Four ‘dirty words’ in career guidance: from common sense to good sense

Ronald G. Sultana

Received: 7 September 2021 / Accepted: 25 May 2022
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2022

Abstract
This paper focuses on commonly used terms in career guidance in order to examine the impact they can have on the way problems are conceptualised and consequently on the solutions that are envisaged. Four such terms are considered, namely ‘vulnerability’, ‘resilience’, ‘employability’, and ‘activation’. Drawing on critical social theory, this paper explores the relationship between language, thought, and action. It demonstrates the intimate relationship of the four terms to the neoliberal agenda in general and to responsibilisation in particular. The paper concludes by arguing that the career development field has a role to play in the struggle over the meaning of concepts in the public sphere, as the outcome has a bearing on the opportunities for people to flourish.

Keywords Career guidance · Responsibilisation · Social justice

Résumé
Quatre “gros mots” dans l’orientation professionnelle: du sens commun au bon sens
Cet article se concentre sur les termes couramment utilisés dans l’orientation professionnelle afin d’examiner l’impact qu’ils peuvent avoir sur la façon dont les problèmes sont conceptualisés, et par conséquent sur les solutions qui sont envisagées. Quatre de ces termes sont considérés, à savoir ‘vulnérabilité’, ‘résilience’, ‘employabilité’, et ‘activation’. S’appuyant sur la théorie sociale critique, cet article explore la relation entre le langage, la pensée et l’action. Il démontre la relation intime de ces quatre termes avec l’agenda néolibéral en général, et avec la responsabilisation en particulier. L’article conclut en affirmant que le domaine de l’évolution de carrière a un rôle à jouer dans la lutte pour la signification des concepts dans la sphère publique, car le résultat a une incidence sur les possibilités d’épanouissement des personnes.

Ronald G. Sultana
ronald.sultana@um.edu.mt

1 Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research, University of Malta, Msida, Malta
We will not go back to normal.
Normal never was.
Our pre-Corona existence was not normal.
other than we normalised greed, inequity, exhaustion..
depletion, extraction, disconnection, rage, hoarding, hate and lack.
We should not long to return to the old ‘normal’.
At present, we are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment.
One that fits all of humanity and nature.
Sonya Renee Taylor.

Introduction

The relationship between language, thought, and action

Reflecting on the poem by Sonya Renee Taylor, Enid Lee remarks: “Language is a key tool in stitching this new garment” (2020, p. 265). Language has indeed been the object of much critical deliberation, in terms of its powerful domesticating
ability to encourage us to think and view things in certain ways and its equally pow-
erful but subversive potential to help us see—and do—things differently. It was
Lacan, after all, who famously noted that “it is the world of words that creates the
world of things” (2001, p. 49). This is an arresting proposition, reminding us that
our thoughts and actions are intimately mediated by the words we use: we inhabit
‘discursive ecologies’ where words are connected to each other, creating webs of
meaning and signification that orient us to seeing and acting upon the world—as
well as feeling—in particular ways.

Those familiar with Marx and critical social theory more generally will of course
make the connection between such insights and the notion of ‘ideology’. As Eagle-
ton (1991) notes, it is in the nature of totalising ideology to persuade that the pre-
vailing order is natural, normal, self-evident, and universal and that it works in the
interests of all—whilst mystifying, excluding and denigrating alternatives (Eagle-
ton, 1991). Gramsci would say that this ‘natural’ state of affairs becomes ‘common
sense’, which he opposes to ‘good sense’. He also argues that such ‘common sense’
is embedded and communicated through language, including through popular say-
ings that are handed down from one generation to the next and which ‘reify’ social
relations, rendering them ‘natural’ and even God-given, massaging the brain, and
leaving it ‘comfortably numb’. The point of course is that we become so accustomed
to seeing things in particular ways that we interactively maintain them, even when
they work against our interests or against the interests of those we care for. Gram-
sci further notes that “Each time the question of language surfaces, in one way  or
another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the forma-
tion and enlargement of the managing class, the need to establish more intimate and
secure relationships between the governing groups and the national–popular mass,
in other words to reorganise cultural hegemony” (Gramsci, 1991, pp. 83–84).

Such insights are as important today as they were in Gramsci’s Fascist Italy, if
not more. With the resurgence of populist leaders, words are used as weapons to
shape the way we think and feel about particular issues, thus creating specific sub-
jectivities that orient us to act in some ways and not in others. Olimat (2020), for
instance, considers that consummate word-monger, Donald Trump, in order to show
how, in relation to important issues affecting society, he mobilised words, meta-
phors, imagery and other linguistic devices to create a shift in thoughts and opin-
ions. Thus, Trump referred to COVID-19 as an invisible enemy, a foreign enemy,
a dangerous threat, and a global battle. Similar ‘dysphemisms’ (Allan & Burridge,
1991, 2006)—i.e. the mobilisation of an offensive and persuasive speaking approach
to manipulate ideological attitudes and social control in political discourse (Crespo-
Fernández, 2013)—are of course used by populist leaders everywhere in relation to
‘illegal’ migrants and refugees.

Ideology, however, is not just about consciously and deliberately using words like
swords in order to exercise power. As Žižek (2016) argues, in a Gramscian vein and
drawing on Lacan, ideology is also a subconscious phenomenon that helps define
and construct the world we live in. According to him, we do not interact with the
world as it is, but rather as we represent it through language. Language, then, is “the
material which humans use for masking, unmasking and making new meaning of
reality” (Lee, 2020, p. 251).
This paper acknowledges the power of language in shaping consciousness, values, sentiments and behaviour. Our focus will be specifically on four words that are often used in career guidance, namely ‘employability’, ‘activation’, ‘vulnerability’, and ‘resilience’. In what follows we will deconstruct each term in turn, mindful of Derrida’s comment that one cannot reconstruct anything without first deconstructing (see Zuckert, 1991). In other words, what I hope to do in this paper is not just to critique language use, but also to reclaim language. Words, after all, are volatile, allowing for redefinition that signals new ways of apprehending the world and of becoming alert to the hegemony that wields oppression, often in a velvet glove. Whilst language can trap us in ways of thinking, it can also be used to question, challenge, resist, and respond—in Derrida’s terms (1972), language is a ‘pharmakon’, i.e. both a poison and a cure. Language, when used creatively and outside its tried and tired ways, can become a counter-hegemonic force. That is why a good poem is a destabilising force and “helps to change the shape and significance of the universe” (Thomas, 1954).

