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# Careers and employability learning: pedagogical principles for higher education

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## ABSTRACT

Increasingly, universities prioritise employability as a primary purpose of personal and public investment into higher education and target graduate employability in their teaching, learning, assessment, and student support strategies. However, despite its emergence as a central concern in higher education, graduate employability lacks coherent and robust theoretical or pedagogical foundations. In particular, limited conceptualisations of career development learning applied in most graduate employability scholarship do not include key theories from the field of career development. Rather than continuing to approach graduate employability and career development as different things, the higher education community should recognise their congruence and compatibility and instead adopt a more integrated and critical understanding of *careers and employability learning*. This article offers a curricular vision of an integrative pedagogy of careers and employability learning, based on six pedagogical principles that can inform efforts to deliver high quality, equitable, and empowering careers and employability learning for students.

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## Introduction

Universities target graduate employability in their teaching, learning, assessment, and student support strategies, in response to policy and market pressures which prioritise employability outcomes as a purpose of personal and public investment into higher education. As a result, graduate employability is considered by many to be integral to higher education curricula and pedagogies (Bridgstock and Jackson 2019; Yorke and Knight 2006), often focused on work-integrated learning or career development learning (CDL; Bridgstock, Grant-Iramu, and McAlpine 2019; Dean et al. 2022). Employability also provides the mandate for a wide range of co- and extra-curricular services and programs in support of student career and employability success (Healy, Brown, and Ho 2022). Many scholars or educators question the mandate of employability as a purpose of higher education and critique the ideological assumptions driving it (Bridgstock and Jackson 2019; Reid and Kelestyn 2022).

Despite its emergence as a central concern in higher education, graduate employability lacks consistent definitions or theoretical and conceptual cohesion (Bridgstock and Jackson 2019; Clarke 2018; Healy, Hammer, and McIlveen 2022; Römgens, Scoupe, and Beausaert 2020). Many efforts have been made to explicate frameworks which account for various configurations of employability capitals, traditionally focused on so-called 'employability skills' but expanding in recent years to include

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social, cultural, and psychological capitals (Caballero, Álvarez-González, and López-Miguens 2020; Clarke 2018; Nghia et al. 2020; Römgens, Scoupe, and Beusaert 2020; Tomlinson and Anderson 2021). Employability frameworks tend to be conceptualised and operationalised as *outcomes*, in the form of structured lists of employability competencies and capitals which are expected to be targeted by educators, developed by students, and valued by employers (Caballero, Álvarez-González, and López-Miguens 2020; Römgens, Scoupe, and Beusaert 2020; Small, Shacklock, and Marchant 2018). Comparatively little scholarship has approached graduate employability as a *process* of learning, identity formation, self-actualisation, and social connection (Bridgstock and Tippett 2019; Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth 2004; Holmes 2013; Monteiro and Almeida 2021).

One perspective that is markedly absent from graduate employability scholarship and practice is that of *career development*, an interdisciplinary field of scholarship and professional practice that draws from a number of scholarly fields (McCash, Hooley, and Robertson 2021; Spurk 2021). When career development is acknowledged in graduate employability research, it tends to be in limited terms, referring to the concept of CDL as a discrete component of broader graduate employability frameworks. Career development learning, as it stands in the graduate employability literature, refers primarily to the development and deployment of career management skills, such as career decision-making, information gathering, networking, and job seeking (Bridgstock, Grant-Iramu, and McAlpine 2019; Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007; Ho et al. 2022; Small, Shacklock, and Marchant 2018). Psycho-social, processual theories of learning from the field of career development have had little impact in graduate employability scholarship, notwithstanding a few recent exceptions noted by Healy, Hammer, and McIlveen (2022).

