

Preparing students for the graduate labour market: from 'unfreezing' to 'action'

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Abstract

In an increasingly competitive labour market students need to be well prepared for the recruitment and selection processes adopted by graduate employers. Yet, despite students stating that their main reason for going into higher education is to obtain a 'good' job, they often fail to engage in activities that will enhance their ability to compete effectively in the graduate labour market. This paper is based on research (including action research) undertaken over several years in a post-1992 university in England. The research focused on how we can encourage students to improve their ability to compete in the graduate labour market - for example, by adopting more comprehensive/rational approaches to career decision-making and by participating in extra-curricular activities.

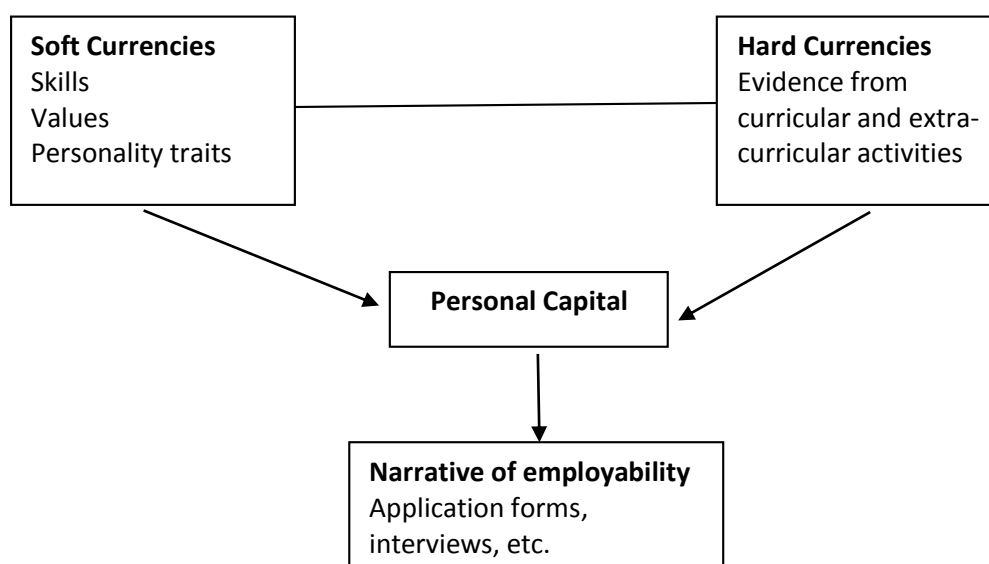
The research found that the students' values (e.g. a present time orientation, a reliance on intuition, conformity to peer norms, an external locus of control, risk aversity and a 'purist' orientation) often act as barriers to engaging in activities that would improve their ability to compete in the graduate labour market. This paper describes how the students have been encouraged to critically evaluate (and change) their values, and therefore their behaviour, through a series of inter-related 'transformative' pedagogic interventions. These interventions involved 'unfreezing' the students' existing values; providing support to help students change their behaviour; and reinforcement strategies to ensure that changes in the students values are maintained and converted into actions. The paper concludes by discussing some of the problems involved in implementing these transformative pedagogies.

Introduction

The graduate labour market has become increasingly competitive as the number of students leaving colleges and universities with higher education qualifications, in both the UK and overseas, has risen and the number of professional and managerial jobs has not kept pace with this growth (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Brown et al., 2011; Roulin and Bangerter, 2013). In the UK this has led to an increase in the proportion of graduates who are not in 'graduate jobs', even several years after leaving college or university (Dolton and Vignoles, 2000; Elias and Purcell, 2003; Mosca and Wright, 2011). For example, according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in 2013, 34 per cent of graduates were still in non-graduate jobs five years after they graduated, compared to 29 per cent in 2001 (ONS, 2013, Figure 8, p. 14). It is also the case that the rewards (both pecuniary and non-pecuniary) for those in graduate-level jobs are becoming more unevenly distributed (Allen et al., 2013).

The evidence suggests (see for example Blasko et al., 2002; Chia, 2005; Tchibozo, 2007; Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011; CBI/EDI, 2011) that in order to be able compete effectively 'within a hierarchy of job seekers' (Morrison, 2013, p. 5) students need to package what Brown and Hesketh (2004, p. 34) refer to as 'personal capital' in a way that is attractive to employers. As can be seen from Figure 1 (below) personal capital comprises of 'soft currencies' and 'hard currencies'. This can be used by students to construct a 'narrative of [their] employability' so that they can sell themselves to potential employers (Brown and Hesketh, 2004, p. 36).