**Word traps for neoliberal subjects**

We now turn to the four terms that shape our career guidance universe. All four are frequently used by policy makers, researchers, and practitioners the world over, where meaning is derived from each word’s interpretive common ground, constituting what Richard (2019) refers to as ‘public language’. The latter is a historically embedded social practice, and different from anything an individual’s words could possess on their own. Public language is therefore saturated with norms which arise from a hegemonic world view and consequently from the master narrative that has colonised our lifeworld: neoliberalism. All four terms are part of this narrative, inasmuch as their public meaning forms our subjectivities in particular ways.

Whilst we will consider each term in turn, we will also note that all four are links in the same chain of signification: they encourage us to view systemic problems as if they were shortcomings of individuals, they mobilise a set of tools to address the problem thus defined, and they responsibilise and oppress whilst claiming the mantle of solidarity and emancipation. It should also be noted that these four words are not unique in the chain of signification: several others feature in the discourse of career guidance that are intimately linked to the four selected here, such as ‘agility’, ‘adaptability’, and ‘flexibility’. Word limits of the article genre impose restrictions on how much ground can be covered. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that several other terms in use in the career guidance field produce the same effect. The four chosen here serve as a case study, showing how such terms can be deconstructed and reconstructed with a social justice agenda in mind.

In this paper, therefore, our consideration of neoliberalism goes beyond its predatory economic logic, to focus instead on its ability to generate particular forms of subjectivities. For neoliberalism affects not only the material conditions of our existence but also those inter- and intra-psychic processes that some would consider private and outside the reach of the market. My argument is that the words we unreflexively use entrap us in a ‘field of force’ (Bourdieu, 1993) where specific meanings are
produced, circulated, appropriated, and exchanged in the struggle for different kinds of power resources.

Our counter-narrative follows a particular sequence and logic: it starts with a consideration of how ‘vulnerability’ is represented in ‘public language’ generally and career guidance more specifically. It then moves onto consider how individuals and groups defined as vulnerable need to be ‘activated’ so that they become more ‘employable’, a process that requires personal ‘resilience’ in facing the odds. A contrapuntal reading (Said, 1993) of each term opens up a host of questions that career workers need to ask, requiring us to mind our language.

**Vulnerability**

Vulnerability is very much part of the discursive ecology that operates in the career guidance field. Several groups are considered to be ‘at risk’ due to physical, material, or social reasons. They are considered vulnerable because of their tenuous relationship to the ‘goodies of life’ (income, work, education, health, housing, status, dignity, social links, opportunities, autonomy, life expectancy, well-being, and so on). The list of those considered ‘vulnerable’ is a long one and includes persons with disabilities, the unemployed and working poor, ethnic or religious minorities, the homeless, travellers, as well as women, ex-offenders, and so-called NEETs (not in education, employment, or training). Such persons are considered to be in danger of ‘social exclusion’, requiring special attention from members of the ‘caring professions’, such as social workers, counsellors, employment advisers, and/or educators.

The word ‘vulnerable’ is a good example of how ‘problems’ are socially constructed. Taking the cue from Bacchi’s WPR approach (2009), we need to ask: What is the problem represented to be here? What kinds of assumptions are being implicitly made about such groups with vulnerability, and what is imputed to be the source of such a problem? What is being left unsaid about ‘vulnerability’, and what are the effects produced by thinking of ‘vulnerability’ in this particular way? Who stands to gain and who to lose by such an understanding of ‘vulnerability’, and how was such an understanding produced, disseminated, and defended? Is there a way that the term ‘vulnerability’—and what it stands for—could be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?

In its contemporary and hegemonic usage, the word ‘vulnerable’ conjures up images of personal weakness, of individuals and groups being susceptible to harm due to an inherent deficit, be this physical, material, or psychological. There is also associated with the term a sense of inevitability and ‘naturalness’ about it: in the order of things, there are the strong and the weak, the able and the disable, and the fortunate and the unfortunate. The etymological origins of the word, however, provide us with a hint at what is going on here, and how words acquire new meanings and inflections over time. ‘Vulnerable’ in fact comes from the Latin word *vulnus* (a wound). Interestingly given the argument we will be making in this section, Latin also gives us *vulnerare* (to wound, hurt, injure, maim). It was only in late Latin that we find a passive form of the word—*vulnerabilis*—which made its way into the English language in the early seventeenth century as ‘vulnerable’. 
There is a big difference, clearly, between thinking of somebody who has been wounded, to saying that somebody has a wound. A processual rendering of the word shifts us from thinking of people as ‘vulnerable’ to people who have been ‘vulnerabilised’. The grammar behind this process involves turning a noun into verb, a process referred to as ‘denominalization’ or ‘anthimeria’ or more simply as ‘verbing’. This linguistic transformation is important because it draws attention away from the individual towards the environment: somebody or something is actively causing some groups, identifiable by specific characteristics and attributes, to experience vulnerability. It reminds us that vulnerability does not just ‘happen’, such as when one catches the flu or suffers a headache, it is caused by an economic system that values profits over the rights and dignity of fellow humans, leading to unfair compensation, lack of respect and consideration, and to the siphoning off of the results of one’s energies and efforts to the disproportionate benefit of those who already enjoy higher levels of power, status, and wealth. These are not (just) characteristics of rogue captains of industry, rather, they are qualities inherent to the economic and social models that have become entrenched to the point that many do not envisage an alternative, despite the fact that they are historically contingent.

‘Vulnerabilisation’ is therefore an active process and is a ‘doing’ word. Using verbs rather than nouns helps us think of social facts as constructs and to focus on structuring processes rather than on structures. The latter often appear to be mysterious, impenetrable, preordained, and reified. Verbing reminds us that the social is the outcome of human action, and as such is subject to deconstruction (what is going on here?) and reconstruction (how can we think, speak, and act differently, in ways that promote social justice?). Let us explore this by focusing on one group that are often considered to be ‘vulnerable’, namely unqualified young adults.

In the realm of what we earlier called ‘public language’, the use of the adjectival noun ‘unqualified’ connotes a deficit of an individual or group who, due to lack of ability, motivation, and/or opportunity have failed to obtain the credentials needed to be absorbed by the labour market. Language use helps shift the focus onto individual and group ‘deficits’ and away from the deficits of the labour market. On the one hand we have the ubiquitous rhetoric promoting a knowledge-based economy which requires lifelong learning, up-skilling, and ever higher levels of qualifications. On the other hand is the reality of underemployment, a manifestation of the ‘broken promises’ linking investment in education with better jobs, or with employment tout court (Brown et al., 2011; Cappelli, 2015). Many job profiles have in fact experienced a process of deskilling (Previtali & Fagiani, 2015). Moreover, qualifications are often used by employers as proxies for personal qualities and characteristics (such as stamina, fortitude, and self-discipline) rather than actual work-related skills. They are also often used to reduce the number of applicants for a particular vacancy, making the selection process quicker, more manageable, and less costly (Brown & Souto-Otero, 2020).

