An assessment rubric on reflection in a career development learning component of a business course

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Abstract

It is vital in an increasingly competitive labour market, that students are equipped with all the qualities necessary to gain and retain fulfilling employment. One of the generic skills of concern is employability skills which relates to knowledge of the relevant profession, the ability to interact with the profession and seek a career. Students should position themselves in relation to future work and what they perceive to be appropriate and meaningful courses of future action. This can be facilitated through career development learning activities as part of Work Integrated Learning.

Career development learning aims to assist students to develop knowledge and understanding of themselves e.g. strengths, abilities, skills; develop knowledge and understanding of the range of career opportunities available; learn how to make considered choices and plan options and effectively manage the implementation of the considered choices in adult life and work life. This can be done through reflection.

This paper proposes the use of an assessment rubric in assessing reflection in a career development component of a business course.

Keywords: Work Integrated Learning, Career Development, Assessment, Lifelong Learning

Introduction

It is vital in an increasingly competitive labour market, that students are equipped with all the qualities necessary to gain and retain fulfilling employment. To achieve this, course curricula must develop learning, teaching and assessment practices to encourage employability development to take place alongside developments in discipline specialisations (Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac, & Lawton, 2012).

One of the generic skills of concern is employability skills which relates to knowledge of the relevant profession, the ability to interact with the profession and seek a career (Freudenberg, Brimble, & Cameron, 2009). Developing employability skills for graduates is an issue for the higher education sector, not only in relation to the first job students may gain after their studies, but also important for graduate prospects at future points of career development or change (Pegg, et al., 2012). Students should position themselves in relation to future work and what they perceive to be appropriate and meaningful courses of future action (Tomlinson, 2007). This can be facilitated through career education.

Within the Australian context (McCowan & MacKenzie, 1997; Patton & McMahon, 2001), career development learning aims to assist students to develop knowledge and understanding of themselves e.g. strengths, abilities, skills; develop knowledge and understanding of the range of career opportunities available; learn how to make considered choices and plan options and effectively manage the implementation of the considered choices in adult life and work life. This can be done through reflection.

Reflection can generally be defined as a cognitive process carried out in order to learn from experiences (Moon, 2004b) through individual inquiry and collaboration with others (Dewey, 1933). The focus of reflection can vary from a concrete technical aspect of an experience to the broader societal context of that experience, and the quality of reflection can be described through successive stages of augmentation: describing, justifying, evaluating and discussion (Leijen, Valtna, Leijen, & Pedaste, 2012).

This paper proposes the use of an assessment rubric in assessing reflection in a career development component of a business course. In the next section, relevant literature is discussed. A discussion on learning, reflection and assessment will follow. Future research on levels of reflection will be followed with a conclusion.
Literature Review

Career Development Learning and Work Integrated Learning

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is a range of work-related activities and experiences built into a student’s study program. Reeder (2000) defined WIL as “student learning for credit designed to occur either in the workplace or within a campus setting that emulates aspects of the workplace”. WIL is a vehicle for developing essential graduate attributes are the qualities, skills and understandings that a university community agrees all its graduates should develop as a result of successfully completing their university studies.

WIL can be subsumed under and serve as a practical vehicle for the broader notion of Career Development Learning (CDL). McCowan and McKenzie (1997) argued that career education should be integrated with the curriculum rather than added as an extraneous service with its delivery shared by various parties and not simply by specialist groups.

CDL is a lifelong process of managing learning, work and transitions in order to move towards a personally determined and evolving future for the individual and society (Smith et al., 2009). The process of CDL may be considered as cyclical stages, with a person progressively moving through each, generating an understanding of themselves at different points in time and finding solutions to career-related problems or challenges. It involves awareness of the many different lifespan roles and stages which require active involvement by individuals in decisions related to ongoing life transitions (Smith, et al., 2009).

Employability is taken as a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke, 2006). The four critical pillars in the USEM model of Employability (Knight & Yorke, 2003) comprises Understanding (of subject), Skills, Efficacy - beliefs, self-theories, personal qualities and Meta-cognition encompassing self-awareness.

CDL takes a holistic approach in learning where it places the learner at the centre and focus to developing employability, which encompasses the value of learning in higher education as enabling and creative (Pegg, et al., 2012). CDL supports quality student centred learning opportunities across all aspects of students’ lives. CDL is intrinsically student-oriented, entailing active student engagement. It is also critical that students be involved in the process of planning their learning experiences and participate in the selection and management of their WIL (Smith, et al., 2009). CDL is focused upon student learning plans and needs and it entails reflection upon learning undertaken in relation to those plans and needs. Including CDL activities in WIL can enhance its capacity for reflective learning (Smith, et al., 2009).

