

# Alternative visions of employability: the role of critical pedagogy

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## **Summary**

Educational policy currently provides a clear imperative: that educational institutions must aid student employability (McCash, 2008; Watts 2003; Browne, 2010; Mercer, 2011; Cote, 2014). Such emphasis increasingly implicates pedagogy in a discourse promoting a vision of self-interested actors operating calculatively within educational and labour markets. Many commentators have been critical of consumer rationalism prominent in official discourse, pointing to more complex issues of emotional engagement of students in education. This article will focus on the learner's 'career' and its potential to be placed under academic scrutiny via the reflexive exploration of theory. This article will also demonstrate how this pedagogical approach can provide a means toward critical career understanding and how this influences future student career enactment. The article argues for the transfer of such learning to an Irish school setting, where it is argued that such pedagogy places employability in its proper place: as something that becomes meaningful and helpful when situated within a wider understanding of 'career' development.

## **Key words**

Employability, career education, critical pedagogy, career studies

## Introduction

The guidance counsellor plays a central role in delivering services spanning across the domains of education, the world of work and pastoral care. This article will focus on the role of guidance counsellors and their part in informing the educational curriculum's exploration of career. The article starts with a brief exploration of the guidance counselling context before highlighting how career is a complex concept that has multiple interpretations within the literature. It is argued that much of the literature provides a conservative ideological stance upon career, based upon modern assumptions, which tend toward the continual marketization of education and thus exacerbates inequality (Archer et al, 2003; Hutchinson et al, 2011). Pedagogy therefore is becoming increasingly implicated in a discourse that promotes a vision of rational-actors operating calculatively within educational and labour markets. Many commentators have been critical of the consumer rationalism that predominates in official discourse, pointing to more complex issues of emotional engagement experienced by students in education (Archer et al, 2003). This article outlines how career may be explored in a curriculum via a critical pedagogy that concentrates on the 'learner's career' and its potential to be placed under academic scrutiny via reflexive exploration of career development and wider social theory. The article utilises case illustrations so as to demonstrate how this critical approach can provide a means of contextualising the personal development of 'career' understanding, and how this influences anticipation of future 'career' enactment.

The article proposes the potential for transferring such learning to an Irish school context and argues that such an approach locates employability in its proper place: as something that becomes meaningful and helpful when situated within a wider understanding of 'career' development.

The beginning of the 21st century has seen the emergence of 'career development' as a global public policy consideration, where policy-makers regard 'career development' work as a significant activity to aid people make short term 'career decisions' as well as helping to lay "the foundations for lifelong learning and lifelong career development" (Watts, 2003, pg.4). The career theory and policy literature has therefore acknowledged that careers develop over time and require further input than a brief one-to-one interaction with a careers adviser/counsellor (Law, 1996). Policy therefore perceives that an educational curriculum can make a useful contribution, via careers education to supplement career guidance/counselling so as to aid policy objectives.

Careers education proliferated during the mid-twentieth century and became common practice by the early 1970's across UK schools (Barnes and Andrews, 1995), where it was defined as consisting of planned experiences to facilitate the development of:

- Decision learning
- Opportunity-awareness
- Transition learning
- Self-awareness

(Watts, 2006, pg.10)

This form of careers education, commonly known as DOTS, has underpinned much career work within the UK as well as Ireland, where it has subsequently taken on board variants of such notions to influence educational career curriculums (Liston and Geary, 2010; Watts 2001). Towards the end of the 20th century the career literature accounted for what it saw as