Figure 1 Conceptualising the construction of personal capital



Source: Adapted from Brown and Hesketh (2004)

Soft currencies are the skills, values and personality traits that graduate employers are seeking. These may, for example, consist of skills such as decision-making, leadership and the ability to work in teams; and values and personality traits such as adaptability, enthusiasm and confidence (see IoD, 2007; Maher and Graves, 2008; Redmond, 2010; CBI/EDI, 2011). Hard currencies represent the evidence that students can use to demonstrate they possess the attributes that employers are looking for. Students may, for example, be able to show that they have these skills and other attributes through participation in curricular and extra-curricular activities (ECAs).

This paper discusses how we can help students to not only be better prepared to compete in the graduate labour market, but also to set them on a career path that is compatible with their skills, personality traits, values and aspirations. The paper is based on the premise that encouraging students to think carefully about the sort of career they wish to pursue, and how they can develop the type of personal capital that will maximise their chances of being able to obtain a job that is consistent with their chosen career, is the best way to achieve this. The paper discusses an approach to developing the employability of students that is different in emphasis to that often adopted in higher education institutions (HEIs). This is because, rather than focusing on providing information and advice to students on how they should prepare for the recruitment and selection process, the emphasis is on changing the values that underpin the students' current behaviour. This approach is adopted because a person's values (i.e. their objectives, perceptions and attitudes) are seen as central in determining the way they act (Rokeach, 1973; Bardi & Goodwin, 2011).

The paper begins by outlining the research (methodology and key findings) that informed the approach to preparing students for the graduate labour market advocated in this paper. It then provides details of the type of 'transformative pedagogies' (see Lewin, 1999; Aronson, 1999; Bardi and Goodwin, 2011) that can be used to help students critically evaluate their values and therefore be better prepared for the graduate labour market. The paper concludes by discussing some of the challenges involved in implementing the ideas presented in this paper.

Research methodology and key findings

Initial survey and interviews

This paper is based on research undertaken over a number of years. The starting point was a survey of final year students from a cross-section of degree programmes (Business and Management, Computing, Geography, History, Law, Marketing, Media and Sport) at Edge Hill University in 2007. The survey resulted in 165 useable questionnaires and from these 30 students (from working class backgrounds) were selected for follow-up interviews. The results of this study were published in a report for the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) called 'Working Class Students and the Career Decision-making Process: a qualitative study' (Greenbank and Hepworth, 2008a) and in a number of journal articles (see Greenbank and Hepworth, 2008b, Greenbank, 2009a, 2009b).

This research found that students believed that gaining a 'good degree' – what Pitcher and Purcell (1998) refer to as 'the essential 2:1' - was the key to obtaining a graduate job. The students were often unaware of the value graduate employers placed on ECAs, particularly unpaid ECAs such as volunteering and sporting and cultural activities. Therefore, the vast majority of students failed to exploit opportunities to develop their personal capital. The study also found that rather than adopting rational/comprehensive approaches to decision-making (what Kahneman (2011) refers to as a 'System 2 thinking'), most of the students relied on their intuition (what Kahneman (2011) refers to as a 'System 1 thinking') to make career decisions. In fact, the students were often overconfident about their ability to make effective decisions based on their System 1 thinking. For example, one student commented on how he trusted his System 1 thinking: 'I think intuition is very valuable and I think it's very accurate as well a lot of the time'; whilst another student said, 'I can't think of where I have used my intuition and it hasn't worked'.

Although this study focused on working class students, there were reservations about the extent to which the findings would only apply to students from such backgrounds (a view supported by research carried out at a later date). There were also concerns about the efficacy of targeting so-called 'disadvantaged' students, such as the working class. As a result, the study concluded that *all* first-year undergraduates should be encouraged to critically evaluate the way they intend to approach career decision-making and the transition from education to employment.

Action research

It was decided to implement the conclusions from the survey and interviews using an action research approach. The action research project began in the academic year 2007/08 (see Greenbank, 2010) and

continued until the academic year 2011/12. The research was undertaken with full-time undergraduates in the Business School at Edge Hill University and this time included both working class and middle class students. This action research project involved introducing pedagogic interventions which aimed to 'unfreeze' the students' existing values and provide them with different perspectives on how they might prepare for the graduate labour market so that they were more likely to adopt a System 2 approach to career decision-making and engage in activities that develop their personal capital.