In this article, I argue that contemporary career development theory and evidence should be better integrated into graduate employability pedagogies. I begin by describing how the current conceptualisation of CDL in graduate employability scholarship is limited to a single model of career management skills – the DOTS model (Watts 2006) – rather than any account of career development as a learning process. I then describe several learning theories of career development that have been overlooked in graduate employability scholarship. I propose that scholars and educators should avoid repeating narrow conceptualisations of CDL as a discrete component of graduate employability, but rather adopt a more integrative pedagogy of *careers and employability learning*. I finish by outlining several key principles that can underpin a curricular vision for careers and employability learning which draw on the conceptual, empirical, and practical strengths of both career development and graduate employability scholarship:

- (1) careers and employability learning is a psycho-social process, not an outcome;
- (2) careers and employability learning is contextual;
- (3) careers and employability learning is ubiquitous;
- (4) careers and employability learning is relational, dialogical, and narrative;
- (5) careers and employability learning can be traumatic; and
- (6) careers and employability learning can be emancipatory.

## Career development and employability

Career development is a diverse, interdisciplinary field of scholarship, drawing primarily from vocational and organisational psychology, counselling, education, occupational sociology, and management studies, among others (McCash, Hooley, and Robertson 2021; Spurk 2021). For the purpose of this article, focused as it is on how educators can support students' career exploration, decision-making, and goal-directed behaviours, the term career development refers primarily to scholarship from the fields of vocational and organisational psychology, counselling, and education.

A century of career development research has provided a robust evidence base, with career development interventions shown to enhance university students' career decision-making, self-

efficacy, and adaptability, among other measures, and to offer positive effects to a range of academic and employment outcomes (Healy 2020; Spurk 2021). Career development scholars have identified traits such as career adaptability, proactivity, self-efficacy and goal clarity as crucial resources for to support career success and mitigate career challenges (Spurk 2021; Stead, LaVeck, and Hurtado Rúa 2021). Career development is also recognised as an integral element of mental wellness (Blustein et al. 2016; Tang et al. 2021) and an enabler of equity and social justice in education and work (McWhirter and McWha-Hermann 2021).

Organisational psychologists have studied employability for many decades. In general terms, the concept employability as applied in that field refers to the ability to gain and maintain employment and manage work transitions across the lifespan, though scholars have often complained that employability lacks consistent and precise definitions or conceptualisations (De Vos, Jacobs, and Verbruggen 2021; Forrier, De Cuyper, and Akkermans 2018; Lo Presti and Pluviano 2016). Organisational psychologists look at employability in all forms of work transitions, of which the university-to-work transition is just one (De Vos, Jacobs, and Verbruggen 2021; Lo Presti and Pluviano 2016).

Employability research has been categorised as either input or output focused (Forrier, De Cuyper, and Akkermans 2018). Input focused employability research investigates the ‘seemingly endless’ range of psycho-social resources that make a person employable, how those strengths are developed and expressed (Forrier et al., p. 514). Input focused research aligns well with learning theories from career counselling and career education described later in this article (Forrier, De Cuyper, and Akkermans 2018; Lo Presti and Pluviano 2016). Output focused research looks at how employability is enacted in labour market transitions, most often in terms of a person’s perceived employability and how this affects their agency and proactivity (De Vos, Jacobs, and Verbruggen 2021; Forrier, De Cuyper, and Akkermans 2018).

### ***Career development learning in graduate employability scholarship***

Employability research from organisational psychology has had some influence on graduate employability scholarship, with research into graduates’ perceived employability being revealed as a distinct theme in Healy, Hammer et al.’s (2022) map of bibliometric networks. However, other career development theories and evidence – such as various learning theories from the subfields of career counselling and career education – have made little impression in the graduate employability literature, notwithstanding a few recent exceptions (Bennett and Ananthram 2022; Monteiro et al. 2022). This lack of integration of career development into graduate employability reflects the boundaries between scholarly disciplines and professional jurisdictions, including the fact that career development professionals are more often situated in student service roles rather than academic roles (Healy, Brown, and Ho 2022).