Seen in this light, the deficit is rather more with the neoliberal world order than with individuals who are vulnerabilised—rendered vulnerable, wounded—by the way wealth is produced and distributed worldwide. Ours is an economic order that is dead set on replacing labour with cheaper and compliant technology and on exporting its production across the globe in search of lower labour costs and higher profits.
These are hardly strategies that lead to full employment, which is not a neoliberal aspiration anyway. When the logic underpinning economic activity is profit at all costs, irrespective of the fallout to human flourishing, no amount of qualifications can guarantee stable and secure employment. Depending on circumstances, one can find oneself at the head of the queue, but this competitive advantage can quickly be lost—due to the company’s needs for a different skills set or to downsizing, for instance—and once again one finds oneself with the ‘at risk’ label hanging around one’s neck.

There is another assumption underpinning the description of unqualified youths as being vulnerable, and there are other questions that one can ask that help us see ‘the problem’ in a different way. One needs to ask why it is that we assume that the responsibility for skilling people should be exported onto the state (Keep, 2020), leading to companies privately benefiting from the investment of public money. It is reasonable to expect companies to take their training obligations seriously, as this serves their own self-interest, but also constitutes an intrinsic part of corporate responsibility (Lê & de Nanteuil, 2015). If companies did deliver on this front, the notion of the ‘vulnerability’ of unqualified young people would be quite meaningless, especially in a context where full employment, rather than spiralling profits at any cost, was to be the goal. Indeed, the ‘problem’ of unqualified youth disappears when there is more demand than supply of labour: hands and brains are taken on and, where necessary, trained on the job. We are therefore in the realm of social, political, and economic deficits, not individual failings, and we are justified, I would argue, to speak rather more of ‘vulnerabilisation’, than of ‘vulnerability’ and, therefore, of ‘wounding’ rather than ‘wounded’. If we were to agree, then the need to look at individuals within systems, and to engage in transformative rather than (just) palliative action, would become more pressing.

**Resilience**

In a neoliberal world, where individuals are expected to be entrepreneurs of themselves (Foucault, 2004, p. 232) in an unstable environment, ‘resilience’ is a treasured quality that sees one through thick and thin. Being ‘resilient’ irrespective of the cards that one is dealt by the invisible hand of the market is important, helping avoid joining the ranks of the vulnerable. It is no wonder, then, that the term has caught on in political and in popular discourse and ‘public language’, often featuring in self-help literature, lifestyle magazines, reality television, positive psychology …, and career guidance.

It is important to be aware of the origins and genealogy of the word ‘resilience’, where, by whom and how the concept is used (Endress, 2015), how it is constituted, how it operates, and how it materialises across different sites. The term crossed over from psychology (in the 1950s) to child poverty/abuse and ecology (1970s), to recovery and loss traumas (1980s), and to neuroscience (2000s) (Estêvão et al., 2017). With the 2008 financial crisis, the imposition of austerity and now the climate emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic, the term has been especially visible in the therapeutic, pedagogical and developmental
individual, and personality psychological literature (Endress, 2015), including career guidance (Šapale et al., 2021). One is resilient if, as with materials in the physical world, one is able to absorb strain energy when deformed and to release that energy without breaking or becoming disfigured (Lennart et al., 2015). Resilient individuals, much like resilient materials, bounce back, and rebound (Olsson et al., 2015, p. 1)—qualities that are increasingly seen as necessary given the “socio-cultural unsettling” that arises from enhanced self-perception of increased insecurity (orientational as well as ontological), risk, danger, threat, hazard, uncertainty, crisis, and disaster. In such a context, “the practice of living […] is increasingly conceptualised as onerous” (Endress, 2015, p. 537), and resilience and fortitude are the virtues and habits of character that will see one through.

Career guidance practitioners operate with notions of resilience, such as when, in the context of public employment services (PES), they are encouraged to ‘activate’ the unemployed—that is, to spring back and rebound from the calamity of the loss of a job. Some see such resilience as an innate personal trait that some have and others not. Others emphasise ‘emergent resilience’: individuals, much like the environment, institutions, and even cities and states, can learn to adapt in the face of threats, adversity, and trauma. This introduces a more collective, community-level dimension of resilience (Downes et al., 2013), where resources are redistributed in order to enhance the ‘bouncing back’ and where resilience is not limited “to the outcome of activation of an intrinsic attribute belonging to the individual or object” (Estêvão et al., 2017, p. 12).

There are many facets to the construct ‘resilience’. For the purposes of this paper two will be highlighted as having particular relevance to those involved in career work, namely its association with individual heroic forbearance and courage in the face of adversity and its ultimately conservative nature, given that “the tendency to understand resilience as resistance to change is ubiquitous in the literature” (Olsson et al., 2015, p. 2).

As we have just noted, resilience is often used to describe or account for the ability to withstand external shock to communities, including environmental disasters, health epidemics, and social, economic, or political upheavals. Communities are said to be resilient when they are able to absorb and cope with such traumas and to return to the previous state of affairs without, therefore, having to radically modify a way of life. As such, political and economic regimes, amongst others, attribute a positive normative value to resilience, emphasising its ultimately conservative scope. Needless to say, this is precisely what critical social science finds problematic with resilience, since it sees the world through the lens of human agency, power, conflict, and ultimately of social transformation rather than conservation. There is thus a tension between, on the one hand, the functionalist tenor of the natural sciences—with their view of a self-organising system that, much like Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’, leads to an equilibrium (Olsson et al., 2015, p. 5)—and emancipatory sociology, with its focus on power and conflict and inequality and its ultimate goal of reconfiguring social structures in relation to the redistribution of resources, risks, and power. ‘Resilience’ is thus an intensely political term, since it privileges continuity over rupture and change, aligning itself with neoliberalism (Walker & Cooper, 2011; Joseph, 2013) and
signalling a wider psychological “turn to character” within the psychic life of neoliberalism (Gill & Orgad, 2018).

