

CGHE series on The Critical Economics of Higher Education – webinar 1: Challenging the Skills Fetish, 31 March 2022



00:22:17 Gavin Moodie: Wheelahan, L., Moodie, G., & Doughney, J. (2022). Challenging the skills fetish. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 43(3), 475-494, DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2022.2045186

00:29:35 Gavin Moodie: Australia's national framework for micro credentials specifies that they are from 1 hour to 6 months in duration.

Australian Government. (2022, pp. 3, 9). National microcredentials framework. Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment,

<https://www.dese.gov.au/national-microcredentials-framework>

00:30:47 Pete Leihy: What's the difference between human capital theory and Renaissance humanism? Both seem to assign special instrumental meaning to human orderliness and fetishised skill and judgment, but in order to serve some sort of transcendental or at least future-oriented faith ('heaven' then, 'sustainable development' now, for example)

00:31:24 Gavin Moodie: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/There_is_no_alternative

00:35:35 Simon Marginson: Nice observation Peodair. Problem is not humanism per se but the anthropocentric positioning of the subject

00:37:30 Pete Leihy: I would be interested to see what Gavin thinks, re information revolutions

00:38:32 Gavin Moodie: Moodie, G. (2016). *Universities, disruptive technologies, and continuity in higher education: the impact of information revolution*. Palgrave Macmillan.

<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/978-1-137-54943-3>

00:40:06 Simon Marginson: Colleagues it is tie to 'hit the nail on the head' with your questions and statements. Put them in the chat so that we can bring you into the Q&A!

00:40:43 Simon Marginson: 'Hit the ground running' not with your employability but with your ideas¹

00:45:33 Gavin Moodie: Marx's hidden hand of the market.

00:50:04 Gavin Moodie: The policy is a train wreck.

00:51:24 Diana Laurillard: Interesting argument, but it fosters the unhelpful dichotomy between skills and knowledge, when graduates need both. The turn towards skills derived initially from the problem that so many graduates join the workforce in areas that don't use the discipline knowledge they've developed as students. But why argue against skills and not argue FOR the fully-rounded development of our graduates?

00:52:27 James Robson: Fantastic analysis! The shift to individualised responsibility for skills and employability is really clearly described with pressure on students to fund their E&T and universities to provide 'labour market relevant courses'. What's the trajectory? Does the reification and commodification of skills enable employers not only to demand individuals invest in their E&T but to provide the mechanism for that training and profit from it? Is the growth of micro credentials an inevitable part of this?

00:53:27 Timothy Hampson: I want to ask what your advice to teachers would be. Maybe including me 2 years ago teaching at a university in China where 1) the students were quite into skill fetishism and 2) in an economy where skill gathering may help them land a job. I'm always wary to impose my views in this situation but I agree and recognise all of what you're saying.

00:54:39 Glen Chatelier: The current situation worldwide in the philosophy of education is the disconnect between "thought" and action in meaningful work. Agree? Disagree?

00:55:23 Gavin Moodie: Sen, Amartya (1999) Development as freedom, Anchor Books, New York.

Nussbaum, Martha (2000) Women and human development: the capabilities approach, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

00:56:39 Sophie Reading: In the modules I teach on, we look at the concept of graduate identity. We critique skills as being situational, gendered, classed etc. so look at identity, structure and agency and use Michael Tomlinson's Graduate Capital model for a more rounded approach to the resources students draw on when navigating their way into the graduate labour market: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/ET-05-2016-0090/full/html>

00:56:56 Gavin Moodie: The analysis of development presented in this book treats the freedoms of individuals as the basic building blocks. Attention is thus paid particularly to the expansion of the "capabilities" of persons to lead the kind of lives they value - and have reason to value. These capabilities can be enhanced by public policy, but also, on the other side, the direction of public policy can be influenced by the effective use of participatory capabilities by the Public. The two-way relationship is central to the analysis presented here.

P 18

Sen, Amartya (1999) Development as freedom, Anchor Books, New York.

00:56:57 LAURA GIOVINAZZI: Hello all,, I also have a question, thank you!

00:59:09 Jose Miguel Salazar: Indeed, Simon

01:03:37 Gavin Moodie: Lovely painting in your background Diana!

01:04:23 Rosalyn Eder: One of the main reasons why HCT become hegemonic is because its simple and gives (false) hopes. Is there an alternative Theory that can replace HCT, particularly as regards education in relation to national (economic) development?

01:06:16 Sophie Reading: But both knowledge and skills can be seen as sitting in isolation and don't help students learn how to translate their knowledge and skills, the impact of the situation / labour market and how to navigate this and the structural inequalities within it. That is where identity and graduate capitals is much richer and more nuanced to enable students to learn how to navigate and negotiate the labour market.