When graduate employability scholarship does mention career development as a distinct concept, it is most often a reference to CDL or career management skills – the terms are almost synonymous in graduate employability scholarship – as a discrete ingredient of broader models of graduate employability (Bridgstock, Grant-Iramu, and McAlpine 2019; Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007; Ho et al. 2022). In graduate employability scholarship, CDL refers almost exclusively to the venerable DOTS model (Watts 2006), which organises career management skills and knowledge into four domains: Decision-making, Opportunity awareness, Transitions, and Self-awareness. Work that does not refer to DOTS directly tends to cite models of graduate employability which themselves point to the DOTS model, such as Dacre Pool and Sewell’s (2007) CareerEDGE model or the work of Bridgstock, Grant-Iramu, and McAlpine (2019).

While acknowledging the wide and enduring influence of the DOTS model, we must recognise what the model is and what it is not. The DOTS model is a content model of career management skills and knowledge, themed into four broad stages (Watts 2006). The discrete elements in the DOTS model tend to be expressed as competency statements that describe the attainment and performance of a skill. As such, the DOTS model lends itself to use as a framework for career

management skills to be targeted as learning outcomes in employability strategies (Bridgstock, Grant-Iramu, and McAlpine 2019; Small, Shacklock, and Marchant 2018; Watts 2006).

However, the DOTS model does not describe a process of career development learning accounting for how students develop psycho-social qualities and resources such as professional identity, career self-concept, adaptability or proactivity. The DOTS model was not empirically derived, has been the subject of little empirical research, and does not offer any summary or integration of career development theory. Law (1999), one of the original architects of the DOTS model, and others (McCash 2006) have critiqued it as outdated and focused too much on career management tasks, skills, and outcomes rather than career development as a formative process. Others have critiqued the underlying concept of career management skills as a technocratic approach to career development which occludes systemic inequities, promotes deficit narratives, and holds the individual responsible for their own successes and failures (Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen 2018; Sultana 2021).

In contrast to most graduate employability scholarship which references CDL, Dean et al. (2022) allude to much broader potential for CDL to be conceived of as a transformative process of reflection, exploration, and adaptation, rather than as just career management skills. However, this promise of more meaningful CDL for graduate employability is an ideal currently unrealised in graduate employability scholarship, because so few graduate employability scholars have integrated theories or evidence from career development beyond the career management skills listed in the DOTS model (Healy, Hammer, and McIlveen 2022).

## Learning theories of career development

Several influential career development scholars have explicitly conceptualised career development as processes of *learning*: reflecting on experience, developing skills and behaviours, forming a career self-concept, and adapting to change and transitions. In fact, McCash, Hooley, and Robertson (2021) describe learning as a 'unifying vocabulary' for career development theory and practice (p. 11). Below, I describe four career development theories that are explicitly conceptualised as learning processes: the social learning theory of career development (Krumboltz 2009), career learning (Law 1999), social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent 2021), and career construction theory (CCT; Savickas 2021).

In his social learning theory of career development, Krumboltz (2009) argued that career development is the cumulative effect of learning experiences, including intentional efforts to master a certain task as well as observational and vicarious learning. In Krumboltz's (2009) view, the role of career education is not simply to help match individuals with suitable occupations, but to motivate and enable them to adopt exploratory, proactive, and adaptive career behaviours and assist them to reflect on and learn from their career learning experiences.

Law (1999), one of the original authors of the DOTS model, integrated Krumboltz's social learning theories in his process model of *career learning*, developed out of his dissatisfaction with the content focus of the DOTS model. Law focused his career learning theory on sense-making and career identity rather than the career management skills of the DOTS model, drawing on constructivist theories of learning and career development (Law 1999). Career learning is among the most explicitly pedagogical models of CDL, developed specifically to support the integration of CDL into the curricula of secondary and further education (Law 1999).