Learning and assessment

The notion of approaches to learning was developed by (Biggs, 1987). The level of learning may be classified into deep learning and surface learning. A deep approach is characterised by a desire to understand the underlying principles and favourable perceptions of the learning context and is associated with deep approaches to learning (Jackling, 2005a, 2005b; Lucas, 2001). The deep approach is indicative of a wider awareness that goes beyond the established parameters to find meaning by testing theories developed in range of different situations (Tempone & Martin, 2003). Reflection as a process leads to deeper learning (Moon, 2004b)

The following are some salient outcomes of reflective processes:

- Learning and material for further reflection
- Action
- Critical review
- Personal and continuing professional development
- Reflection on the process of learning or personal functioning (metacognition)
- Empowerment and emancipation
- Emotional development
  (Moon, 1999)

Reflection is important in employability at least the following ways:
- As the means for students to gain, maintain awareness of, express and explore their abilities in general, and particularly in recruitment processes
- Preparation for lifelong learning
- As an aspect of good quality (meaningful learning) (Moon, 2004a)

Personal development planning (PDP) activities can aid the development of a link between reflection on personal progress and the program curriculum, encouraging greater awareness of how different aspects of learning develop relate to each other and how learning experiences contribute to employability (Moon, 2004a).

Rowntree (1977) defined assessment as “about getting to know students and the quality of their learning”. Ecclestone (2003) subsequently expanded on this definition by including diagnosis, feedback, selection and recruitment, certification of achievements, quality control, motivation and life-long planning as additional purposes of assessment. Good curriculum design will embed generic capabilities into learning outcomes across the curriculum. There needs to be constructive alignment between learning outcomes and learning activities, assessment tasks and the criteria used to evaluate assessments (Biggs, 2003). Wood et al. (2009) states that embedding generic skills means assessing these skills.

Assessment in higher education has an important role to play in aligning assessment not only with immediate learning requirements but also with the longer-term to foster post-graduation learning, contributing to lifelong learning (D. Boud & Falchikov, 2006). A short term focus in assessment must be balanced against a longer-term emphasis for learning-oriented assessment to foster future learning after graduation. It was suggested that current assessment practices did not prepare students for lifelong learning and that assessment practices should help to equip students for their own lifelong learning needs after graduation to be sustainable (David Boud & Solomon, 2001). These assessment practices should promote skills needed for lifelong learning.

According to Boud & Falchikov (2006), eight points need to be considered to make assessment practices more sustainable. Amongst these are a shift in focus of assessment to measurement of learning rather than performance, assessment to incorporate elements of self-assessment, encouragement of reflection in learning and feedback on assessment tasks are internalised for further learning.

**Career Development in a university’s WIL Framework**

All of a university’s undergraduate business students have the opportunity to experience WIL as part of their learning. There are four types of WIL available to them in the WIL Framework (O’Shea, 2008). The Business WIL Framework is an adaptation of the generic WIL Framework and is depicted in Figure 1.
The Business WIL Framework explicitly embeds skills development in three separate courses. These are in a core course in the first year, a major course in the second year and culminating in a capstone course Work Integrated Learning in the final year. This Framework supports the development of business students’ self-efficacy through CDL in WIL programs.

Self-efficacy is a central concept in social cognitive theory where it is defined as ‘beliefs in one’s capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997). The level of an individual’s self-efficacy is seen to be an important determinant of how well the individual copes with learning and performing at the workplace. Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organise and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations. Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves and act (Bandura, 1995).

Students tailor their study programs to meet the expectations of employers in the job market (career management) (Hancock, Howieson, Kavanagh, Kent, & Tempone, 2009). They take responsibility for reviewing or assessing their own employability skills, addressing gaps and then pursuing appropriate ways to report or present relevant information about their skills to prospective employers when seeking employment (BIHECC, 2007; Pool & Sewell, 2007). However, unless students are proactive and these skills development activities are compulsory and assessed, any CDL and WIL integration efforts will not realise full potential.

CDL should include activities that help students to become more self-aware, to enable them to give real consideration to the things that they enjoy doing, are interested in, to motivate them and suit their personalities (Pool & Sewell, 2007). It is introduced in a core course, Accounting for Decision Making in the first year to raise business students’ awareness of employability and how to self-manage their studies and extra-curricular activities to maximise the employability. This approach is undertaken through curriculum-integrated strategies in which career development learning is an explicit vehicle for course-level learning outcomes (Smith, et al., 2009). These are tailored career and work-related tasks and events designed, delivered and supervised by the university and form the start of a student’s career management process.