major changes to labour market dynamics due to ‘globalisation’ (Watts, 2001; Arthur, 2010). Such notions suggests that career in the 21st century is experiencing a “careerquake” (Watts, 1996) which provides a shaking of the foundations of traditional structures; (even though such accounts tend to lack criticality and do not take into account how structural change may vary between different social classes – see section below). As a result Watts and other commentators e.g. Arnold 1997, suggest that career education, on a global scale, must consider a restructuring so as to meet the demands of the new labour market. With such assertions of globalisation, the present focus of the career curriculum, very much becomes operationalised under the guise of employability where it has become a key policy priority due to the major changes facing the educational sector (Mercer, 2011; Watts, 2003; Browne, 2010). Given this scenario there is a policy assumption that students will become rational consumers within a marketised education sector, looking for a return on investments via future employment that satisfies financial expectations. This is further exacerbated by the unquestioned underpinning policy principle that education contributes to the development of a nation’s human capital thus providing a greater national economic yield (Browne, 2010; Purcell et al, 2012). Although there is much criticism in the academic literature in relation to employability (Bathmaker et al, 2013; O’Regan, 2009) it is worth noting that policy very much embraces ‘employability’ and touches upon the concept of career development (Watts, 2006; Yorke, and Knight, 2006). Employability therefore places an emphasis on student transition to the world of work, where students are to be assisted with their ‘career’ decisions. The Irish National Guidance Forum highlighted the importance of employability in its report.

*Guidance is recognised at national and European policy levels as fundamental to lifelong learning that supports the development of human potential, social inclusion, **employability** and economic prosperity*  
(National Guidance Forum, 2007, pg.1 – my emphasis)

Such an example illustrates the importance of ‘employability’ in supporting well-informed career decisions.

Much of the literature fails to operationalise the concept of ‘employability’ – as well as ‘career’ - and fails to take into considerations its rhetorical limitations (Pegg et al, 2012; Bathmaker et al, 2013). Watts (2006) links the notion of career development learning – incorporating aspects of DOTS - to employability so as to encourage a broad exploration moving from the notion of ‘immediate employability’ – concerned with student attributes to become ‘work ready’ – toward ‘sustainable employability’ – a concern with maintaining employment throughout life. Watts argues that such a move utilises career development theory so as to provide a broader approach to employability – and therefore avoid the conceptual narrowing of a skills approach – which according to the literature is unpopular with students (Atkins, 1999; O’Regan, 2009).

Watts concludes that deployment – the extent to which individuals ‘are aware of what they have got and how they choose to use it’ – is the most useful way to explore ‘employability’. What becomes apparent is that Watts’ proposal to broaden the employability curriculum resonates with the rational paradigm underlying the conception of DOTS and much guidance policy. However, DOTS and linear rational approaches to career education, that Bowman et al. (2005) would describe as the unsatisfactory “folk theory” of career, have received much criticism within the career theory literature - as many argue that they simply no longer relate to people’s ‘realities’ and are insufficient to deal with ambiguity, e.g. Gelatt (1989) and Ruppert (2010). McCash (2006) suggests that DOTS overly embraces the agented notion of

career enactment of the student and fails to take into account the social and cultural context in which it inhabits. Likewise Roberts argues that career ‘choice’ is largely shaped by an interplay between aspects of identity and social structures - such as class, education and the labour market – to such a degree that choice may well be illusionary (Roberts 1977,1997,2009). There is little scope within Watts’ argument to provide space in the curriculum to contemplate how wider social forces influence the student’s career enactment<sup>1</sup>. Also, the only mention of political notions of career occur under the confines of future employing organisations - e.g. students contemplating where there “maybe hidden tensions and power struggles within organisations” or being “aware of the location of power and influence within organisations” (Watts, 2006, pg. 14-15). Watts’ attempt to widen the employability curriculum therefore becomes inherently work centric, a-political and therefore lacking in criticality, in line with much policy discourse.