Learning experiences are also at the heart of SCCT, which integrated Bandura's social cognitive theories of learning into vocational psychology (Lent 2021). SCCT places self-efficacy and outcome expectations at the heart of its models of decision-making, goal setting, self-management, and exploration (Lent 2021; Stead, LaVeck, and Hurtado Rúa 2021). Social-cognitive approaches to learning recognise four potential sources of self-efficacy, which can inform the design of educational interventions: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and emotional affect (Lent 2021). Focused in large part on career decision-making, SCCT has often been applied to the career

development of university students (Healy, Hammer, and McIlveen 2022), though it has only recently been applied in graduate employability research (Bennett and Ananthram 2022).

Career construction theory describes a process by which individuals develop and express their vocational identities and career narratives (Savickas 2021). Career construction theory was a product of the 'narrative turn' in career development, which saw a shift beyond positivist person-environment matching and life-stage development theories toward post-modern approaches informed by constructivist theories of self and society (Rossier, Cardoso, and Duarte 2021; Savickas 2021). At the heart of CCT is the concept of *career adaptability*, a set of resources that individuals use to exercise agency in response to career changes and challenges: *concern*, an attitude of planfulness and intention; *control*, an attitude of decisiveness and organisation; *curiosity*, an attitude of exploration and learning; and *confidence*, an attitude of self-efficacy (Savickas 2021; Stead, LaVeck, and Hurtado Rúa 2021). Some recent graduate employability scholarship has introduced career adaptability as a quality of employable graduates (Monteiro et al. 2022).

The career development theories described above are rarely applied in graduate employability scholarship, notwithstanding a few recent exceptions (Bennett and Ananthram 2022; Healy, Hammer, and McIlveen 2022; Monteiro et al. 2022). Limited conceptualisations of CDL applied in graduate employability – the DOTS model of career management skills and little more – do not adequately reflect the value of career development theories and evidence for supporting careers and employability pedagogies.

## Principles of careers and employability learning

The purpose of this article is to argue that careers and employability researchers and educators should move beyond current narrow conceptualisations of CDL and make greater efforts to draw on career development research. Furthermore, rather than continuing to approach graduate employability and career development as separate fields, or of CDL as one ingredient of graduate employability frameworks, scholars and educators should adopt a more integrated understanding of *careers and employability learning*. The term careers and employability learning is intended to highlight the integration of the theoretical and empirical strengths of both fields, while foregrounding the importance of understanding graduate employability as a learning processes, rather than as an outcome.

Graduate employability scholarship is saturated with models and frameworks, many of which debate the minutiae of what to call and how to organise employability capitals. In this article I make no effort to evaluate the relative merits of those frameworks, or to add a new one of my own, acknowledging Monteiro and Almeida's (2021) warning that to claim that any one model adequately explains employability is implausible. Accordingly, the pedagogical principles I propose below are not intended as a comprehensive summary of graduate employability or career development as fields of scholarship or pedagogical practice, nor are they intended as frameworks for the design particular careers and employability learning tasks.

Rather, these pedagogical principles describe a curricular vision for an integrated pedagogy of careers and employability learning. A curricular vision describes how educators – including lecturers, student support professionals, and those who design curricula and teaching and learning strategies – reflexively and critically understand and support their students' learning (Darling-Hammond et al. 2005). Elements of a curricular vision include the formal curriculum (*what* is taught), the enacted curriculum (*how* it is taught), and the hidden curriculum (*why* it is taught). The hidden curriculum refers to the tacit moral and ideological lessons and the reproduction of social structures and values that underpin educational practices.

Employability is often critiqued as a (barely) hidden neoliberal curricula, founded in the ideas that the role of higher education is to provide skilled labour into the workforce, employment is the primary return on investment into higher education, and career success is an individual achievement and the lack of it an individual failure (Dalrymple et al. 2021; Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen 2018; Monteiro and Almeida 2021; Reid and Kelestyn 2022; Sultana 2021). These criticisms are valid and



necessary, but the response need not be to reject the concept of employability altogether. Instead, careers and employability learning, as expressed by the principles described below, can instead be conceived of as a formative, empowering process of self-exploration, self-actualisation, and social connection.