Career guidance can easily find itself on the wrong side of “the politics of resilience” when it fails to ask such questions as “resilience of what” and “resilience for whom” (Cote & Nightingale, 2012). Adopting a critical, emancipatory perspective requires an investigation of “the social fields, professional contexts, and institutions in which concepts of resilience are enforced and various programmes of action that are propagated and implemented using these concepts. In addition, we must scrutinise those groups of agents who make it their business to (re-)code resilience and to flag up their interests under the banner of resilience” (Endress, 2015, p. 541).

Resilience is therefore not a ‘pro-poor’ concept (Béné et al., 2012), even though within the helping professions, including career guidance, it tends to be associated with a benevolent humanism that genuinely sets out to help the vulnerabilised. A critical social theory perspective adds a fist to the heart, arguing that unemployment and precarity that lead to spiralling poverty and misery are the result of specific neoliberal policies that lower taxes for the wealthy, roll back the welfare state, further empower corporations and capital at the expense of workers, and deregulate leaving the multitude exposed to risks, thus rescinding on the social contract. All this cannot be offset simply by fostering and engineering resilience, as if this was a sort of hidden resource to be explored, developed, and exploited by public policy as a “somewhat costless—or at least more efficient—alternative to welfare state intervention in dealing with poverty and other social risks” (Estêvão et al., 2017, p. 13).

‘Resilience’ then is the other side of the coin of ‘vulnerability’, both sharing the same neoliberal logic and worldview. One is vulnerable because one has not worked hard enough to develop the qualities necessary to survive, including resilience. In both cases, the individual is ultimately to blame and named and shamed (figuratively and sometimes literally) for becoming a burden to the state. In both cases too we see the process of responsibilisation at work: individuals and whole communities are at one and the same time admonished and encouraged to show forbearance, grit, and courage in the face of structurally caused traumas. Their worthiness is measured by their ability to be adaptable and positive, to bounce back from adversity and to embrace “a mind set in which negative experiences can—and must be—reframed in upbeat terms” (Gill & Orgad, 2018, p. 1). It is such fortitude that enables one to thrive against all odds, irrespective of cuts to benefits, wage freeze, and economic meltdown. The burden of success or failure is thus transferred to individuals, with such injunctions being strongly classed and gendered (Gill & Orgad, 2018, p. 479).

In this conservative understanding of resilience, systemic failures are projected as individual deficits, with heroic concepts of resilience (Estêvão et al., 2017) serving to downplay other alternatives, such as collective mobilisation and forms of public solidarity. When career workers adopt this heroic concept of resilience, they are likely to interpret their role as resilience builders, becoming yet another instrument in the affective governance of subordinate individuals and groups by depoliticising and naturalising the social order rather than highlighting agency, conflict, knowledge, and power. As Enders notes, “at issue here is the (seemingly paradoxical) shift and attribution of responsibility to subjects (responsibilisation) in a context marked by (generally unforeseeable) side-effect dynamics. The corresponding techniques of
power are frequently flanked by (ultimately cynical) attempts to label such allocations of responsibility as forms of ‘empowerment’” (Endress, 2015, p.541).

As with the term ‘vulnerability’, our task is to deconstruct in order to be able to reconstruct. Adopting heroic notions of resilience leads us to wonder why some are overwhelmed by adversity and others overcome it. The sole emphasis on internal states blinds us to the systemic, opening up the door to palliative care for those we genuinely seek to assist—by helping them discover and put to good use their inner potential, overcoming self-esteem problems and engaging in training, career change, volunteering, and entrepreneurship.

If we must have resilience, then we need to consider its applicability at different levels, i.e. not just at the micro level, but the meso and macro ones as well. This helps us move away from ‘heroic’ notions of resilience to more systemic ones and from coping with crises at an individual level to a response that draws its strength from human solidarity. Such wider social and environmental resilience processes include two dimensions, namely the mobilisation of resources and the shifting of risks. The former highlights the fact that “resilience processes are heavily influenced by prevalent social inequality and power asymmetries within a society” (Estêvão et al., 2017, p. 18). In other words, it makes a great deal of difference to the potential for resilience if the vulnerabilised are given access to economic, social, cultural, and environmental resources (such as credit, public services, welfare provisions, education and training, and support by collective entities, such as political parties, trade unions, and NGOs). Career guidance workers that embrace a systemic approach to resilience not only help shift the focus from the individual to the social but also “from individual actions to the creation of conditions for them to take place” (Estêvão, et al., 2017, p. 21). This contests the use of ‘heroic’ notions of resilience that leads to the reprivatisation of risks—i.e. “the shifting to the individual of risks that were previously dealt with through collective means” (Estêvão et al., 2017, p. 21).

**Employability**

‘Employability’ is another of the keywords that career workers are likely to frequently come up against and use. As with ‘vulnerability’, ‘resilience’, and ‘activation’, ‘employability’ falls within the semantic and ideological force field of neoliberalism, positioning the individual and his or her relationship with society in particular ways (Chertkovskaya et al., 2013). As Williams et al. (2016) note in their systematic review of the use of the term in English language publications, ‘employability’ is a multifaceted construct, with theories of employability becoming more complex and multi-dimensional from the 1940s onwards. Citing Grazier (1998), they highlight a key development in the use of the term, from considering whether one is employable or not to one that thinks of employability as having a dynamic and adaptive character (Williams et al., 2016, p. 877).

Whilst, therefore, employability can be viewed from a *societal* perspective (i.e. employment rates and economic health of a particular country or region) or from an *organisational* perspective (i.e. focusing on the match between demand and supply...
of skills), for our purposes it is the third perspective, the *individual* one (Thijssen et al., 2008 as cited by Williams et al., 2016, p. 878) that is most relevant. From this individual perspective, employability concerns the development of personal and vocationally relevant qualities over time that increase the chances of becoming employed, but do not guarantee it.

It is this individual and developmental or adaptive understanding of employability that one finds most commonly used in career guidance circles, where, amongst others, we find programmes that set out to ‘increase one’s employability’. As with the other three terms central to this article, employability signals an understanding of the individual as an entrepreneur of the self, whereby individuals, by their own or with the help of others, mobilise a number of technologies so as to work on their own thought, conduct, and way of being in order to transform themselves and reach a state of happiness—in this case, becoming more employable, on the path to becoming employed. Here too we see a process of responsibilisation: unemployment is no longer a responsibility of the neoliberal state—keen as it is to cut down on welfare spending—but rather that of the individual, who transforms it into a problem of self-care.