Each cycle of this action research project was evaluated using questionnaires, observations and class discussions. Whilst the action research project ended in the academic year 2011/12, the author of this paper has continued to work with students in the Business School and other departments at Edge Hill University, to help students develop their career decision-making skills and personal capital.

Longitudinal study

In the early stages of the action research project (the academic year 2008/09), 34 students were interviewed during their first year of study. Twenty-one of these students were then re-interviewed in their final year (just before they graduated in 2011) so that we could see how the students had approached preparing for the graduate labour market over the course of their degree programme. These interviews, again, found that the students (from both middle class as well as working class backgrounds) often failed to develop their personal capital by participating in relevant ECAs.

As in the initial study (Greenbank and Hepworth, 2008a), the students also tended to rely on more intuitive (System 1) forms of decision-making and therefore did not carry out in-depth research into different career options. This meant that when they came to apply for jobs in their final year of study many of the students had little, or no, idea of the career path they wanted to follow. As a result, some students did not apply for any jobs during their final year of study, whilst others admitted that they sent off applications with very little thought given to the type of job they were applying for. This is exemplified by these comments from students:

I just saw the deadlines, panicked and put a couple of applications in. It was just a case of trying to get SOMEWHERE (*capital letters indicates that the students were emphasising a word*).

I just sent some jobs off to meet the January deadline. You just send them off, it makes you feel better even though they may not be the best.

During their first-year interviews these students had indicated their intention to be well prepared for the graduate labour market by the time they reached their final year of study. Yet, despite the interventions, the students had invariably failed to transfer their intentions into actions. This demonstrated the need to continually reinforce the ideas initially introduced to students during the first-year of their degree studies.

Influencing student approaches to preparing for the graduate labour market: key findings

The questionnaires, class discussions and interviews indicated that the students’ values influenced the way they prepared (or failed to prepare) for the graduate labour market. Kurt Lewin discussed how such values - he referred to them as ‘forces’ - can act as either barriers or facilitators of change (Lewin, 1999). Burnes and Cooke (2012) contend that this type of analysis enabled Lewin to obtain a detailed understanding of the forces influencing behaviour. According to Lewin change can be successfully introduced by influencing the forces that are either inhibiting or facilitating the required change (Burnes and Cooke, 2012).

In Figure 2 (below) the values identified by this research as acting as barriers or facilitators to change are presented in the form of continuums, with those to the left representing barriers to students preparing adequately for the graduate labour market; whilst those to the right, represent values that are seen as facilitating the ability of students to compete successfully in the graduate labour.

Figure 2 Values influencing student approaches to preparing for the graduate labour market

Barriers	Facilitators
Present orientation	Future orientation
System 1 thinking	System 2 thinking
Dependency	Independence
Conformity to ‘norms’	Autonomy
External locus of control	Internal locus of control
Risk aversity	(Calculated) risk taking
‘Purist’ orientation	‘Player’ orientation

The interventions (which will be discussed in the next section) sought to move students to the right of the continuum so that their values facilitated the development of personal capital and their ability to make more rational career decisions. To summarise, the students are encouraged to be:

Future orientated: The students tended to adopt a present, rather than a future, time orientation. This often manifested itself in a concern to maintain a particular 'student life-style', which meant that whilst students were concerned with obtaining 'high' or at least 'satisfactory' grades, they were also eager to sustain an active social life and a consumer life-style. As a result, the majority of students were in part-time employment in order to earn money to fund this life-style. This reduced the amount of time available to engage in other activities, e.g. researching different career options and engaging in non-paid ECAs. The students also invariably adopted a 'serial approach' to task completion, which involved prioritising tasks and then completing one task at a time (see Greenbank, 2008). This inevitably meant that tasks associated with a future temporal frame (e.g. life after university) were deprioritised and continually pushed back as more pressing concerns, such as the next assignment, were tackled.

System 2 thinkers: The students showed a preference for using informally absorbed information from people they know (what Ball and Vincent (1998) refer to as 'hot information') and 'System 1' thinking. They preferred this to System 2 thinking - which depends on more rational and comprehensive approaches - using information obtained from research; and by consulting experts, such as careers advisers. In part, this reliance on intuition and hot information arose because of the pressure of time. However, as discussed above, it also arises from a belief in the efficacy of System 1 thinking.