### ***Careers and employability learning is a psycho-social process, not an outcome***

Much graduate employability scholarship and teaching approaches employability as an outcome of education. However, employability is better understood as a process than an outcome. Employability is not a stable and persistent state that can be attained and maintained indefinitely, because it is dependent on too many dynamic individual and contextual factors (Dalrymple et al. 2021; Forrier, De Cuyper, and Akkermans 2018; Monteiro and Almeida 2021; Nghia et al. 2020). An individual's employability can be enhanced or impaired by fluctuations in their emotions, attitudes, and behaviours, and is defined in large part by their socio-economic circumstances. Employability is therefore in constant flux and requires constant maintenance, as a person interacts with their employment environments and communities, reflects on their career learning experiences, and adjusts their career management strategies and self-concept accordingly (Lo Presti & Pluviano 2016).

Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth (2004) describe employability as a synergistic aggregate of career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capitals. Career identity, in particular, describes an element of employability that motivates or moderates proactive and adaptive behaviours (Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth 2004; Lent 2021; Savickas 2021). Holmes (2013), describing a processual approach to employability, characterised the adoption of a *graduate identity* as a crucial element of university students' employability development.

Psycho-social, processual conceptualisations of employability welcome the integration of learning-oriented career development theories. Social learning theory (Krumboltz 2009), career learning theory (Law 1999), SCCT (Lent 2021), and CCT (Savickas 2021) all describe career development, in their own ways, as a process of reflecting on career related experiences and integrating the resulting insights into an ever-evolving career identity. In particular, CCT describes how career self-narratives are formed and how negative career stories can be reconstructed into more hopeful expressions of career identity (Rossier, Cardoso, and Duarte 2021; Savickas 2021). Of course, career identity is not only formed by success, as unemployment, under-employment, and precarious work have significant negative impacts on people's career self-concept (Blustein et al. 2016).

### ***Careers and employability learning is contextual***

A person's employability is dependent on conditions in the social, political, economic, and cultural systems which they come from, travel through, and enter into. It is possible to be objectively employable, yet remain unemployed (Forrier, De Cuyper, and Akkermans 2018). Consider a student with all the right employability capitals: strong grades, engagement in extracurricular activities, and quality work experience. They are competent, articulate, proactive, and adaptable. But do they remain as employable if they relocate to a rural area, become responsible for the care of an elderly parent, suffer an injury, or if the labour market crashes?

Some higher education graduate employability research focuses on the contexts of employability, particularly sociologically or policy focused scholarship or that which considers the role of social and cultural capital in employability (Caballero, Álvarez-González, and López-Miguens 2020; Clarke 2018; Dalrymple et al. 2021; Nghia et al. 2020). The role of context is often starkly illustrated in research into the employability experiences of international students in their host and home countries (Nghia et al. 2020). Other themes in higher education research focus on contextual influences on students' access to and experience of higher education, such as widening participation, equity and diversity, internationalisation, and marketisation, and should also be more intentionally integrated into graduate employability scholarship.

In comparison, career development has been criticised as being too narrowly focused on the characteristics and behaviours of individuals while ignoring socio-economic contexts (Forrier, De Cuyper, and Akkermans 2018; Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen 2018; McCash, Hooley, and Robertson 2021). This criticism is strongest in a tranche of socio-political career development scholarship which rejects the individualist rhetoric of much careers and employability discourse and confronts systemic inequities in education and work (Blustein et al. 2016; Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen 2018; McWhirter and McWha-Hermann 2021). These scholars promote a social justice ethic of career development that informs another principle of careers and employability learning described later in this article: careers and employability learning can be emancipatory.

### ***Careers and employability learning is ubiquitous***

The rhetoric of embedding employability and CDL into the curriculum (Bridgstock, Grant-Iramu, and McAlpine 2019; Watts 2006; Yorke and Knight 2006) conceptualises careers and employability learning as targeted moments in time in which it is expected, or mandated, to happen. Educators are tasked to integrate careers and employability learning activities or assessments into the curriculum (Dean et al. 2022; Yorke and Knight 2006) while careers and employability professionals offer extra-curricular employability award programs, career fairs, or mentoring programs and careers services offer career counselling and intensive job application coaching (Bridgstock and Jackson 2019; Healy, Brown, and Ho 2022). Many graduate employability learning activities and events are structured around certain milestones or seasons, some of which occur only once in the student life-cycle, such as work experience programs or graduate recruitment campaigns.

