environment in which new knowledge is the aim, to universities as a vehicle for employment and economic well-being, does not mean that employability is incompatible with democratic values. It does, however, point to the need to think about democratic values more centrally

within the employability agenda. Situating employability within a context and conceptual framework based on democratic notions of social relations enables it to be recognised as a necessary practice but also as concept to be reconfigured (Tronto 1993). To simply focus on employability as the attainment of skills and attributes for employment and relationships between stakeholders is to overlook the needs and vulnerabilities of some stakeholders. It is also to ignore the derivative dependency of those involved in enabling and assuring employability, the erosion of relational autonomy and the politics governing relations (Tronto 2013).

Discussion

The political and ideological context outlined is important in considering the potential of the conceptual framework (table 1) to develop understanding of the moral and political practice of employability in higher education. The focus of the framework is not on skills and attributes or relationships but:

Politics: recognition and debate/dialogue of relations of power within and outside the organisation of competitive and dominative power and agreement of common purpose;

Particularity and Plurality: attention to human activities as particular and admitting of other possible ways of doing them and to diverse humans having diverse preferences about how needs might be met; and,

Purposiveness: awareness and discussion of the ends and purposes of [employability] (Tronto 2010, 162).

In these terms the conceptual framework can be used to understand employability in a range of political, geographic, demographic and cultural contexts and is not particular to specific groups or individuals. It is also used to consider the discourse used in employability debates so that terms such as; placement, work integrated learning, work-based learning and internship are understood as organising features of the work those involved in enabling employability do.

Caring about employability

This phase includes noting and making an assessment of an employability need. If a need isn't recognised employability cannot occur. However a key concern is to understand who is defining the need for employability and from what standpoint. Is, for example, the focus on skills or attributes or on a much wider definition of relations – is employability viewed as an economic imperative and of individual responsibility where procedures are put in place to enable this; or as plural, requiring a collective agreement based on notions of mutuality, reciprocity, democracy, concern for the common good, and responsibility?

In a context where the needs of the elite and those who put employability policies into action are privileged over the needs of students, education settings become environments of 'otherness' (Biesta 2004) between the constituents; managers, academics, careers staff, and students, where professional relationships and actions are reduced to quantifiable and, above all, inspectable templates (Shore and Wright 1999). In this context autonomy, trust and collegial practices are harmed by hierarchically structured relations (Olssen and Peters 2005).

This raises a question about the ideological power at play and the potential lack of student voice in relationships where they are continually exposed to instrumental practices and a powerful external organizing agenda. Even if preparation for placement includes working alongside some employability professionals in universities, students may find it difficult to be heard in relation to the wider employability discourse (Baltodano 2012). In such circumstances students are objectified and do not participate in the employability agenda on an equal and collaborative basis, instead the organizing discourse leads to questions about cultural universalism versus cultural relativism.

Taking care of employability

Not all of those in employability work are equally involved in making sure students develop the necessary attributes. It is possible to define a number of key stakeholder groups:

- Government and organisations, such as the CBI, which set the policy agenda regarding the need for a skilled workforce and employability.
- Those, such as Vice Chancellors and senior managers in universities, responsible for providing an appropriate structure for the continuing provision of a suitably qualified and skilled workforce.
- Those, including academics and careers staff in universities, assuring the achievement of employability and who assume a moral, legal and contractual responsibility as an aspect of their work.
- University and college students who personally achieve employability through their response to the market.

- In the wider employability context the clients who receive the outcome of employability practices when students are on placement and directly or indirectly shape the employability agenda.

This phase therefore involves how those involved at every level of employability work take on their responsibilities. It does not involve an individual's need for employment or an employer's need for employees; rather it focuses on accepting some responsibility for employability and acting on that responsibility. This may be governed by the scope and definition of employability. If employability is understood as a powerful tool in a marketized approach to education, those involved in its provision can be attentive to employability as a moral but regulatory and contractual aspect of their work, potentially foregrounding the student's need for employment rather than considering how their own responsibilities are manifest. Differences in approach to employability as a feature of the ruling relations of people's work can lead to the foregrounding of some people's needs over others so that the needs and differences of the least powerful are ignored.

Objectification occurs since not all of those who enable employability, for example policy makers and university managers, are involved in working directly with students or in negotiation of employability need. This creates the potential for conflict in relation to resources, including time, and expectation of particular skills and attributes which can lead to a concern for individual deficit. Where conflict is felt by students on placement it does not suggest an empowering or enabling experience.