This entails learning ‘hard’ skills, such as technical know-how in a particular area. But it also requires developing generic, soft skills. Indeed, many employability programmes, whether in the education or labour market sectors, give a lot of importance to the latter as part of the ‘showcasing’ of the self, in much the same way as one would display goods in the market. The list of such soft skills is long and includes personal dispositions, attributes, and know-how, such as awareness of self, having self-esteem, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence, being proactive and entrepreneurial, being flexible, adaptable, resilient, available and mobile, knowing how to present, market and ‘sell’ oneself, being willing to learn and develop oneself, having a strong work ethic, being work-ready and a ‘go-getter’, working well with others, and having strong communication skills. One increases one’s employability by developing appropriate ‘career management skills’ which include such aspects as cv writing, knowing how to behave during a job interview, learning to find out employment-related information and to use it effectively, extending one’s social capital, including networks, and so on (Sultana, 2012).

One also increases one’s employability by having the right qualifications (in terms of both fitting the job profile and of the level of qualifications, since being ‘over-qualified’ can be as counter-productive as being under-qualified), by having previous paid or voluntary work experience (including positive references from previous employers), by proving one’s competence through alternative means (such as thanks to the accreditation of prior experiential learning), and by having the right contacts (given that in some contexts, it is who you know and not just what you know that can get you in the front of the employment queue or render you more attractive since such contacts can be of benefit to the company). Given the discriminatory nature of many labour markets and as proposed by Positional Conflict Theory (Brown et al., 2003), having the ‘right’ gender, ethnicity, religion, age, health status, sexual orientation, freedom of movement—and a majority-sounding name (as noted by, *inter alia*, Widner & Chicoine, 2011)—can dramatically increase one’s employability. So too can one’s appearance—what Hakim (2010) refers to as ‘erotic
capital’—with some career advice websites even promoting facelifts as possibly more effective than qualifications in landing a job (Janiga & Janiga, n.d.). These different sorts of capital can be converted into economic capital for the individual and employing company alike.

The imperative to work on oneself that is implied in the employability discourse does not affect all young people in the same way: many of the qualities that are prized in this ‘autobiographical planning’ are not distributed evenly and equally amongst all of young people. Young people are interpellated in such a way that they need to reconstruct themselves as “self-interested actors operating calculatively within educational and labour markets” (Gee, 2016, p. 1). And yet, such behavioural and dispositions expectations are classed, racialised, and gendered (Walkerdine et al., 2001). They reflect a middle-class habitus which the working class will have to shed blood and tears to demonstrate (Gramsci et al., 1971, p. 190). Assertiveness in men might easily be interpreted as aggressiveness in women, even when the latter display the same behaviour during job interviews as the former (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). Such heavy investment in self-editing, which is more likely to pay off for some rather than for others, leads to potentially damaging consequences (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). What is explicitly marketed as a way to enhance self-esteem does anything but.

The career guidance field is heavily implicated in the legitimisation of the concept of ‘employability’. Mainstream career guidance theories as well as career learning frameworks are built around the concept of employability, putting the stress on adaptability as a career meta-competence that facilitates a protean career (Hall, 2004). Career guidance further contributes to this legitimisation process by teaching and fostering ‘career management skills’ through career learning programmes and by accompanying individuals through the hoops and hurdles on the way to a hoped-for destination. Career practitioners use their specialised knowledge to help individuals estimate, calculate, measure, evaluate, discipline, and judge themselves against the normalised values that are expected by the market, with ‘work readiness’ being the goal. They draw on a range of technologies in order to help ‘clients’ become more personable and sociable, whilst identifying and weeding out personality flaws that do not correspond to the work habits and dispositions expected by employers. In Europe, Europass serves as one such technology, organising the individual’s efforts and achievements in a personal skills card, signalling employability status beyond national borders. As Lakes (2011, p. 328) notes, “Fetishizing over employability is essential in positioning oneself as a new economy citizen.”

The problem of course is that, as Cremin notes, employability is a “condition that can never be fulfilled” since the labour market context keeps shifting and changing and individuals have to constantly find a way of staying ahead of the competition (2009, p. 131, cited by Williams et al., 2016, p. 897). As a consequence, the entrepreneurial/enterprising self can never be satisfied with itself as there is always more to do in the quest of having just the right profile for that next job—a never-ending process of shadow boxing with oneself since ‘full potentiality’ can never be achieved (Berglund, 2013). The problem, therefore, with an emphasis on ‘employability’ is that such an approach attempts to address a demand-side issue (i.e. the number of jobs generated by the economy) by a
supply-side solution (i.e. requiring individuals to develop and edit themselves in such a way as to increase their chances of employment) when the simple mathematics is that two—or two hundred—into one will not go. In other words, the problem is not with employability, but with ‘employer-ability’ (Morley, 2001).

The neoliberal state, however, has to camouflage its democratic deficits by blaming individuals for their deficiencies, whether behavioural, moral, or cultural. Employability helps to achieve this sleight of hand, further legitimising its increasingly punitive forms of conditional welfare and stigmatising the unemployed even more (Crisp & Powell, 2017, p. 1784). In such a context, employability is a policy manifestation of the neoliberal state in self-formative action rather than a rational response to economic change. It is therefore “a more ambitious attempt to pursue a political project of austerity that uses the costs incurred by the state in containing the financial crisis as an opportunity to legitimise the pursuit of ideological goals, particularly in terms of reducing the costs of public spending on welfare” (Crisp & Powell, 2017, p. 1801).

Rather than explaining unemployment by pointing its fingers at policies it has itself adopted—such as deregulation, privatisation, and financialisation—the neoliberal state exports the blame onto citizens, so that within the employability discourse, unemployment is seen not as a social risk and a collective responsibility, but rather as a case of ‘risk management’ expected of the individual (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004). Rather than seeing access to livelihood as an individual’s entitlement within the terms of the social contract between state and citizens, the latter are accused for letting the community down by allowing a deterioration of their skills, work habits, and commitment.