However, careers and employability learning should not be understood only as the product of specific interventions or activities. As impactful as purposefully designed employability curricula and career development interventions are (Healy 2020; Yorke and Knight 2006) any one of them is a minute moment in the context of several years of study and personal development. In fact, careers and employability learning is ubiquitous and can occur anytime, anywhere. Krumboltz (2009) developed a version of his social learning theory that foregrounded *happenstance*, recognising that every moment of every day is a potential moment of careers and employability learning. *Planned happenstance* – the adoption of proactive and intentional orientations, actions, and behaviours – can increase the likelihood that favourable opportunities will emerge (Krumboltz 2009). Similarly, Pryor and Bright (2011) applied chaos theory to career development to account for the indeterminable complexity of career influences, constant change, and the profound impact of chance events. Attempts to control or predict careers and employability learning are unrealistic, and should be relinquished in favour of active and reflective participation in the complex systems of education and work (Krumboltz 2009; Pryor and Bright 2011).

Although the university campus and curriculum are fertile grounds for happenstance and chaos, opportunities for careers and employability learning are equally likely in other contexts of students' life. This is especially true for 'non-traditional' students for whom the boundaries between study, work, and home are often blurred, such as adult learners balancing their study with work and caring. Careers and employability educators need to support learners to adopt proactive career behaviours and develop career adaptability to help them make the most of careers and employability learning opportunities, whenever and wherever they arise.

### ***Careers and employability learning is relational, dialogical, and narrative***

Much graduate employability scholarship implies that a person is employable when they stand out, presenting the most attractive employability capitals in the most effective ways. But employability is equally a matter of *fitting in* with a professional community. Work is an inherently relational act (Blustein et al. 2016; Forrier, De Cuyper, and Akkermans 2018); even the most independent of entrepreneurs has clients and collaborators. Graduate employability is not the inevitable result of an objective



formula but is in fact negotiated between the graduate and their educators, employers, and accrediting bodies (Bridgstock and Tippett 2019; Forrier, De Cuyper, and Akkermans 2018; Holmes 2013). Holmes (2013) described how graduates present a claim of a professional identity to gatekeepers, such as employers, who affirm or disaffirm the claim: the identity is only valid if it is accepted and endorsed by those influential others. This process of warranting a graduate's identity is enacted through language, in the form of employability narratives and dialogues with educators, employers, peers, and mentors (Bridgstock and Tippett 2019; Holmes 2013; Tomlinson and Anderson 2021).

Much graduate employability scholarship has explored the relationship between the graduate and their employers and professional communities. Scholars have often studied which employability capitals and what kinds of employability signalling employers are most receptive to (Dalrymple et al. 2021; Tomlinson and Anderson 2021). Bridgstock's connectedness learning model (Bridgstock and Tippett 2019) argues that engagement with professional communities is an integral ingredient of employability pedagogies, not only developing practical skills for growing, maintaining, and strengthening connections, but also helping students develop and express their connected professional identity.

Although much graduate employability scholarship recognises identity as a crucial element of employability, it is seldom rigorously conceptualised, with little exploration of how an employable identity is developed and expressed. In contrast, career development research has long been focused on how individuals develop their career self concept, making meaning from and expressing their identity in their work and career (McCash, Hooley, and Robertson 2021; Rossier, Cardoso, and Duarte 2021; Savickas 2021; Spurk 2021). The learning theories of career development described earlier in this article all acknowledge the importance of social learning and interpersonal experiences on peoples' career exploration, efficacy, and identity. Recently, career development researchers have focused on various *career orientations* that are often understood and expressed narratively, such as optimism, hope, meaning in work, and work as a calling (Healy, Brown, and Ho 2022).