Independent: The students often exhibited a tendency to be dependent on others supplying them with information about careers. For example, some of the students said they were waiting for the university's careers service to come in and provide them with ideas about the type of careers they might pursue. Whilst students should take account of what other people tell them, they should also be encouraged to take responsibility for obtaining information themselves.

Autonomous: The students were heavily influenced by the values and behaviour of their peers. This meant that the students were motivated to remain (as far as possible) within the parameters of what became 'normative behaviour'. For example, the students often justified their failure to engage in ECAs by stating that their peers were not participating in such activities. Archer (2007) differentiates

between 'communicative reflexives' who reflect on the choices they make, but need their decisions to be endorsed by others; and 'autonomous reflexives' who may consult other people, but do not need their decisions to be approved by others (see Greenbank, 2014 for a summary). It is argued that students would benefit from operating more like autonomous reflexives.

Agentic and have an 'internal locus of control': The students often exhibited an external, rather than an internal, locus of control (see Rotter, 1990). This meant they believed they had little control over what happened to them because they felt their futures was determined by fate. In contrast, students with an internal locus of control believe they have control (i.e. agency) over their future and will act in a way that they feel will secure desirable outcomes. Whilst not denying the existence of structural factors that may disadvantage some students (Wilton, 2011), it is argued that all students should still be encouraged to believe they have agency and a degree of control over their future.

Calculated risk takers: When making decisions the students often anticipated the potential for regret. For example, some students did not want to go on a year-long work placement, because it meant giving up their part-time jobs; and they feared being unable to obtain another part-time job when they returned from their placement. Such attitudes make the students risk averse. It is not being argued that students need to become risk takers, but that they should be less risk averse and more willing to take (calculated) risks that take into account the anticipated costs and benefits of their actions. In doing this, the students need to be more future orientated and pay particular attention to the longer-term benefits of their actions (Greenbank, 2015).

'Player' orientated: 'Players' are students who engage in activities with the objective of developing their personal capital in order to enhance their employability (see Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Brown et al., 2011). Therefore, 'players' would participate in particular ECAs, not because they were interested in them, but because they thought it would enhance their personal capital. For example, students with a player orientation might engage in charity work because they think it would look good when they apply for jobs. In contrast, 'purists' would only engage in ECAs they were interested in and had an affinity with. 'Purists' would hope that being true to themselves would be sufficient to secure a graduate job. It is, however, argued that in order to be able compete in the graduate labour market students need to behave more like 'players'.

Interventions: the ‘Three-step Model’

It is argued by Lewin (1999)¹ that for change to occur it is necessary to go through a three-stage process that involves:

1. Encouraging people to ‘*unfreeze*’ their current values (i.e. be willing to seriously consider changing their existing values and therefore their behaviour).
2. Ensuring individuals have sufficient information and understanding to enable them to make appropriate *changes* to their behaviour.
3. Creating the conditions that ‘*freeze*’ appropriate behaviour into sustained change.

In order to successfully implement this ‘three-step model’, particular (transformative) approaches to learning need to be adopted. Such approaches involve the following:

Activity-based learning: This is where students engage in activities (such as practical exercises, reading and discussions), rather than passive approaches (such as listening to lectures). Active approaches foster autonomy and independence and are seen as more effective in encouraging students to engage in critical thinking, especially for less motivated students (Biggs and Tang, 2011). It is essential that students engage in this type of thinking if they are to effectively evaluate the values underpinning their attitude to preparing for the graduate labour market. This does not mean there is no place for lectures, particularly if they incorporate active approaches within them. In addition, ‘guest speakers’ - such as graduate employers and ex-students (who can also be seen as useful role models) - often have a high level of credibility, which means students are willing to listen to them (Aronson, 1999; Bowman et al., 2005).