Assessment of reflection

In semester 1 of 2012, students were asked to write an 800-word personal reflection journal (10% weight) on one of the recorded 1-hour campus presentations on ‘Career Development and Employability’ provided on the course homepage. The presentations involved the university’s Careers and Employment staff in collaboration with the core course academic staff at three geographically dispersed campuses. The Assessment required on-campus students to attend and listen to a guest presentation on Career development/management at their campus and write their reflection journal on their campus presentation. For External students, students had to listen to any or all of the recordings and choose one presentation to write their journal.

On the completion of this assessment, students were assessed on their ability to meet the requirements of the assessment and achieve pre-determined course objectives. These are:

- understanding the need for career development building/management
- understanding how effective career building can improve employability
- knowing the university’s graduate qualities
- understanding what is reflective practice
- applying common models of reflective practice and
- writing reflective journals to demonstrate learning

In line with the university’s practice of teaching, practice and assessment, additional resources were provided to assist students in their assessment. A recorded Power Point file on career development and reflection was made available as a teaching resource. Two additional readings on career development/management and reflection practices were also provided. Students were also given a practice recording for self-reflection with suggested pointers on coverage and scope. An assessment rubric developed by the author (see Table 1) was also provided as a reference to students. Marks were awarded for description of the event, identification of employability skills required, emotional response, self-analysis, learning with changed actions and referencing.

An assessment rubric is an assessment or scoring tool commonly found in a matrix or grid format and is an example of a criterion-referenced assessment. It is a tool that guides the assessment and evaluation of the quality of students’ assessment products, processes or performance (Brookhart, 1999; Pophman, 1997).
A criterion-referenced assessment evaluates students’ assignments against criteria, defined as desirable qualities or dimensions of a student’s performance. The assessment rubric is an excellent communication tool that explains and exemplifies explicitly performance standards to help students internalise disciplinary or professional understandings of excellence and to begin evaluating their own individual performance against them. It assists learning: using criteria and standards making explicit to students the disciplinary understanding and skills they are expected to demonstrate in an assignment. An assessment rubric grades students according to explicit criteria and standards. It encourages all students to strive for high standards because there is no predetermined grade distribution.

An assessment rubric also enhances assessor accountability. Descriptive qualities and standards allow markers to make transparent and defensible moderation decisions about which grade level should be awarded. Subsequent feedback focusing explicitly on the criteria identifies specific points for commendation or improvement. Empirical evidence indicates that marking rubrics increase the consistency of scoring among markers, support student learning and improve teaching (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007).