### **Careers and employability learning can be traumatic**

Among the unanticipated events at the heart of Krumboltz's (2009) planned happenstance theory and Pryor and Bright's (2011) chaos theory of careers, career shocks are the most impactful. Career shocks are unforeseen events that have significant, disruptive consequences to work and life (Akkermans et al. 2021). They may be personal, such as a medical crisis; organisational, such as an organisational restructure; or national and global, such as an economic crisis (Akkermans et al. 2021). Career shocks are often traumatic and evoke emotions of disappointment, rejection, disillusionment, or hopelessness, particularly when they result in unemployment, which is detrimental to mental, physical, and social wellbeing (Blustein et al. 2016).

Trauma often informs career decisions and ambitions and is therefore an inherent part that person's career identity: a law student motivated by experience of injustice, or a social work student inspired by care they received. Even educational and career success, such as graduation or a new job, can have an element of trauma as the student undergoes a transition and experiences a change in their self-concept (Savickas 2021), such as leaving a comfortable and familiar environment for a new, less certain one, or going from a position of senior, expert student to junior, novice professional. Some from communities under-represented in higher education may feel alienated from their family, community, or culture when attending university and entering professional employment.

People with higher levels of career adaptability are more able to navigate career challenges and disruption (Savickas 2021; Stead, LaVeck, and Hurtado Rúa 2021). Many studies have explored the career adaptability of university students (Healy, Hammer, and McIlveen 2022; Monteiro and Almeida 2021; Stead, LaVeck, and Hurtado Rúa 2021), including evaluations of educational interventions designed to develop students' career adaptability. Career construction theory and other examples of constructivist, narrative models of career development were informed in part by

innovations from trauma counselling (Rossier, Cardoso, and Duarte 2021; Tang et al. 2021). With careers and employability learning so proximate to potentially traumatic experiences, it is vital that universities adequately integrate student wellbeing into their careers and employability strategies.

### ***Careers and employability learning can be emancipatory***

All the preceding principles of careers and employability learning have foreshadowed this last one: careers and employability learning can be emancipatory. It is true that much graduate employability rhetoric implicitly accedes to socio-economic demands of labour markets and the structures of privilege in education and work (Reid and Kelestyn 2022). Graduate employability scholarship frequently highlights structures of privilege and confronts the neoliberal, instrumental hidden curriculum of employability (Dalrymple et al. 2021). In response, many scholars and educators critique and contest the notion of employability (Bridgstock and Jackson 2019; Monteiro et al. 2022; Reid and Kelestyn 2022), but rejecting it entirely is not a pragmatic response. Rather, the discourses of employability can be reclaimed and re-directed if careers and employability learning is understood and designed in ways that promotes agency for the individual, connects them to their communities, and challenges the inequities that constrain them.

It is in the field of career development where we find the most explicitly emancipatory resistance to neoliberal discourses of careers and employability, from scholars who advance a social justice ethic in their scholarship and draw attention to inequity in education and work (Blustein et al. 2016; Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen 2018; McWhirter and McWha-Hermann 2021). These scholars argue that the career development field as a whole requires a paradigm shift to better realise its emancipatory potential (Blustein et al. 2016; Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen 2018; McCash, Hooley, and Robertson 2021). In the psychology of working framework, Blustein and colleagues (2016) offer rigorous critique of the dominant individualist discourses about career and work and offer an account of the fundamental importance of work on people's psychological wellbeing. Work is a central aspect of people's lives and *decent work* is a human right (Blustein et al. 2016). Decent work is defined as work which affords physically and emotionally safe working conditions, access to health care, adequate remuneration, work-life balance, and congruence with personal family and social values; the absence of decent work puts people at risk of serious physical and emotional harm (Blustein et al. 2016; McWhirter and McWha-Hermann 2021).