Group work: This benefits the unfreezing process because it involves sharing knowledge, perspectives and ideas through discussion; which in turn facilitates understanding and critical thinking (Falchikov, 2001; Boud, 2001; Bourner et al., 2001; Brock, 2010; Howie and Bagnall, 2013). It is also argued that when individuals are in a group where people are changing their values and behaviour they are more likely to change theirs. According to Lewin (1999) one of the problems with lectures is that when a person is listening to them they remain psychologically isolated. In contrast, when an individual is in a group they feel pressure to conform to the normative behaviour of the group (Lewin, 1999; Jaques, 2000; Beach and Connolly, 2005). As Lewin (1999) states this occurs because of the ‘unwillingness of

the individual to depart too far from group standards' (Lewin, 1999, p. 273). Lewin (1999) goes on to contend that this group effect even works when groups are not permanent and only meet intermittently.

Self-persuasion: The evidence suggests that methods of direct persuasion, where for example, a presenter provides arguments aimed at encouraging their listeners to change, are often less effective than methods of 'self-persuasion', where individuals draw their own conclusions (Aronson, 1999). Self-persuasion often involves the type of activity-based and group approaches discussed above because it requires students to work together to draw conclusions for themselves. Methods of self-persuasion have been found to have a more powerful and long-lasting effect than direct persuasion (Aronson, 1999; Bardi and Goodwin, 2011). According to Aronson (1999) this is because people tend to be naturally resistant to persuasion by others, however expert or trustworthy they appear to be.

This paper will now consider each of the stages in the 'three-step model', and how they can be implemented (using the transformative approaches to learning discussed above), to help students change their values and behaviour so that they are better prepared for the graduate labour market

1. Unfreezing

Students need to be willing to critically evaluate the values that underpin their attitude to preparing for the graduate labour market. According to a number of writers (e.g. Festlinger, 1957; Schein, 1987; Lewin, 1999; Aronson, 1999; Burnes, 2004; Cooper, 2007) individuals can be encouraged to do this if they become dissatisfied with the way they currently operate. Therefore, Schein (1987) discusses the need to create 'disequilibria'; Festlinger (1957) 'cognitive dissonance'; and Lewin (1999) 'emotional stir-up', as antecedents to persuading individuals to consider changing the way they will behave in the future.

The research carried out by the author of this paper led to the development of the following strategy for unfreezing the students' values:

Awareness of the nature of the graduate labour market: Students are made aware of the nature of the graduate labour market: its competitiveness; the sophisticated recruitment and selection methods used by employers; and the implications for students who fail to compete effectively (for example unemployment, or more commonly, underemployment). As discussed above, the approach can involve lectures, but activity-based learning involving group work is likely to be more effective. For

example, students can be split into different groups and tasked with finding out what employers in different sectors (including the small business sector)² are looking for in graduates - and the methods of recruitment and selection they are utilising.

Critical reflection on the way they have made decisions in the past: Research by Maio and Olson (1998) found that an individual's values are often based on 'truisms' which have not been thought about in any depth. They argue that asking people to provide a rationale for these truisms encourages them to think about them in depth and makes them more likely to be willing to consider changing their values. Therefore, working in small groups, students are asked to discuss with each other the decisions they have made in the past, and the rationale for the approach they adopted. This session also involves discussing the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to decision-making. Students are also helped to identify decision-making traits that might adversely affect the efficacy of their decision-making, e.g. satisficing behaviour, the confirmation trap, escalation of commitment and over-confidence (see Kahneman, 2011; Bazerman and Moore, 2013; Greenbank, 2014).

Critical evaluation of a series of case studies: The students again work in small groups analysing case studies illustrating the different ways students can prepare for the graduate labour market. In order to encourage students to adopt a rigorous approach to the analysis of these cases a process known as 'analogical encoding', which requires students to identify similarities and differences between a number of cases, is used (see Loewenstein et al., 2003; Gentner et al., 2003). Analogical encoding encourages students to think about preparing for the labour market in more depth. As Bardi and Goodwin (2011) argue a failure to consider issues in depth often means values remain unchallenged 'rendering [existing] values stable by default' (p. 273). Studies also show that analogical encoding improves knowledge acquisition (Williams et al. 2007) and the subsequent recall of this knowledge (Gentner et al. 2003). It also promotes 'deep learning' and therefore facilitates understanding, the ability to synthesise information from different sources and critical thinking (Schwartz and Bransford 1998).

Consideration of their 'future possible selves': One way of helping students to unfreeze is to encourage them to think and write about their 'future possible-selves'. Leondari (2007) defines future possible-selves as representing, '[T]hose selves that a person could become, would like to become, or is afraid of becoming ... They encompass both hoped-for and feared images of the self' (p. 8). For students, it could be the negative image of being unemployed or in a job they dislike; and/or the positive image

of obtaining a well-paid job they enjoy. Both of these can provide the motivation they need to change their values.