McCash (2008) provides a view of conceptually widening the employability agenda by the encouragement of career studies. McCash promotes the notion of a transdisciplinary exploration of career where career studies endeavours to break open agented rational work paradigms of career prominent within DOTS, thus directing students toward the role of career-researcher (McCash, 2006). Career studies therefore provide a useful endeavour to open space within the curriculum, where career may be explored via a broad perspective. The activity of career studies therefore provides the potentiality for ‘career’ to move toward criticality, urging students to become more sceptical toward commonly accepted truisms and hierarchies, thus avoid rhetorical notions of rational, linear and work centric conceptions of career (Burbules and Berk, 1999). Such assumptions of career, this article argues, adhere to modern notions that tend to succumb to a conservative ideology reproducing inequality in a marketised educational system (Archer et al, 2003; Roberts, 2009; Hutchinson et al, 2011; Browne and Misra, 2003; Love, 2008; Mignot, 2001). To explore such assumptions, this article will investigate the career theory literature’s contemplation of ‘career’, so as to reveal the varied ideological and political perspectives upon such a concept. Doing so it moves toward a contemplation of how critical readings can be encouraged by enabling student’s to place their ‘career’ under academic scrutiny via a critical pedagogic approach.

### **Exploring ‘career’ – A critical analysis**

The use of an everyday dictionary provides a useful insight into the layperson’s usage of a word. The Oxford on-line dictionary definition of career provides a good starting point with interesting cultural insights into the concept of career.

*A course of professional life or employment, which affords opportunity for progress or advancement in the world –*

(On-line Oxford English Dictionary accessed June 2011) –

This definition like many on-line definitions is concise and to the point. However, such concision can result in a simplification and narrowing of a concept; highlighting bias. The idea of work is central to the above definition, as work is presented in the guise of employment and a career is only induced if such employment is of a professional nature and ‘progresses’. One can quickly realise that such notions of career appear exclusive. One in a position without employment, or a person in employment that does not ‘progress’ are all deemed career-less. This is a paradigm that excludes people from career and one which makes career vulnerable and in a position to be ‘broken’.

The dictionary is not the only definition that presents a narrow view of career. Government policy can widen career to include learning but as means of serving work, for example:

*An individual's lifelong progression through learning and work.*  
UK National Curriculum (2007)

The career literature has a history of broader conceptions of career. Super (1996) and Goffman (1961) challenge the above definitions as Super suggests that the sequence and combination of the roles we play within the lifespan constitutes an individual's career, and Goffman suggests that career encompasses an individual's social strands. Taking into account Goffman and Super, the guidance worker may want to ponder positional views of career, especially as such positions will have ideological implications (Mignot, 2001). The work of Gellner is utilised within this section to explore the 'layperson's' definition of career so as to expose the cultural value base that lurks within the psychologies and philosophies of practitioners and theorists thus influencing the career enactment of individuals.

Gellner's (1972) sociological analysis explores how the project of the Enlightenment has provoked a yearning for countries to 'progress' and how such one dimensional notions of progress have influenced collective and individual thought. The concept of progress is depicted as that which provides a 'secularised salvation' and meaning to an ideological and historical understanding. Such notions lead to a strong assertion that "European thought since the eighteenth century has come to assume the idea of progress; and, indeed, that the idea has come to permeate ordinary thought and be built into its assumptions and language." (ibid, pg.3). Such ideas of progress provides the minds of many modern citizens to view the future as bright and better than the past with life being lived on an 'upward slope' with a nature biased towards 'improvement'. Gellner wishes to critique notions of progress which he describes as the 'world-growth' myth. Gellner asserts that the world growth story has much appeal for modern societies; he argues that it leaves a strong residue in everyday speech and action and has thus permeated our values where "people believe ...as self-evident truths, that being literate, clean, technology-minded... [and] organised, are 'progressive' and therefore good, that their contraries are backward and therefore bad" (ibid, pg.11). Gellner is keen to expose the allure to western thought, where the world growth myth promotes western man's desire to present their story as "the history of humanity" and how this history embraces a "persistent upward swing." (ibid, pg.12). As indicated below:

*The picture [of the world-growth story] - also merits the name of the Education of the Human Race Theory. One clear source of its appeal was that it conceived the story of the cosmos, and especially human history, in a manner analogous to the way in which middle-class people conceive and justify their lives. The period of the belief in progress was also, notoriously, a bourgeois period. A middle-class life is, essentially, a career. Its education already tends to be long and marked by a self-conscious series of upward steps, and its subsequent pattern is equally, or is intended to be, a continuous ascension, whether in wealth or along the rungs of some hierarchy, or both. If an individual life is validated in such a manner, what could be more than natural than that the life of mankind as a whole, or indeed the life of the cosmos, should have a similarly gratifying pattern? (ibid, pg.13)*

