Embedding Graduate Employability Skills

**Introduction**

Welcome to this screencast on embedding Employability Skills. My name is Richard Lynch. I am hoping that you have looked at the earlier screencast "Introducing 'graduateness' in D&S" a discussion of the graduate employability skills: self-directed learning, ICT, numeracy, communication, analytical abilities and problem solving.

This screencast focuses on how you might embed these skills in the curriculum in your modules, your courses and your programmes.

**Process**

The way in which you can embed the different skills is a process; a process which I'm going to make suggestions about.

The way you start a process may be by:

- Thinking about a skill. For example, problem solving or Information and Communication Technology.

- Thinking about the students that you are teaching. So, for example, you may recognise that analytical abilities or communication skills need to be developed with the particular students you are considering.

- Thinking about a particular curriculum space. So, for example, PDP or career management or work related learning is the space within your course or programme or curriculum and you are looking at the way of bringing out employability skills (which might already be implicit in what students are doing).

This process talks about:

1. mapping a skill,
2. thinking about a student activity and
3. considering assessment, which is regarded as a key driver for student learning.

**Mapping a Skill**

In terms of mapping a skill it might simply be recognising where there are gaps in the skills that students are practising in different modules or in a particular module. It may be about 'well, which skill do I want to consider, in which context?'

A skill is no more than a situated practice; it's about things that people do in professional contexts, in disciplinary contexts or beyond the academic discipline within the wider field. For example, within Criminology, you have the academic discipline and then you have the broader field of Crime and Justice; you have academic
understandings of the construction industry, in the knowledge industry and in academia and you have the practice of construction in the wider field in the world.

A skill needs to be situated within a context. Employability is about considering the real world beyond the University, the context for different skills.

- Which skill are you considering?
- What context are you considering it in?

Using problem solving as an example: Are you thinking about problem solving in an academic disciplinary context? What are the problems the discipline is facing? Are you trying to resolve a knowledge base? How have previous problems been solved? What are the professional problems practitioners face? What are the issues and what are the problems in the wider field?

Graduate employability skills could be situated in any of those problem solving contexts.

**Student Activity**

If you take a skill or a context in which you want students to learn about problem solving, then you need to think about how they are going to learn about it. What activities do you want them to be doing to learn about it? That is a judgement that only the person involved in the course, the module or the programme can make.

You may want to put the activity in a particular module that is related to employability; for example in work-related modules or in PDP modules where students are reflecting. In this type of module they are thinking about and analysing what they have been doing, perhaps in a class activity or as part of an assessment activity.

**Student Assessment**

It is the assessment activity which is crucial. How are students going to demonstrate their problem solving abilities? You may be asking them to write an essay or report, but that doesn't mean that problem solving isn't a part of that. You may be asking them to write an essay or a dissertation or do a project; it might be that problem solving is a part of that process. So how are you going to draw problem solving out?

In terms of student assessment being important for learning, I wonder if you have considered Ipsative Assessment? This is where people think about their own activities, reflect on them and make judgements upon how they are doing. For example, problem solving – the student reflects back on their problem solving skills in general and how they have solved the problem on this occasion. What they are doing is making a judgement about problem solving now and problem solving previously.
Ipsative Assessment might be a way that students could work on particular skills. As they progress through the module/course/programme they could record their different levels of performance in a skill, such as problem solving or Information and Communication Technology. At each stage they are recording and measuring their own progress.

That is one aspect of what a student activity for assessment might be. There would, of course, be informative activities and some summative assessments and that would be part of the broader process of learning on module.

**Summary**

These are just some ideas to get you thinking about how employability skills might be drawn out in your curriculum and how they might be developed. I would be pleased to receive feedback, please contact Richard Lynch at r.lynch@shu.ac.uk

Thank you very much.