2. Change

The unfreezing process discussed above also involves providing information to students on how they can modify their behaviour to improve their chances of success in the graduate labour market. For instance, the case studies provide examples of the way different students have approached career decision-making and prepared for the graduate labour market. There is also a place for providing students with the opportunity to practice and develop the type of skills they need to successfully navigate the recruitment and selection process. However, students should also be encouraged to take responsibility for developing such skills themselves (Cole and Tibby, 2013), particularly as we wish to encourage independence and autonomy (see Figure 2).

There is always the possibility that students may still fail to engage in behaviour that is conducive to success in the graduate labour market, possibly because they have misunderstood something, or because they have been given misinformation from somebody within their network of peers, relatives or other contacts. For example, even though parents may lack an understanding of the graduate labour market, they often represent a key source of advice (Greenbank, 2011). It is therefore important that universities seek to influence students in a way that is persuasive. The application of the type of transformative pedagogies discussed above, and the monitoring of the students' plans (discussed below), should help.

Universities should encourage students to make career decisions and to set out in action plans how they are going to develop their personal capital and the skills they will need for the graduate recruitment and selection process. As Robinson and Aronica (2013) state, 'You can't plan the whole of your life's journey and you don't need to. What you do need to plan are the next steps' (p. 214). Research by Gabriele Oettingen and her colleagues found that imagining a positive image of the future fosters motivation, but this should be supplemented by a consideration of the potential negative aspects of this ideal future scenario – a process referred to as 'mental contrasting' (see for example Oettingen and Mayer, 2002; Oettingen and Gollwitzer, 2002,). The research found that the process of considering positive and negative aspects of a decision helps individuals to make a rational decision about whether their future aspirations are achievable or not. It also found that the identification of potential barriers to achieving aspirations helps people to plan how they are going to achieve (in this case their career) objectives.

The evidence suggests that these plans need monitoring to ensure they are implemented (Greenbank, 2015). Personal Development Planning (PDP), which involves students recording and reflecting on their achievements, can help in this process (Ward and Watts, 2009). There is also a role for personal tutors, both through PDP or independent of PDP. For example, personal tutors can take an interest in how students are progressing in terms of deciding on their career paths and developing their personal capital and skills to navigate the recruitment and selection process (see Greenbank, 2015, Appendix 1 'Guidelines for Personal Tutors: helping students to develop their employability').

Universities can also organise and promote opportunities for students to develop their personal capital through part-time work, work placements, volunteering and cultural and sporting activities. This is something that many universities, including Edge Hill, are already extensively involved in. It should, however, be recognised that if students take the initiative and arrange ECAs for themselves this is looked upon positively by graduate employers (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2009).

3. Freezing

Once the students have shifted their values to the right of Figure 2, and have changed their behaviour, there is a need to ensure this change is sustained. The process of encouraging students to reflect on their progress, which is discussed above, will help to 'freeze' these changes so that they become a permanent feature of their behaviour. The students should also be encouraged to re-evaluate and develop their ideas about their future possible-selves. According to Segal et al (2001) and Rossiter (2007), if a person has a well-developed image of a future they can aspire to (which is achieved by continually thinking about their future selves) this can be highly motivational.

Finally, if a large number of a student's peers are engaged in activities to enhance their employability, it is envisaged that this will motivate students to maintain changes to their behaviour. The research underpinning this paper found that students were often failing to engage in ECAs because their peers were not participating in such activities (Greenbank, 2015). As one student said: 'You've got all the other students and I can't think of ONE who has done any charity work or any volunteering activities'. The evidence suggests (see Lewin, 1999; Jaques, 2000; Beach and Connolly, 2005) that the opposite also applies, which means that if a student's peers are engaged in ECAs and other activities to enhance their employability, then other students are more likely to engage in similar types of behaviour.

Discussion and concluding remarks

The way the three-stage process (unfreezing, change and freezing) advocated by Kurt Lewin is applied in this paper is underpinned by the use of transformative pedagogies (i.e. activity-based learning, group work and a focus on self-persuasion rather than direct-persuasion). The students would also benefit from these transformative pedagogies being utilised elsewhere in their degree programmes. There is also a need for students to engage in critical reflection and action planning throughout their time in higher education. Again, the promotion of critical thinking should be something that is integral to programmes of study in higher education.