Returning to Lacan’s notion that ‘the world of words creates the world of things,’ such use of the term ‘employability’ is real in its consequences. It serves “as a form of discursive legitimisation for neoliberal policies which seek to reduce the costs of supporting young people whilst simultaneously compelling their engagement with ‘flexible’ and insecure labour markets” (Crisp & Powell, 2017, p. 1786). The employability discursive regime serves to lower the expectations and aspirations of young people, inuring them to the fact that, for many of them, the best they can expect are non-standard forms of employment, short- to no-contract jobs, and gig work. The irony is, of course, that never has there been so much qualified labour for jobs requiring few qualifications, with graduates from further and higher education obliged to settle for anything they find since the arrival of a knowledge-based society has not resulted in a knowledge-based economy (Brown et al., 2020; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). As Crisp and Powell note (2017, p.1789), what we see at work here is a “political response to the need to create a ready supply of workers for the low paid and contingent work that has emerged in the wake of economic restructuring”. They go onto cite Peck (2001, p.6) who remarked that workfare—state support given not in respect of the social contract with its citizens, but conditional to fulfilling criteria that improve the recipient’s job prospects—“is not about creating jobs for people that do not have them; it is about creating workers for jobs that nobody wants.”
It is precisely this workfare regime that calls for ‘activation’. As several authors have pointed out, the ‘activation turn’ in active labour market policies (ALMPs) was promoted in OECD countries in the 1990s, where the maxim was to establish ‘balance’ between rights and duties for the unemployed (Raffass, 2017, p. 349) and to “provide support whilst making demands” (Ludwig-Mayerhofer et al., 2014, p. 597). In most countries, activation measures include employment counselling, job search assistance, and personal action planning; vocational training and work experience; incentives to employers (such as wage subsidies) to take on unemployed persons or to the unemployed themselves (such as seed money for start-ups); and employment in the public sector through work-for-benefits schemes.

As Raffass (2017) and Sultana and Watts (2006) note, some of these activation measures are enabling. Some programmes, for instance, provide child care or transport to facilitate training or job search activities. Some focus on longer-term development with the support of career guidance, job brokering, and access to courses that open up new opportunities rather than on getting clients off benefits and into a job as quickly as possible, irrespective of desires or aspirations. Most activation measure are, however, punitive. Neoliberal workfare principles require that beneficiaries demonstrate responsibility—by taking part in any programme, training, work experience, or job placement offered by PES, by attending regular meetings with PES employment advisors, by updating their cv and job search and application skills, by designing and implementing an ‘employment action plan’, by documenting their efforts to find work, and by improving their everyday behaviour, including modifying their appearance. As the point of all this ‘case work’ is activation, time that is not dedicated to any of the above-mentioned government-sponsored activities is considered inactive, and “this inactivity need[s] to be governed and managed by assigning young people to any available service” (Haikkola, 2019, p. 343). Failure to show willingness to be thus activated, supervised, and counselled results in sanctions, including the withholding of benefits.

It bears noting that with procedures being so highly bureaucratised and presuming a particular habitus, those with a manual and limited literacy background are more likely to fall foul of the system. They will also be more likely to find PES procedures irrelevant given that access to jobs in subordinate sectors are often accessed through informal contacts rather than in the scripted manner in which PES activation programmes function (Ludwig-Mayerhofer et al., 2014, p. 604).

The subjects that need to be activated are, presumably, those who wilfully and irresponsibly wish to be inactive or those who need an additional helping hand—such as training, job search skills, and work experience—in order to break into a recalcitrant labour market. A more jaundiced view about such workfare from the perspective of critical social theory is that activation is directed at those who have not bought into the employability discourse. In other words, the technology of activation tries to break down the resistance of those who either refuse to accept that unemployment is their fault rather than that of a national and global capitalism that puts profits before people, or to fit into jobs that are unfit for humans.
There are different types of activation models, following the social philosophies and norms of liberal, continental, and conservative welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990), each with its own way of balancing support with responsibility. For the purposes of this paper, however, a number of broad statements can be made and conclusions reached, which are applicable across the board when it comes to the shift from ‘welfare’ to ‘workfare’.

A key point is the fact that the activation paradigm is underpinned and driven by the state’s commitment to neoliberalism, which involves pushing down wage demands, increasing labour supply where people are least likely to want to work, and decreasing corporate obligations towards those in its employ. Deregulation is accompanied by a shift towards austerity; given the state’s generosity with the least needy by drastically lowering their tax contribution, it retrenches and adopts fiscal conservatism in its social policies, rendering historically hard-earned rights, such as greater employment protection and generous income replacement rates during unemployment, arcane, and even unthinkable.

One of the ways of legitimising the state’s withdrawal of support, or of making it subject to what are often draconian conditionalities, is the implicit or explicit vilification of the ‘inactive’. The latter are represented in deficit terms, either because they have not sufficiently invested in their own education and training or because they impudently expect to survive as leeches on public largesse. Thus blamed, the victims of the new economy find themselves further vulnerabilized and publicly named and shamed, making it easier for the state to discipline them into preferring low-wage jobs, irrespective of conditions, to living on benefits (Mead, 1986, in Raffass, 2017, p. 357). In some activation regimes, the conditions and demands imposed on jobseekers are such they end up taking on any job just to exit from its grip (Meager et al., 2014, p. 185). This, of course, is the goal: the control of the unemployed behaviour and their resocialization so that they are willing to accept work in today’s flexible labour markets, with little concern for the self (Haikkola, 2019; Peck, 2001).

Such resocialisation comes at a cost: those who buy into the activation paradigm often end up suffering adverse psychological effects, since they integrate the sense of self communicated by the very nature of activation that they are somehow lacking. Furthermore, they are susceptible to potentially damaging psychological fallout from the scars and stigma associated with unemployment, from being coerced into doing something that they would otherwise not do and being subjected to “harassment and intimidation associated with activation in job-short economies [...] and the intrusive psychological intervention to modify attitudes, beliefs, and the personality of the jobseekers in order to create a ‘disposition of employability’ in them” (Raffass, 2017, p. 360).

This is where the discourse around activation converges with that of employability. In both, a problem of supply is reconfigured as one of the demand. In both, deficits in job opportunities, in affordable housing, in health services, in employment regulation that allow employers to discriminate on the basis of age or of lack of work experience, and so on (Raffass, 2017, p. 361) are transformed into deficits of individuals, whose state of ‘inactivity’ is blamed on lack of motivation, of adequate skills, of job search strategies, of self-discipline, and organisation. With the problem thus defined, it is up to the individual to be more enterprising and self-directed and
to engage in ‘personal action planning’ that will help them exit unemployment and thus be less of a burden on the state. This, then, is yet another example of liberal forms of governance that seek to govern through freedom by producing self-governing and responsible subjectivities (Rose, 1999), requiring compliance and resilience on the one hand and entrepreneurship and initiative on the other. What both the activation and employability discourse fail to acknowledge is that what is lacking is not aspirations, but lack of the means to achieve them due to the way the economy is structured (Egdell & Graham, 2017).

