

The Translation of Employability Attributes into Students' Competencies: An Evaluative Study on the Structured Whole Person Development Programme (SWPD)

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The Structured Whole Person Development Programme (SWPD) of the Vocational Training Council (VTC) is a curriculum aimed at equipping students with an array of transferable skills, attitudes and values to enhance their employability. Adopting an employability model of vocational competence (Mulder, 2009; Mulder, Weigel and Collins, 2007; Rauner, 2007) emphasizing the role of generic competence in vocational development, the Person-Environment Fit paradigm (Feldman, Smart and Ethington, 1999) and a social cognitive framework (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 1994) for understanding career development, this study attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of the SWPD.

The investigation employed a mixed method design to explore what and how the SWPD contributes to students' employability. Document analysis, class observations, student surveys, focus groups interviews were conducted for the 2010 new intake of the 3-year Diploma of Vocational Education (DVE) and 2-year Higher Diploma (HD) from September 2010 to August 2012.

Results suggested that the SWPD is successful in crystallizing career orientation and promoting career self-efficacy of the students. Findings also demonstrated that students and teachers in general could recognize the benefits of the SWPD in terms of work attitudes, immediate employment skills and continual development.

The study found that the depths of development opportunities provided by liberal studies in secondary school and the SWPD are not identical. Being multifaceted, the SWPD helps instill appropriate vocational attitudes, equips students with concrete, immediate employment skills and helps prepare for students' job placement during study. It can also address most attributes students' and teachers' emphasized. Most students agreed that the SWPD extends their learning activities to daily life and equips them with a wide array of behavioural skills.

Students expressed that they treasured the caring and supportive learning environment created by the WPD teachers and the arrangement of experiential learning activities which promote a sense of self-determination and active learning. These two features facilitate acquisition of attributes in the SWPD. Adopting trade-specific teaching materials, collaborating with trade teachers in SWPD delivery, reflecting job placement experience and optimizing the use of formative assessments are four strategies suggested to help students recognize the relevance of learned attributes at work.

In response to the curriculum changes in secondary schools, the attributes emphasized in the SWPD were rationalized to the acronym of 'SMART' starting September 2012. Building on the strengths and areas of improvements identified in the study, the SWPD will continue its mission in enhancing students' employability through translation of employability attributes into students' competence.

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