As in most assessment rubrics, the university’s rubric (see Table 1) has the following three components: criterion, grade or performance scale and performance descriptor. The criterion provides details of the qualities or components of the tasks against which students will be assessed. The grade or performance scale is a scale that shows the students how they have performed for each criterion ranging from poor to excellent. The performance indicator describes the performance of the criterion for each grade or performance level.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria (mark)/Grade</th>
<th>HD</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>F+</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief description of event (1.0)</td>
<td>Full details of presenter, topic title, location, dates/times and other important details of event</td>
<td>Critical details of presenter, topic title, location, dates/times and other details of event</td>
<td>Important details of presenter, topic title, location, dates/times of event (0.65)</td>
<td>Some details of presenter, topic title, location, dates/times of event (0.5)</td>
<td>Insufficient details of presenter, topic title, location, dates/times of event (0.25)</td>
<td>No details of presenter, topic title, location, dates/times of event (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification and description of skills/attributes enhancing graduate employability (2.5)</td>
<td>Identification with excellent description of critical skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability</td>
<td>Identification with very good description of critical skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability</td>
<td>Identification with good description of most skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability (1.75)</td>
<td>Identification with description of some skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability (1.25)</td>
<td>Identification with some but insufficient description of skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability (0.75)</td>
<td>No identification and description of skills and attributes enhancing graduate employability (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional response (personal thoughts etc.,)(1.5)</td>
<td>Excellent expression of thoughts and personal feelings on the presentation content using extensive vocabulary</td>
<td>Very good expression of thoughts and personal feelings on the presentation content (1.25)</td>
<td>Good expression of thoughts and personal feelings on the presentation content</td>
<td>Some expression of thoughts and personal feelings on the presentation content (0.75)</td>
<td>Scant expression of thoughts and personal feelings on the presentation content (0.4)</td>
<td>No expression of thoughts and personal feelings on the presentation content (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis (through personal reflection and course readings) (2.0)</td>
<td>Excellent analysis and reflection of current personal skill set with good reference to the presentation contents and career development readings</td>
<td>Very good analysis and reflection of current personal skill set with reference to the presentation contents and career development readings (1.6)</td>
<td>Good analysis and reflection of current personal skill set with some reference to the presentation contents and career development readings (1.3)</td>
<td>Some analysis and reflection of current personal skill set with little reference to the presentation contents and career development readings (1.0)</td>
<td>Scant analysis and reflection of current personal skill set with no reference to the presentation contents and career development readings (0.5)</td>
<td>No analysis and reflection of current personal skill set with no reference to the presentation contents and career development readings (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and changed actions (2.5)</td>
<td>Excellent description of lessons learnt from the presentation with detailed personal courses of action elaborated to improve personal employability prospects</td>
<td>Very good description of lessons learnt from the presentation with personal courses of action to improve personal employability prospects (2.0)</td>
<td>Good description of lessons learnt from the presentation with mention of personal courses of action to improve personal employability prospects (1.75)</td>
<td>Some description of lessons learnt from the presentation with some mention of personal courses of action to improve personal employability prospects (1.25)</td>
<td>Scant description of lessons learnt from the presentation with inadequate mention of personal courses of action to improve personal employability prospects (0.75)</td>
<td>No description of lessons learnt from the presentation with no mention of personal courses of action to improve personal employability prospects (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References (0.5)</td>
<td>Several high quality references using Harvard referencing style</td>
<td>Several high quality references but not properly referenced (0.4)</td>
<td>Minimal references using Harvard referencing style (0.35)</td>
<td>Minimal references but not properly referenced (0.25)</td>
<td>One reference provided (0.15)</td>
<td>No references provided (0.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Career Development/Reflection Assessment Rubric
Future research

Four hundred and fifty (450) students in the semester 1, 2012 cohort submitted their career development reflection journals for assessment. These majority first year on-campus and external students come from diverse social and demographic backgrounds. Using this sample, future research will proceed to identify and assess the levels of reflective thinking in these journals and find common ground in different demographic groups. The basis of research will be based on the four constructs of habitual action, understanding, reflection and critical reflection developed by Kember and others (Kember et al., 2000; Kember, McKay, Sinclair, & Wong, 2008).

A coding scheme is also currently being developed to identify and assess levels of reflective thinking in students’ written journals using NVivo software. Very preliminary results from the early coding of journals from a sub-sample of 99 students show 63% showed some levels of reflection but only 9% demonstrated higher levels of critical reflective thinking.

Conclusion

The university’s business faculty encourage students’ career development learning by supporting their capacity to systematically reflect, record and articulate the acquired employability skills (Smith, et al., 2009). CDL emphasises reflection through engaging students and making their learning experiences meaningful. It provides the process for ongoing transformation and lifelong learning (Smith, et al., 2009).

Through the introduction of career development learning, the university has adopted at least 4 of the 8 guiding principles for career development services (Career Industry Council of Australia, 2006). These are Promoting awareness of the service and service goals, giving students access to career information and assisting them in their understanding of that information, Differentiating service provision to accommodate diversity and collaborating with other facilitators of career development.

The element of reflection and evaluation is key to the development of the three Ss’ namely self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem (Moon, 2004a). The three closely-linked “Ss” provide a crucial link between knowledge, skills, experience and personal attributes and employability (Pool & Sewell, 2007). By providing opportunities, encouraging reflection and evaluation of experiences, self-efficacy can be increased. A graduate who believes they can do whatever is necessary if far more likely to gain a position and be successful in whatever occupations they choose than a graduate who does not have that self-belief (Pool & Sewell, 2007). If self-efficacy is seen as a belief that one has the capability in a particular situation, then self-confidence could be seen as the way that is projected to the outside world. An increase in self-efficacy should be reflected in an increase in demonstrated self-confidence (Pool & Sewell, 2007).

Through reflection journal writing, personal development tools and careers advice are used to assist students in making connections between their career intentions and their learning, working, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. This approach connects labour market opportunities, personal development and aspirations, skills development, career management and learning support and informs students about the possibilities that exist for them in the working world (Pegg, et al., 2012).
References


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