A key focus of this theme in career development scholarship is to reject the 'responsibilisation' of the individual in careers and employability discourses, which frames employment and other forms of career success as the result of an individual's merit and a personal virtue, and unemployment as the result of individual flaws and a personal moral failure (Forrier, De Cuyper, and Akkermans 2018; Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen 2018; Reid and Kelestyn 2022; Sultana 2021). Careers and employability educators and scholars have a moral obligation to resist these discourses, to call out the erosion of decent work, and to support their students' to develop a critical consciousness as a resource to recognise and mitigate the effects of marginalisation and inequity (McWhirter and McWha-Hermann 2021; Reid and Kelestyn 2022).

### **Conclusion**

A university education requires significant investments of money, time, energy, and emotion. It is reasonable for students to expect that these investments into their education should afford them opportunities to secure decent, meaningful, and relevant work upon graduation and throughout their working life. It is also reasonable to expect that university educators support their students to realise their career and employability goals through learning activities, assessment, and feedback. However, the scholarship and pedagogical practice of graduate employability has not yet developed sufficiently beyond its prevailing narrow focus on employability as an outcome, in part because it

maintains a narrow conceptualisation of what CDL is and has made little use of evidence and theory from career development (Clarke 2018; Healy, Hammer, and McIlveen 2022; Römgens, Scoupe, and Beusaert 2020).

Noting the gap between graduate employability and career development research is not a criticism of graduate employability researchers. The reasons for the gap are complex and include differences between academic and professional disciplines, epistemologies, associated research methods, and publishing practices (Healy, Hammer, and McIlveen 2022; McCash, Hooley, and Robertson 2021; Spurk 2021). Certainly, the interdisciplinary nature of graduate employability and career development affords richness and diversity in attempts to understand complex phenomena (Dalrymple et al. 2021; McCash, Hooley, and Robertson 2021). Nonetheless, the stark lack of integration between the two fields should be recognised as a risk to the quality and cohesion of efforts to understand and support university students' career and employability success (Healy, Hammer, and McIlveen 2022).

The first step to overcoming this gap is simple: graduate employability scholars and educators should be more attentive to research and evidence from the parallel field of career development, which offers the fruits of many decades of sustained conceptual and empirical research. In a promising trend, some recent graduate employability scholarship does reflect greater attention toward career development (Bennett and Ananthram 2022; Healy, Hammer, and McIlveen 2022; Monteiro et al. 2022), while Dean et al. (2022) envision a broader, more meaningful vision of what CDL can be than typically present in work based more exclusively on the DOTS model. Continuing this trend will go some way to responding to criticisms about the empirical rigour and conceptual cohesion of graduate employability research (Dalrymple et al. 2021).

In addition to arguing that graduate employability scholars engage more with career development theory, I have argued that they should also move from considering CDL as a discrete component of graduate employability. Instead, scholars and educators should understand concepts and theories from both graduate employability and career development as expressions of the same goal of *careers and employability learning*: supporting students on their journeys of personal and professional self-actualisation. The curricular vision of careers and employability learning presented in this article is offered as a more integrative alternative to current conceptualisations, drawing on leading theories and approaches from both fields and applying the psycho-social theories of learning from career development to the educational, social, and economic contexts of graduate employability. This article is intended to offer some signposts toward useful starting points or resources for further integrative inquiry into careers and employability learning.

This article also echoes those calls to reclaim the concepts of employability and career development from reductive discourses of neoliberal instrumentalism, which equate higher education to a training ground for the labour market, consider employability as synonymous with employment, and place responsibility for employability primarily on the shoulders of the individual (Blustein et al. 2016; Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen 2018; Reid and Kelestyn 2022; Sultana 2021). I have argued that it is possible to pursue a more emancipatory curricular vision of careers and employability learning, informed by learning-oriented theories of career development and the pedagogic principles described in this article. Careers and employability learning, as described in this article, acknowledges the pragmatic realities of socio-economic contexts, but enables students to recognise and confront those systems' inequities by supporting them through a sustained, transformative learning journey toward personal and professional self-actualisation, social connectedness, and careers and employability success.

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