

## **New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education**

**Title:** *Fostering employability in adult and higher education: An international perspective*. Issue 163

### **Editor's note**

*Employability*, the subjective perception of the individual of his/her ability to obtain, keep a job or obtain a new one, has set itself as a performance indicator for higher education at the end of the last century. In particular, (a) the relevance of the relationships and connections between education and the labor market; and (b) the need to develop job-oriented skills in order to accompany individual transformation through rational, emotional, and learning dimensions in a lifelong perspective. In addition, the changes in cultural and economic contexts and globalization have accelerated the interest in professionalism, leading to employability. From an international perspective, the issue of employability is connected with political and educational strategies that institutions enact to foster the development of professional and continuous learning, as well, along with the modification of knowledge, teaching strategies, and curricula. Contributions collected in this issue propose interpretative frameworks, case studies and teaching practices centered on the category of *employability*, through which to reflect on the functions of higher education, and to support the educational and professional development of adults. Employability is a category for understanding the need of linking education and the labor market. Adult education and higher education are called upon to respond to the need of developing new competences to facilitate successful transitions between university and the labor world.

As co-editors of this volume, we take on the issue of setting the stage for discussions by authoring and co-authoring the first three articles. The three main directions for employability are: as a category for fostering occupation, as a factor for designing teaching and learning practices and as a driver for promoting and integrating soft skills in higher education programs.

In the first article **Vanna Boffo** provides an overview of the issue and of the meaning of employability, dealing with the transition process and how to support students in looking for employment. In addition, she illustrates some perspectives for educational action through the presentation of career service activities aimed at the development of transversal skills. She also highlights the implications for organizations when they foster employability services.

The second article authored by **Monica Fedeli** and **Tullio Vardanega** introduces the concept of employability and teaching, describing a capstone project which represents the crowning experience for a field of study where students integrate fundamental concepts of the discipline and spend time in a work context. Discussed are three main factors that guide the development of a successful capstone project: employability, active learning, and responsibility in teaching. The authors connect the capstone project to all these factors and reflect on the implication for teaching, learning, and employability.

The third article is co-authored by **Claudio Melacarne** and **Aliki Nicolaidis** who deal with the concept of capability and soft skills and how these competencies are becoming central for instructors and educators in formal and informal adult education settings. They start questioning how higher education classrooms can become a space to promote employability and related social skills. Two teaching methods are presented in order to foster employability in class: collaborative development and action inquiry.

The next three articles feature discussions of employability in higher education dealing with some organizational implications. In article four **Loretta Fabbri** and **Alessandra Romano** discuss how to develop paths, organizational devices and system interventions in a Teaching and Learning Center for training students and faculty to foster soft skills and employability. These actions promote also teaching innovation dealing with organizational development and curriculum development. Connected to this, **Laura L. Bierema**, in article five discusses a method called the T-Shaped Professional and advances it as an organizing rubric for curriculum development in higher education as a strategy to enhance employability. Pedagogical implications are outlined for faculty and academic programs, including strategies for developing T-shaped professionals. In article six **Velerie A. Delleville** defines and illustrates how the sustainable cycle of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) benefits for both employees and employers in the U.S. workforce. First, the adult student and employer benefits of prior learning assessment in the U.S. are discussed along with the relationships between types of PLA, retention rates, and graduation rates.

Articles seven, eight and nine deal with different teaching strategies and practices used in higher education to foster employability. **Stacey Robbins** and **Chad Hoggan** present collaborative and team-based learning to improve students' employability. According to their discussion employability is becoming an increasingly important metric for assessing the quality of higher education. In article eight, **Daniela Frison** and **Concetta Tino** focus on work-related learning in higher education. They feature the main factors of work-related assignments designed for students in partnership with the organizations. Also emphasized is the dialogue between business and higher education which is based on collaboration among all actors involved in the process. Article eight, authored by **Carlo Terzaroli** illustrates the relationship between employability and entrepreneurship. He questions how to develop entrepreneurial skills linked to innovation. From this perspective some interventions and strategies carried out by the career service of the University of Florence are presented.

The last two articles present the concept of employability in doctoral programs, **Critina De Vecchi** who authored article ten presents two projects offering concrete resources to promote PhD students' employability. These resources see the students as co-researchers, enabling them to develop and implement employability skills in a safe context and transferring them in the work-place. In the last article **Brittany Davis, Monica Fedeli and Joellen Coryell** discuss how employability has become an important measure of success of many doctoral programs. They describe an international experience in which Italian and American students shared their research focused on increasing their employability in a global world. The comparative study aims to highlight differences and similarities of the doctoral programs in the two countries: Italy and U.S.

Our hope is that readers of this volume will gain a greater appreciation of the challenges and benefits associated with the practices of fostering employability at different levels in higher education, recognizing also the complexity of merging together different perspectives and working with authors coming from an international context.

A great number of people worked with us on this volume. We thank all the authors for their contributions and the editors of the book series Jovita M. Ross-Gordon, and Joellen E. Coryell for trusting us and for their capability of working in international settings.

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