The unfreezing stage is crucial because without persuading students to be open to new ideas many of them would not even consider changing the way they would prepare for the transition from education to employment. This is why the unfreezing stage of Lewin's model is given so much attention in this paper. The research also identified the importance of reinforcing any changes in the values and behaviour of students that has occurred so that these changes become permanent. As such, this aspect of Lewin's three-stage process is also given a good deal of attention.

This paper demonstrates that the implementation of Lewin's three-stage model involves a substantial and sustained interconnected set of interventions. This is illustrated in Table 1 (below) where the range of interrelated interventions across a three year degree can be clearly seen.

Table 1 An example of the type of interventions that might be implemented over the three years of an undergraduate degree programme

Year 1 & summer	Year 2 & summer	By the end of summer, just before Year 3	Year 3
Unfreezing - Awareness of the nature of graduate labour market - Critical reflection on decision-making - Case studies/ analogical encoding - Identifying future possible-selves Developing career objectives Developing and evidencing personal capital	Reflecting on progress Continuing to develop and evidence personal capital Revisiting future possible-selves Refining career objectives Developing skills for the recruitment and selection process	Formulate clear career objectives Evidence of personal capital fully articulated Develop strategy for applying for jobs	Apply for jobs Reflect on progress and if necessary take action to overcome setbacks

It should be noted that the model of interventions outlined in Table 1 recognises that career objectives may take time to formulate. As Robinson and Aronica (2013) state, ‘Beginning the journey, and being willing to explore various pathways, can be as productive as setting out with a final destination in mind’ (p. 31). Landine (2013) also points out that deciding on a particular career path too early may stop students from engaging in a range of ECAs, and this may limit their awareness of different career options. By engaging in a range of ECAs students might also discover talents they did not know they possessed (Robinson and Aronica, 2013).

At Edge Hill University It has been difficult to implement the type of strategy illustrated in Table 1. One factor is that the author of this paper moved from the Business School (where the action research stage of the study was conducted) to the Centre for Learning and Teaching in June 2009. This made it more difficult to continue with the action research project because I was no longer in the Business School, which meant as an ‘outsider’ rather than an ‘insider’ (see Hellowell, 2006), I had less influence over issues such as the curriculum and timetabling. As a result, I have been given less time to implement the type of interventions advocated in this paper. Similarly, when I am asked to undertake sessions on employability within other departments in the university I am often allocated just a few hours, usually over one or two weeks.

My inability to provide students with the full set of interventions outlined in Table 1 means that it has been difficult to effect a significant shift in the students' values. The disinclination of departments to provide the time necessary to implement a full set of interventions often arises because of the reluctance of academics to create space in the curriculum for employability-related content. A key factor is that employability does not tend to be a subject specialism for academics. This means there is often nobody with strong views about the importance of including such content in degree and other programmes. At Edge Hill University this may change because each department has now nominated an 'employability champion' who has responsibility for taking a lead on employability in their department. If one or more of these employability champions is willing to work with me there might be an opportunity to implement a more substantial, sustained and integrated set of interventions.

There is also an issue about the objective of these interventions. The aim is to change the values of the students. Some academics feel uneasy about the ethics of doing this (for a discussion see Greenbank, 2013). The objective of changing the students' values may also be seen as overly ambitious, even fanciful. Finally, the fact that it is difficult to measure the extent to which the interventions have been successful is not helpful when there is a need to persuade academics of the benefit of such interventions (for a discussion, again see Greenbank, 2013). It can also be argued that the research on which this paper is based was undertaken in one university and much of the research was limited to undergraduates in the Business School at this university. Therefore, as well as a need to fully test the effectiveness of the approach set out in Table 1 within the Business School at Edge Hill University, there is a need to test its effectiveness in different contexts: that is, in different types of HEI and in different departments within these HEIs.

Notes

1. See also Elrod and Tippett (2002), Burnes (2004), Burnes and Cooke (2012) and Bazerman and Moore (2013) who provide useful summaries of Lewin's 'Three-step Model'.
2. Small businesses are becoming increasingly important as a sources of graduate employment (see Branine, 2008; Jensen and Higgins, 2009; Phillips and Donnelly, 2013).

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