Once Gellner's writing has been placed at centre stage one can start to acknowledge the origins of the contemporary dictionary definition and everyday language where career heavily equates with the work-role with opportunities to 'climb the ladder' that lead to

continual ‘progress’<sup>ii</sup>. The influences of the myth of progress also have residues with some academic perceptions of career, thus limiting the many facets of an individual’s life-space and motivations expressed by the likes of Super (1996) and Goffman (1961).

*The evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time – Arthur (2010)*

Since the 1980’s Arthur has advocated an argument for the career literature to embrace his notions of the ‘New Career’. Arthur (2002) suggests that such ‘new’ careers are enriched by a sense of being boundary less as opposed to old careers which are bounded. He suggests that the benefits of the boundaryless career are that individuals gain a range of skills and knowledge to enhanced networks and personal growth, whereas the ‘old career’ benefits include, money, enjoyment safety and support.

The new career is endorsed as providing individuals with greater mobility. It is acknowledged that such mobility may well result in people experiencing hardship and distress. However, such ‘negative’ experiences tend not to be explored in any depth in Arthur’s work. There is also an overly agented view of people’s careers within his writing with an overplay of volition, where Arthur rarely acknowledges sociological dimensions of the various case narratives he presents. Class, gender and ethnicity are rarely if at all acknowledged in Arthur’s work, and only implicitly come into play and are therefore rarely analytically applied. Without taking such notions of identity into account Arthur presents career enactment as occurring within a level playing field where an individual’s ‘success’ occurs via their ability to enhance three domains of knowledge; knowing why, knowing whom and knowing how. Such reflexivity is to be welcomed; however, the domain of knowing ‘what’ is missed as case studies explored rarely take into account how different social positions are variably influenced by social structures that influence enactment<sup>iii</sup>. What becomes apparent is that Arthur’s work appears to be providing ‘new’ conceptual terrain, however, his work very much continues to embrace an over-reliance on the modern assumptions of career where progress, linearity – although beguilingly presented as being ‘boundaryless’ - work, volition and rational decision making become important underlining assumptions, which resonate with the already mentioned ‘folk theory’ of career.

To challenge narrow views of career results in a challenge to the ‘world growth story’ the rational enlightenment myth of progress. There are both moral and logical objections to such a myth. Logically such a story of progress may well provide an explanation of *how* human beings’ evolutionary series have occurred but does not answer *why* this is the case. Evolution theories provide a validation to the ‘schema of things’ only via answering the how. If human societies are increasingly progressing then it begs the question as to why the enlightenment project has provided man with the weapons to inflict its ultimate destruction and why this project has included the horrors of the “holocausts of the first world war or the gas chambers of the second” (Gellner, 1972, p11). Such horrifying stories prompt one to contemplate:

*If man is basically rational and/or good, why is it that the forces of darkness have had quite such a hold over his mind and society. (ibid, pg. 8).*

It is not surprising that a concept as complex as career should have many different perspectives. However, this article asserts that discovering the routes and position of such definitions is an important reflexive endeavour of career development theory and practitioner’s work to aid people’s ‘careers’ in the future. This article therefore advocates the provision of career-education space in the curriculum in which students may consider their

own positional stance on career. This should enable students' consideration of their lived experiences, within and outside the world of work, and the consideration of the many strands that maybe present within their lives; strands that may well interconnect or provide tension to the point of collapse.