The relationship between a placement focussed on skills and attributes or student autonomy and authority is a matter of degree and power in integrating particular and plural needs successfully, or in foregrounding one over the other. Thus where the employability agenda is set by policy makers and employers, and subsequently endorsed by universities and placement settings, as a matter of employment and individual responsibility, student authority and autonomy is diminished in favour of externally set obligations (Vongalis-Macrow 2007). Thus not all students necessarily have access to the same placement opportunities, in the same terms and of the same value as others. Older students or students who are parents, for example, may not take up international opportunities in the same way, for the same time as their peers; disabled students may not find reasonable adjustments are made in a particular workplace thus limiting their opportunity. Yet universities can argue that they are meeting their responsibilities since all undertake a placement of some kind.

Consideration of 'caring about employability' reveals the ideological, political and moral purposes of employability work, including recognition of relations of power, within and outside the organisation of competitive and dominative power. Employability is a common aspect of university experience in England and in its operation the market plays a significant role. The concern is how stakeholders view their own needs and responsibilities and those of other stakeholders in employability work. Those who take care of employability at a senior management and policy level may not be attuned to particular cultural, gender, class and other social differences of students. Resources may be organised to meet managerialist demands and quality standards defined by crude measurements of students gaining employment.

Simply, those involved with employability are not all equally responsible for the same things, in the same way, for the same costs (Urban Walker 1998).

Enabling employability

This involves coming into contact with students. Government and senior managers can encourage employability practices through a financial settlement yet not meet the students for whom the employability agenda is intended. Not to move beyond 'caring about' and 'taking care of' is to potentially 'other' and a consequence of the powerful engaging in employability work from a position privileged irresponsibility.

How policy makers define their own responsibility and competence and that of others is crucial within the education sphere in understanding the nature of moral engagements of all of the actors involved in the employability agenda. Politicians, business leaders and university managers may agree that they enable employability by providing the finance, processes and opportunities for placement and future employment. However, a great deal of additional work goes into converting these resources into meeting students' needs. As such those who claim to enable employability but are removed from its intimate relations can undervalue the nature of employability work (Tronto 1993). They cannot, for example, view the embodiment of the employability process by students or careers staff and therefore ignore the potential of the employability process as a process of becoming that involves emotional labour (Benozzo and Colley 2012).

Current definitions of employability do not concern themselves with notions of relationship, power, inclusion, exclusion or needs. They situate students as objects

of concern rather than as partners in achieving future employment and detach the work of employability professionals from any moral consideration. This is a significant absence since both students and employability professionals are interdependent and notions of responsibility, resources and competence are central to their relationship. Taking an inclusive approach to employability would therefore require consideration of all actors' responsibilities and responses in light of their dispositions and pre-dispositions; including how resources and competence arising through gender, social class and wider subjectivities are placed with respect to each other.

Receiving employability

Students consistently demonstrate an individualist approach to responsibility in developing the opportunity to enhance their employment prospects and skills (Tomlinson 2008). Based on their own educational experiences, messages about individual responsibility and employment, and their understanding of the managerialist nature of educator's work can give rise to demands for particular types of placement experience. This raises concerns about the power of historical discourses and experiences in western schooling practices about occupational preparedness, an individualised approach to responsibility for gaining employment, and consequently student's personal epistemologies (Billett, 2014). There also continues to be a gendered discourse of underachieving boys and disinterested girls in western education policy (Francis 2006) with concomitant responses in schooling to skills and attribute development.

Following approaches that define employability individualistically students seek to pursue experiences based on individualistic notions of managerialist competence and can eschew opportunities to work collegiately and authoritatively. Such approaches and their definitions, such as that offered by the CBI/NUS (2011), do not challenge the ethical basis for constructing an understanding based on individual interests rather than on need. They also underplay the role of institutions and structures in shaping students' experiences. A student's responsiveness to employability is not a matter of skills of a particular kind for employment; it involves their social and educational history, artefacts and technologies, cultural understanding and mores (Bourdieu 1988).

Achieving Employability with

Autonomy, trust and a more democratic approach are achieved in recognition of all participants' experience of the employability process operating across all five phases. In this framework power is manifest in the notions of responsibility and privilege so that to foreground one set of needs over the needs of another group works to maintain the power of those who are privileged.

This phase of employability is concerned with notions of solidarity and trust in the achievement of a more democratic and empowering approach between all involved in employability work (Tronto 2013). It involves the process of employability over time, how the needs of all stakeholders' are set, and the extent to which each phase and the entire process are done well. Where hierarchical practices of employability, for example, enable some to exercise their responsibilities at a distance from those who receive employability then the possibility of individualistic and excluding

practices exist. This becomes a concern of moral engagement between stakeholders when conflicts and imbalances in other phases impact on other stakeholder's needs – where students on work placement, for example, are required to adhere to a managerialist agenda and are not given the time or resources to develop more inclusive and empowering approaches to their work.

There is potential when working collegiately to achieve empowering outcomes for students on placement by enabling understanding of how all stakeholders needs are met and satisfied. Those involved in employability can mitigate some of the organizing power of the employability discourse when working collegiately, to develop an approach to employability that moves beyond employment and accounts for a range of needs. In this regard reflexivity is important.