In this way, then, is the democratic concept of ‘active citizenship’ emptied, transformed, and reduced to a travesty. Rather than governing through freedom, one of the central tenets of the social contract, “the localised interpretation of activation policies represents the authoritarian and paternalistic side of neoliberal governance” (Haikkola, 2019, p. 334). Rather than acknowledging the right to work, as declared in article 23 of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the activating state promises its citizens the right to ‘activation’ instead of to employment—when most research, helpfully synthesised by Raffass (2017), suggests that such activation measures neither create new jobs in the economy, nor do job placements hardly ever become pathways to regular paying jobs and furthermore drive the unemployed into low skill, low pay, and unstable jobs, most of which lead back to unemployment. Those who do follow the workfare regime seem to be only a little more likely to enter employment compared to non-participant jobseekers and there is no evidence that ALMPs are becoming more effective over time. The cynic would be justified in concluding that if the neoliberal state continues investing in programmes that give such few returns, it is only because they are fulfilling another function: the point of neoliberal ALMP is not to do away with unemployment—since this constitutes the ‘reserve army of labour’ serving to keep wages low—but to legitimise it and govern it (Van Oort, 2015).

Conclusion

This paper has been about critique of words that may roll off our tongue without giving them a second thought, simply because they have become a part of our familiar linguistic landscape, our discursive ecology. My argument has been that such RAVE words as ‘resilience’, ‘activation’, ‘vulnerability’, and ‘employability’ (RAVE: etymologically derived from old French meaning: ‘manifesting madness’) are part of the neoliberal discursive universe, silently and perversely shaping our thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and actions in ways that are congenial to and “validate particular forms of neoliberal statecrafting” (Crisp & Powell, 2017, p. 1803). I have argued that words matter when it comes to reading the world, since it is through them that “neoliberal ideas become activated and sedimented into common sense, insinuating themselves into ‘the nooks and crannies of everyday life’” (Gill & Orgad, 2018, p. 478). I have also argued that, as career workers mediating between the world as it is and the world as it could and should be, we need to be ever more mindful that
neoliberalism is not just about political and economic rationality, but is a psychological project built around ‘feeling rules’.

Clearly, minding one’s language is not enough to bring about the social change that we aspire for. And yet, to conclude with our starting point, language is a key tool in stitching a new garment that fits all humanity and nature. Becoming conscientised about the ‘common sense’ sedimented in our everyday language can be a powerful starting point for understanding that the career guidance mantle, well-meaning though it may be, needs to build on but also transcend humanism, liberally understood, if it is to embrace ‘good sense’. Reclaiming language, investing it with new meanings, exchanging words for others that are more helpful in understanding whose interests are being served, and that alert us to the opportunity of agency and the systemic linkages between the personal and the political … one and all open up possibilities to resist the colonisation of our lifeworld by the values of neoliberalism highlighted in the poem by Sonya Renee Taylor that we started off with. Words might seem weak and paltry, unlikely to provide us with an effective arsenal to combat what has come to be taken as ‘normal’ … and yet, as the fourteenth century Persian poet Hafez reminds us: “the words we speak become the house we live in”. The building of a different home requires us to speak a different language.

References

Allan, K., & Burridge, K. (1991). *Euphemism and dysphemism*. Oxford University Press.
Allan, K., & Burridge, K. (2006). *Forbidden words: Taboo and the censoring of language*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511617881
Bacchi, C. (2009). *Analysing policy: What’s the problem represented to be?* Pearson Education.
Béné, C., Wood, R. G., Newsham, A., & Davies, M. (2012). Resilience: new utopia or new tyranny? Reflection about the potentials and limits of the concept of resilience in relation to vulnerability reduction programmes. *IDS Working Papers, 2012*(405), 1–61. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2012.00405.x
Berglund, K. (2013). Fighting against all odds: Entrepreneurship education as employability training. *Ephemera*, 13(4), 717–735.
Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*. Columbia University Press.
Brown, P., & Souto-Otero, M. (2020). The end of the credential society? An analysis of the relationship between education and the labour market using big data. *Journal of Education Policy, 35*, 95–118. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2018.1549752
Brown, P., Hesketh, A., & Wiliams, S. (2003). Employability in a knowledge-driven economy. *Journal of Education and Work, 16*(2), 107–126. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080305562
Brown, P., Lauder, H., & Ashton, D. (2011). *The global auction: The broken promises of education, jobs, and incomes*. Oxford University Press.
Brown, P., Lauder, H., & Cheung, S.-Y. (2020). *The death of human capital: Its failed promise and how to renew it in an age of disruption*. Oxford University Press.
Cappelli, P. H. (2015). Skill gaps, skill shortages, and skill mismatches: Evidence and arguments for the United States. *ILR Review, 68*, 251–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793914564961
Chertkovskaya, E., Watt, P., Tramer, S., & Spoelstra, S. (2013). Giving notice to employability. *Ephemera: Theory and Policit, 13*(4), 701–716.
Cote, M., & Nightingale, A. J. (2012). Resilience thinking meets social theory: Situating social change in socio-ecological systems (SES) research. *Progress in Human Geography, 36*, 475–489. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132511425708
Cremin, C. (2009). Never employable enough: The (im)possibility of satisfying the boss’s desire. *Organization*, 17(2), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508409341112

Crespo-Fernández, E. (2013). Words as weapons for mass persuasion: Dysphemism in Churchill’s wartime speeches. *Text & Talk*, 33(3), 311–330. https://doi.org/10.1515/text-2013-0014

Crisp, R., & Powell, R. (2017). Young people and UK labour market policy. *Urban Studies*, 54(8), 1784–1807. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098016637567

Derrida, J. (1972). *Dissemination*. Continuum.

Downes, B. J., Miller, F., Barnett, J., Glaister, A., & Ellemor, H. (2013). What do we know about resilience? An analysis of empirical research on resilience, and implications for interdisciplinary praxis. *Environmental Research Letters*, 8, 14–41. https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/8/1/014041

Eagleton, T. (1991). *Ideology: An introduction*. Verso.

Egdell, V., & Graham, H. (2017). A capability approach to unemployed young people’s voice and agency in the development and implementation of employment activation policies. *Social Policy & Administration*, 51(7), 1191–1209. https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12262

Endress, M. (2015). The social constructedness of resilience. *Social Science*, 4, 533–545. https://doi.org/10.3390/sosci4030533a

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Polity Press.

Estêvão, P., Calado, A., & Capucha, L. (2017). Resilience. Moving from a ‘heroic’ notion to a sociological concept. *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas*, 85, 9–25.

Foucault, M. (2004). *Naissance de la biopolitique*. Gallimard/Editions du Seuil.

Garsten, C., & Jacobsson, K. (2004). Learning to be employable. In C. Garsten & K. Jacobsson (Eds.), *Learning to be employable: New agendas on work, responsibility and learning in a globalizing world* (pp. 1–22). Palgrave Macmillan.