## Placing career under academic scrutiny

This section explores the articulations of three students who have taken part in a critical pedagogic approach exploring career<sup>iv</sup>. This section provides extracts of their work<sup>v</sup> so as to illustrate their learning of such pedagogy. The setting is within a UK post 1992 university – an ex polytechnic that gained university status after government policy in 1992 - within the Social Sciences. Career is not the primary focus of the students' study, yet space has been utilised within the curriculum to aid student consideration of career-development and social theory so as to place their career narratives under academic scrutiny. What becomes apparent with such an approach is that students contemplate how their narratives are culturally framed and how aspects of their past are entwined with their perceptions of future anticipatory enactment. The narratives expose how the students contemplate fateful moments in their lives and how aspects of identity interplay with the local community and wider social context so as to influence career trajectory. Such contemplation allows new readings of future trajectory to occur and therefore broadens explorations of career<sup>vi</sup>.

Students engaging in a critical pedagogy in relation to their own career tend to start with a challenge to their initial assumptions and conceptions of career. In the author's experience many students that have engaged with such pedagogy have expressed how the reading of a wide number of definitional positions upon career embellishes and adapts their stance as indicated by student A below:

*My preconception of 'career' was largely shaped by the educational aspect I attained at school, where career was projected as being predominately work based. When asked about my initial thoughts of career, I categorically refused to accept that it was anything other than a series of jobs... Whilst studying on [course within the social sciences] I have been introduced to wider concepts and theories which have powerfully changed my rationale. I use the term 'power' inspirationally rather than domineering as my studies have opened up new paradigms of learning in which I have actively engaged in. The introduction to wider literature has influenced me to acknowledge various adaptations of 'career' to which I now take a broad stance....*

Student A

As indicated above the use of theory has provided time for the student to contemplate what career means to them, not via an illusionary solipsism, but via an interplay between their own constructs and the concepts found within the literature. As student A recounts, many students when engaging with wider literature acknowledge a broad stance upon career, one that allows many facets to come into centre stage, strands in their lives that entwine and inter-relate. Students also tend to acknowledge fateful moments in their lives (see Giddens, 1991), moments which have a significant influence upon their lives, where a fateful episode in one area, or strand, has a knock-on effect in other areas, as indicated below:

*I became pregnant at the age of nineteen...another fateful moment as I had nothing but love to give to this child, I was unemployed, not in education and even homeless.*

*My new identity was being created following the birth of my first child, my friends had gone and I became a mother, a new role to play. I eventually was given a council property and was in need of a fresh start. I decided to actively look for work and thought of going to college as I lived a limited life on benefits. After struggling to find work I eventually was accepted by a care agency due to the fact that no experience or qualifications were needed.*

Student B

The above account highlights how student B has taken on board aspects of her career narrative that have influenced her route toward her present situation. The narrative allows an acknowledgement of how social strands in her life interrelate. As well as appreciating their predicament student B also acknowledges how her social position also influences her career enactment and further compounds their position:

*My employment career has always been a carer, a “typical bottom of the labour market hierarchy, confined to dirty jobs in the service sector” (Bradley and Healey, 2008:24). It has been suggested that there is a strong association between women and colour and domestic and caring work. The fact that I am indeed female and of colour, I have to ask myself, did I have a choice? Or have I just been clustered along with many other ethnic background women into service occupations, which are often seen to be more suited to involving high elements of care work (Bradley and Healey, 2008 and Erickson et al, 2000).*

The above account highlights how student B has become aware of how aspects of identity – class, ethnicity and gender – are a prominent aspect of her career narrative. Such pontification very much resonates with Roberts’ (1977,1997,2009) notions that prominent aspects of identity interrelate with the opportunity structure, which in turn heavily influences career enactment – to the point that choice may appear illusory. Such understanding allows the student to contemplate the forces that are potentially at work in shaping their career trajectory, how learning from past events can provide an understanding of what may occur in the future. The contemplation of social position – and how this relates to aspects of identity – occurs in relation to any strand, or strands, that appear important to the student, in the case of Student B this stretches across the domains of housing, education, work and parenthood. Student B has also utilised her own independent research to acknowledge that there are aspects of the labour market that are segmented upon ethnic and gender lines. Student C, positioned rather differently to Student B, provides a useful illustration of how learning of the current context of perceived opportunity structure and social position can aid an understanding of how best to navigate such terrain in the future, a navigation that requires an understanding of the interplay between education and labour markets:

