

28.7.2024

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**Title**

Student identity development in higher education : implications for graduate attributes and work-readiness / Jeannie Daniels and Jennifer Brooker

**Publication year**

2014

**Source/Footnote**

In: Educational research. - 56 (2014) 1, S. 65 - 76

**Inventory number**

35981

**Keywords**

Studentenschaft ; Studienverhalten ; Studentenschaft : soziale Lage ; Hochschule und Wirtschaft

**Abstract**

Background: As universities in many countries engage more directly with industry, the learning emphasis has moved from the student experience to the work-readiness of the graduate. This focus on the student as potential worker is expressed through graduate attributes: particular sets of employability skills developed by institutions and embedded into the curricula. Main argument: Graduate attributes are problematic, however, since they focus firmly on students' future identity as workers, rather than their current identity as students, and in doing so they offer a simplistic, and for some troubling, view of the purpose of universities. In this paper, we advocate a return to consideration of student identity. Conclusion: We suggest that, for students, building an awareness of their student identity as they progress through their higher education experience is not only important for student engagement at university, but is also an integral aspect of shaping their work-readiness as graduates. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)