Gee, R. (2016). Alternative visions of employability: The role of critical pedagogy. National Centre for Guidance in Education. Retrieved from August 2, 2021. https://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/resources/NCGE-PP-Alternate-Visions-EN.pdf

Gill, R., & Orgad, S. (2018). The amazing bounce-backable woman: Resilience and the psychological turn in neoliberalism. *Sociological Research Online*, 23(2), 477–495. https://doi.org/10.1177/1360780418769673

Gramsci, A., In Hoare, Q., & Nowell-Smith, G. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. International Publishers.

Gramsci, A., In Forgacs, D., & Nowell-Smith, G. (1991). *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from cultural writings*. Harvard University Press.

Grazier, B. (1998). *Employability: Concepts and policies*. European Employment Observatory: European Commission.

Haikkola, L. (2019). Shaping activation policy at the street level: Governing inactivity in youth employment services. *Acta Sociologica*, 62(3), 334–348. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699318784341

Hakim, C. (2010). Erotic capital. *European Sociological Review*, 26(5), 499–518. https://doi.org/10.1093/ersj/ jcp014

Hall, D. T. (2004). The Protean career: A quarter-century journey. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 65(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2003.10.006

Janiga, T., & Janiga, J. (n.d.). Can facelifts help in job search and career advancement? Retrieved from July 24, 2021. https://www.janigamds.com/blog/a-face-lift-can-it-help-in-job-search-and-career-advancement/

Joseph, J. (2013). Resilience as embedded neoliberalism: A governmentality approach. *Resilience*, 1(1), 38–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2013.765741

Keep, E. (2020). Employers, the ghost at the feast. *Journal of Education and Work*, 33, 500–506. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2020.1852501

Lacan, J. (2001). *Écrits: A selection*. Routledge.

Lakes, R. (2011). Work-ready testing: Education and employability in neoliberal times. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 9(1), 317–340.

Lê, T. T. T., & de Nanteuil, M. (2015). Employees’ vocational training and corporate social responsibility (CSR): Beyond primary responsibilities. *GSTF Business Review*, 4, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.7603/s40706-015-0018-1

Lee, E. (2020). Reclaiming language! Reclaiming life! Critical reflections of an anti-racist educator’s lived experiences. *Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry*, 12(1), 250–268. https://doi.org/10.18733/cpi29550

Lennart, O., Jernbeck, A., Thoren, H., Persson, J., & O’Byrne, D. (2015). Why resilience is unappealing to social science: Theoretical and empirical investigations of the scientific use of resilience. *Science Advances*, 1(4), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.1400217
Ludwig-Mayerhofer, W., Behrend, O., & Sondermann, A. (2014). Activation, Public Employment Services and their clients: The role of social class in a continental welfare system. *Social Policy & Administration, 48*(5), 594–612. https://doi.org/10.3917/rfas.en605.0021

Mead, L. M. (1986). *Beyond entitlement: The social obligations of citizenship*. Free Press.

Meager, N., Newton, B., Sainsbury, R., Corden, A., & Irvine, A. (2014). Work programme evaluation: The participant experience report. Department for Work and Pensions.

Moreau, M.-P., & Leathwood, C. (2006). Graduates’ employment and the discourse of employability: A critical analysis. *Journal of Education and Work, 19*(4), 305–324. https://doi.org/10.1080/1363908060867083

Morley, L. (2001). Producing new workers: Quality, equality and employability in higher education. *Quality in Higher Education, 7*(2), 131–138. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320120060024

Olimat, S. N. (2020). Words as powerful weapons: Dysphemism in Trump’s Covid-19 speeches. *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 26*(3), 17–29. https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2020-2603-02

Olsson, L., Jerneck, A., Thoren, H., Persson, J., & O’Byrne, D. (2015). Why resilience is unappealing to social science: Theoretical and empirical investigations of the scientific use of resilience. *Science Advances, 1*(4), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.1400217

Peck, J. (2001). *Workfare states*. Guildford Press.

Previtali, F. S., & Fagiani, C. C. (2015). Deskilling and degradation of labour in contemporary capitalism: The continuing relevance of Braverman. *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation, 9*, 76–91. https://doi.org/10.13169/workingalaboglob.9.1.0076

Raffass, T. (2017). Demanding activation. *Journal of Social Policy, 46*(2), 349–365. https://doi.org/10.1017/S004727941600057X

Richard, M. (2019). *Meanings as species*. Oxford University Press.

Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge University Press.

Šapale, S., Dzintra Iliško, D., & Badjanova, J. (2021). Sustainable career guidance during the pandemic: Building pathways into a ‘new normal.’ *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education, 12*(1), 140–150.

Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. Vintage Books.

Sultana, R. G. (2012). Learning career management skills in Europe: A critical review. *Journal of Education and Work, 25*(2), 225–248. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2010.547846

Sultana, R. G., & Watts, A. G. (2006). Career guidance in public employment services across Europe. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 6*(1), 29–46. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-006-0001-5

Thijssen, J. G., Van der Heijden, B. I., & Rocco, T. S. (2008). Toward the employability-link model: Current employment transition to future employment perspectives. *Human Resource Development Review, 7*(2), 165–183. https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484308314955

Thomas, D. (1954). On Poetry. In D. Thomas (Ed.), *Quite early one morning*. New Directions.

Van Oort, M. (2015). Making the neoliberal precariat: Two faces of job searching in Minneapolis. *Ethnography, 16*(1), 74–94. https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138113506636

Walker, J., & Cooper, M. (2011). Genealogies of resilience: From systems ecology to the political economy of crisis adaptation. *Security Dialogue, 42*, 143–160. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010611399616

Walkerdine, V., Lucey, H., et al. (2001). Growing up girl: Psychosocial explorations of gender and class. *Palgrave*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203621479

Widner, D., & Chicoine, S. (2011). It’s all in the name: Employment discrimination against Arab Americans. *Sociological Forum, 26*(4), 806–823. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2011.01285.x

Williams, S., Dodd, L. J., Steele, C., & Randall, R. (2016). A systematic review of current understandings of employability. *Journal of Education and Work, 29*(8), 877–901. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2015.1102210

Žižek, S. (2016). Language, violence and non-violence. *International Journal of Žižek Studies, 2*(3), 1–12.

Zuckert, C. (1991). The politics of Derridean deconstruction. *Polity, 23*(2), 335–356. https://doi.org/10.2307/3235130

Publisher’s Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.