*...my knowledge of normalisation in relation to career development theory enables me to understand how my need for transition between classes, and away from the path in which my parents took can be seen as modern standardisation. Similarly to Forrest and Kearns (2011), it can be argued that it is not an individual choice to go to university but a structural and social means of accessing employment. The hiring of a well-qualified graduate has become the modern day norm, in a society where professional positions outweigh those of manual labour, creating a transition in employment age away from that of the post school world (Beck, 1992). Those who do not access higher education arguably fall into a political label of ‘risky’, attracting an economic risk of being excluded from the modern labour market (Goldblatt, 2004),*

*due to moral and ethical judgements from the powerful influence of society (Cieslik, 2002). Looking through the perspective of normalisation I see a degree classification slowly becoming a means of working class in wait of a second transition in society, as normalisation suggests employment cannot be accessed without qualifications. Knowledge and perception of normalisation when faced with leaving my role of undergraduate ... student, for me brings with it the notion of restriction through working class employment and potential risk of exclusion from the labour market, therefore benefits of this knowledge drive my aspirations to undertake a master's degree, staying one step ahead of risk.*

Student C

The account above acknowledges the student's position within an education 'market', how this market is also linked to the labour market which is likely to be the main means of gaining fiscal goods. However, cultural and social capital are also acknowledged so as to contemplate future action and how this links to theory learnt. Such accounts allow space for the student to contemplate their position within social structures and to start to contemplate how they are to navigate such structures in the future. Doing so embraces the Heideggerian (1961) notion of being-in-the-world-with-others rather than a 'rational' agent that is to pursue a decision making model that does not take into account the culture in which they inhabit and thus inhabits them. The conclusions of such pedagogy for the student is well encapsulated by student B as indicated below:

*My fateful moments, the different roles I have played and the changes these caused are the reasons why I have chosen to be where I am today. However, I believe theory that I have linked to my narrative has had huge benefits to my career development as it has allowed me to understand certain areas of my development and has given me the answers as to why I felt at a standstill for so long, such as my work career as a carer.*

Student B

The above quotes indicate how the pedagogy has enabled students to view their career from a broad perspective where they are to question the influence of 'other', social structures, the community and significant people in their life. The opportunity to theoretically inform their narratives also acknowledges how past events have an impact on various strands in their lives and allows time to reflect upon how the past may, if not reflected upon, repeat itself in the future. Such acknowledgement of such tensions and their ability to reproduce provides a point of contact with the curriculum to reconceptualise career enactment in the future, a future that occurs within a cultural societal setting. It is envisaged that such activity can provide an insightful interpretation of personalised, coloured and nuanced textual accounts that can contribute to and broaden the narrow managerialist 'employability' discourse promoted in many contemporary educative settings.

## Discussion

The above section has provided a brief window into the experiences of students that have engaged with a critical approach to exploring career. It must be emphasised that this has occurred in a UK higher education setting. There is much to contemplate in how such experiences could be transferred to an Irish school setting where the guidance counsellor, as