Conclusion

The development of the conceptual framework for employability is based on a feminist epistemology and relational ontology. It is therefore particular yet offers the potential of a plural understanding of employability. Consequently the purpose of the article is to present a critique of pre-dominant, normative approaches to employability and to encourage debate and the development of new understanding. Significantly the term 'employability' may be put to work in a variety of ways: as an ideological, political and moral concern; as the skills and attributes required by students in gaining advantage in the labour market; or, as the response of universities and their staff in assuring policy objectives and the future employment of their students. Such a proliferation underlines the range of needs present in the current discourse and therefore highlights the need for a different understanding.

Significantly there are no conceptual frameworks for employability that move away from the individual dispositions that involve skills, attributes and relationships. This framework achieves that by positing employability as a process, something to be achieved in relation. In this regard relations differ from relationships with the former denoting the various standpoints of the people involved in the employability process and the mediating relations of ideology and policy.

The predominant theme for the sociology of education, including higher education, over the past thirty years has been the presence of a neoliberal agenda both nationally and globally so that a significant market exists both within and for education (Hill 2002). A common and critical theme is the socially mediated relationship between politics, power and people's experience of work where 'Market imperatives, not ethical or humane considerations, drive social, political, economic, and educational policy' (Kincheloe 2008, 24). The primacy of the market has thus been called into question, in part because of the instrumentalist focus on managerialism as an appropriate approach to the provision of education (Exley and Ball 2011), but also because of the exclusion of voice, context, location and place (Smyth 2009) by powerful externally mediating forces.

If neoliberalism gives rise to concerns about instrumentalism in education then questions develop about the ethical and moral purposes and practices of education. The answer for some is to debate philosophically so that, in a contemporary global context in which neoliberalism has disrupted previous approaches to equality, social justice and welfare, and relationships are reframed. If the moral responsibility for achieving employment is through an interrelated set of processes, policies and

individualised practices then the complexity and uncertainties of employability work are reified in relation to the individual and the wider ethic of care is an existential concern rather than involving the daily work and tasks of moral responsibility. This is at odds with students' every day experiences of placement since the moral and social are inextricably meshed. The competing demands of placement work are not simply resolved through personal ethical deliberation and moral choice; they are mediated through complex, powerful, external and social forces.

The politics of an individualized, neoliberal education system and an individualized concept of moral responsibility are challenged by an alternative politics of relationality (Sturm 1998). The counter-argument to individualism is that policies, such as those framing employability, are engaged and enacted through a relationship with and between people so that "standpoint" and therefore voice, context, location and place have relevance. In this context, morality and ethical behaviour as an aspect of employability are important aspects of the work of all of those engaged with employability (Walker 1998).

Walker does not view moral responsibility as the provenance of the individual, to be discerned intuitively and cerebrally so that the student makes a decision that can be applied universally; rather, moral decision making requires engagement in a process through which people in a particular context or setting interact to develop understandings of what is right and wrong so that good outcomes are achieved (Clifford 2002). Crucial to Walker's thesis and Tronto's (1993) framework for the ethic of care is an encounter between the moral and social so that the factors that distribute power and responsibility differentially and hierarchically mediate action and

moral decision making (Walker 1998). Significantly, inequity in the distribution of power can privilege the policies and ideas of the elite.

While current understandings of employability in higher education continue to be critically reviewed (Tibby, 2012 Tymon, 2013), the focus of employability policy continues to be predominantly based on neo-liberal marketisation principles (Hill 2012; Wilson 2012) with government arguing that 'students [are] at the heart of the system' (BIS 2011). Utilizing Tronto's (1993) framework helps to understand employability in the education sphere as a moral and political practice in which the exercise of power may be unequally distributed, leading to questions of who is assuming or being given power and how needs, responsibilities and competence are set in relation to whom.

Those involved in employability work should be cognisant of the relations of power at play, the setting of responsibilities and offer the possibility of a more empowering practice. The five phases of employability provide a foundation for understanding ruling relations in employability work and for taking steps to mediate institutional and individual power. If employability is redefined as: *a process and something to achieved involving work and collaboration about work at all levels; shaped by political and social realities, history, and materiality, and taken up by actors in everything that they do in identifying and meeting the needs of all stakeholders*, then all those involved in employability work at all levels and responsibilities - students, tutors, employability administrators, but also policy makers and senior managers - are included.

The empowering potential of employability may be achieved when its organization and realisation are understood as a process through which diverse needs are met in collaboration. In this regard employability work and practices account for the social, political and personal contexts of all stakeholders. Developing a broad definition and utilizing Tronto's framework provides a critical and theoretical foundation and enables awareness and discussion of the ends and purposes of employability, and how the responsibilities and needs of each stakeholder is set and understood.

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