01:07:27 Sophie Reading: Great point, Leesa. This article talks about the decoupling of the labour market from HE at a time when the onus is being put on HE and the individual to address the gap: Tomlinson, M. (2012), "Graduate employability: a review of conceptual and empirical themes", Higher Education Policy, Vol. 25 No. 4, pp. 407-431.

01:08:34 CGHE Webinars: Thank you for joining us today. A recording of this session will be on the CGHE site tomorrow morning: <https://www.researchcghe.org/events/cghe-seminar/cghe-series-on-the-critical-economics-of-higher-education-webinar-1-challenging-the-skills-fetish/>

01:09:31 Diana Laurillard: @ Leesa But graduates cannot choose the employment or occupation they go into - history does not take you into a vocational field but does develop extremely valuable skills and ways of thinking - that become transferable to many occupations.

01:10:10 CGHE Webinars: Our next webinar, the second in this series on The Critical Economics of Higher Education, is 'Regulating the teacher: is there any alternative to regulation?', and will be on Tuesday. You can register here: <https://www.researchcghe.org/events/cghe-seminar/cghe-series-on-the-critical-economics-of-higher-education-webinar-2-regulating-the-teacher-is-there-any-alternative-to-regulation/>

01:11:51 CGHE Webinars: You can also register for our Annual Conference on 24-25 May 2022 here: <https://www.cgheconference2022.com/>

01:12:15 Diana Laurillard: @ Gavin - but employers only develop the person in relation to what is good for them. Wouldn't it be better if universities took on MORE of the lifelong learning of their alumni by offering professional development - which would be both broader and deeper?

01:12:24 Monika Jaiswal-Oliver: Education is not only knowledge but helps develop or learn skills but it helps in bringing innovation if it was not for higher education innovation would be slow and the human capital will be impacted. Where does innovation come into the picture to meet the new competency

01:12:33 Trif Victorița: Thank you!

01:15:33 Gavin Moodie: @Diana Sure, universities should support graduates' lifelong learning more. But as you observe, that would be broad professional develop, not developing specific job skills. I suggest it is better for both education and work to leave the development of specific work skills to work.

01:15:39 CRISTINA DE CARVALHO: Congratulations, professors Leesa and Gavin! It was a wonderful first webinar related to series on the Critical Economics of Higher Education. Greeting from Brazil.

01:16:06 Pilar Valenzuela: I have to go, thank you very much for the presentation and the discussion. Greetings from Chile!

01:17:39 Glen Chatelier: Professors Leesa and Gavin, our thanks for a thought provoking and stimulating presentation. Deep respects

01:18:41 Marta Kozłowska: Excellent analysis - thank you. Clearly there are competing paradigms here: education for human development (with student agentic involvement & self-formation within HE) or individuals reduced to skills and ultimately homo sapiens commodified? Luckily there are some positive initiatives also in the Anglophone HE world showing some alternatives...

01:19:27 Diana Laurillard: @Gavin - yes I completely agree that we should not be developing specific skills for particular occupations. It would not be feasible. I didn't think you were arguing that we were being asked to develop those, so I'm sorry I didn't understand that, but I don't think that is what we're being asked to do.

01:20:24 Gavin Moodie: @Diana Yes, we have found from our work in Australia and Canada that except for the regulated occupations, graduates of vocational and professional programs do not proceed to the occupation for which they have ostensibly been prepared. So we argue against tying post secondary education tightly to specific occupation. We argue for education in a field or vocational stream.

01:23:00 Gavin Moodie: @Diana I understand that the micro credentials policy is seeking to get universities and colleges to develop specific job skills.

01:25:24 Rosalyn Eder: @Gavin - unfortunately for many countries in the Global South, vocational education doesn't have the same status as university education. It would take generations and a lot of cultural work for this perception to take.

01:25:38 Rosalyn Eder: i mean to change

01:27:06 Diana Laurillard: @Leesa - the development of the skill has to begin with its development in relation to some area of knowledge, absolutely, but is it doomed to relate only to that - can't we reuse that skill and further develop it a different context. Can a history student only go on to be a historian?

01:27:21 Solomon ZEWOLDE: Cultural capital and habitus are only meaningful in a specific field. Capital and habitus are valued differently in different fields!

01:27:39 Gavin Moodie: @Monika We argue that innovation emerges from people being able to think the unthinkable, for which education in a broad field rather than a specific skill is desirable.

01:27:41 Timothy Hampson: Thanks again for such an interesting talk. Can't wait to dive into the paper.

01:27:44 Rupert Waldron: thank you all!

01:27:58 Michelle Lynch: Thank you very much Dr. Wheelahan. Much appreciated. Thank you to Dr. Moodie, Dr. Marginson, and CGHE for putting this series on.

01:28:49 Monika Jaiswal-Oliver: Thank you Gavin

01:28:50 Diana Laurillard: Many thanks