well as stakeholders, provide careers education, are to contemplate the current context of study whilst taking into account where in the curriculum such an approach could take place. It is worth noting that such a critical pedagogy is in keeping with the 1998 Education Act's assertions that schools are to utilise its available resources to ensure that students receive appropriate guidance to assist in educational and career choices. It is also worth noting that policy in this area, (outlined in DES 2005 and 2012) issued to all post primary schools, also advocates the importance of a 'Whole School' approach to guidance counselling that encompasses personal and social, educational as well as career development. It is argued here that the approach advocated in this article provides a reflexive insight, for the student and educator, into each of these domains and more importantly, how such domains interlink and connect, with an emphasis on the use of group work and class room activities to aid the guidance and educational process. Therefore, the emphasis being articulated here is that students are provided space within the curriculum to discuss their own subjective position in relation to 'career' and how this relates to theoretical considerations highlighted within this paper, for example how aspects of identity interrelate with social and opportunity structures. This could occur in many settings and in different formats, for example a cross curricular approach could explore aspects that naturally occur in different disciplines, e.g. history, geography, sociology, or different areas of the curriculum, e.g. personal and social development, or discretely within a module or curriculum that solely concentrates on 'career'. Law (1996) provides a useful historical analysis, still relevant today, of such challenges with evaluated risks and promises that are likely to ensue with different approaches. The key point being articulated here is that career exploration – informed via the literature – is to be evoked so as to inform enactment, rather than a sole concentration of enactment via the traditional lens of DOTS and dogmatic models of career management.

Part of the challenge for the guidance counsellor – whose role it is to inform an exploration of career in the curriculum - is to ensure that they have a range of knowledge concerning careers, a theoretical range that can be shared with learners to enable an exploration that can aid career learning. It is envisaged that such knowledge will have to be broad, yet not blunt. As McCash advocates, this requires the facilitator of learning – potentially the guidance counsellor – to play their own part in researching career so as to aid the students own reflexive research. This creates a culture shift for the guidance counsellor where the model of career exploration is to expose a range of theory so as to allow students to reflexively construct their own models of career enactment.

## **Biography**

Ricky Gee is a senior lecturer based at Nottingham Trent University. Ricky currently teaches on a number of courses that span the Social Sciences at both undergraduate and post graduate level. Ricky's research focus involves exploring political, philosophical and sociological dimensions of career and how such dimensions may well influence pedagogy. Ricky has experience of working as a career guidance practitioner and training manager.

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<sup>i</sup> Ideas heavily espoused by Young and Vallach, (2000); Patton and McMahon (1999) and the discipline of the sociology of work (see Fleming 2009)

<sup>ii</sup> Metaphors exposed, yet not critiqued, by Inkson's work on career development (2002, 2004)

<sup>iii</sup> An example to demonstrate this point can be found in a paper written in 2002. Here Arthur explores the case of an individual called Bruce. Bruce lives, initially in his story, in New Zealand and his narrative starts by

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explaining that he is a boilermaker where he is a union representative. The story continues to expose that Bruce started to question his union's tactics after which he became 'ostracised, and out of work' (Arthur, 2002, pg.3). There is no detail as to what occurred in this situation and the wider political dimensions and disputes involved. Bruce then takes an overseas job – gained by a friend whose family own a hotel - as a 'barman'. The story unfolds to highlight how this hotel goes into receivership. What becomes apparent in this story is that forces outside of Bruce's control are influencing his career. However, Arthur wishes to overlook such notions and would rather spend time exploring how Bruce adapts to such situations and as a result how Bruce 'gains benefits' due to enacting a 'new career'. Bruce's adaptability is to be applauded given the difficult circumstances, yet, Arthur fails to explore how the wave of 'economic dynamism' experienced, what many would describe as Neo-liberalism (Wright, 2010; Harvey, 2007; Asimakopoulos, 2009), requires Bruce to succumb to prominent economic and social forces which advocate 'agility'. Arthur also does not fully take into account how those with a more privileged position may well not have to face such imperatives of agility to the same degree as individuals in Bruce's predicament (see Berrington et al, 2014; Purcell, 2012; Woodman, 2012; Holmes, 2013; Holmes and Tholen, 2013; MacDonald, 2009). Instead 'voluntary' behaviour of adaptation takes the fore in Arthur's work as though it is enacted within a social void.

<sup>iv</sup> All of which have provided willing consent for anonymous publication

<sup>v</sup> Student work comes from a summative assignment –which involves the student placing their career narratives under academic scrutiny so as to contemplate future enactment

<sup>vi</sup> It must be emphasised that explorations do not have to adhere to the linear, work centric, progressive notions articulated in the previous section yet can do so if the student warrants this a useful personal perspective