



Asia-Europe Meeting
ASEM Education and Research Hub
for Lifelong Learning

Competence, Employability, and New Social Relations of Work and Learning

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competence = human ability?

- Is competence simply a human ability?
 - Traditionally, intelligence, scholastic aptitude, capacity building. . .
 - Recently, competencies, successful intelligence, practical intelligence, human resources, human assets, etc.
- What is the nature of competence? How can we understand it, develop it, manage it, and exchange it with social rewards?

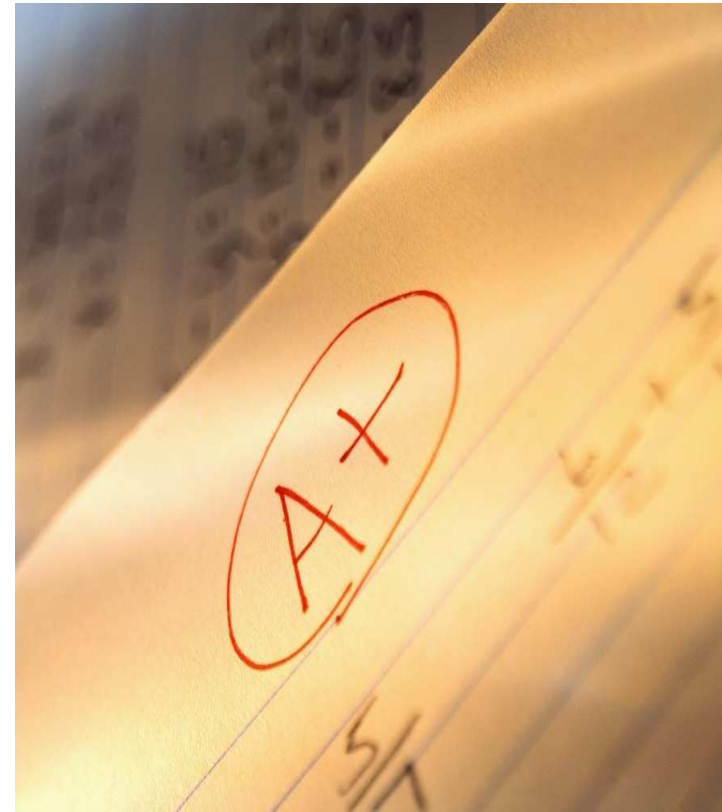
Competence is a socially-contextualized concept

- Employability
= Employ + Ability
- Two Settings
 - From . . . Academic achievement as a learner's ability in a school setting.
 - To . . . A major parameter of practical performance in corporate sector



Trojan Horse Double-edged Sword

- . . . it symbolized educational innovation in meeting the new mode of production of capital;
- . . . it took the role of a 'Trojan Horse,' dismantling the castle of the modern system of education



Broken Link

- However, “the irrelevance of knowledge-based education to occupational performance and the failure of educational qualifications to predict occupational **success**”(Raven, 2001, p. 253).



‘successful life’ . . .

- *American Psychologist* in 1973, McClelland asserted,

“traditional intelligent testing fails to predict the capabilities for **a successful life** and an **alternative way of conceptualizing and measuring the intelligence** was required (McClelland, 1973).



In a ‘particular context’ . . .

- “A competence is defined as the ability to **successfully** meet complex *demands in a particular context* through the mobilization of psychosocial prerequisites (including both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects). This represents a demand-oriented or functional approach to defining competencies (Rychen & Salganik, 2003, p. 43)” [*italics added*].



- What is 'successful Life' and how can it be defined?
- What is the 'particular con where the 'successful life' secured?



Knowledge, Capitalism, and Exchange value of human ability

- Knowledge capitalism, without exceptions, locates knowledge and human competence at the centre of the commodity exchange process (Burton-Jones, 1999).
- Human Ability expressed with Commodity exchange value, standardized, measurable, and exchangeable

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & \text{Coat} \\ 10 & \text{lb. of tea} \\ 40 & \text{lb. of coffee} \\ 1 & \text{Quarter of Corn} \\ 20 & \text{Yards of linen} \\ 1/2 & \text{Ton of Iron} \\ x & \text{Commodity A etc.} \end{bmatrix} = 2 \text{ ounces of gold}$$

Commodity. . .

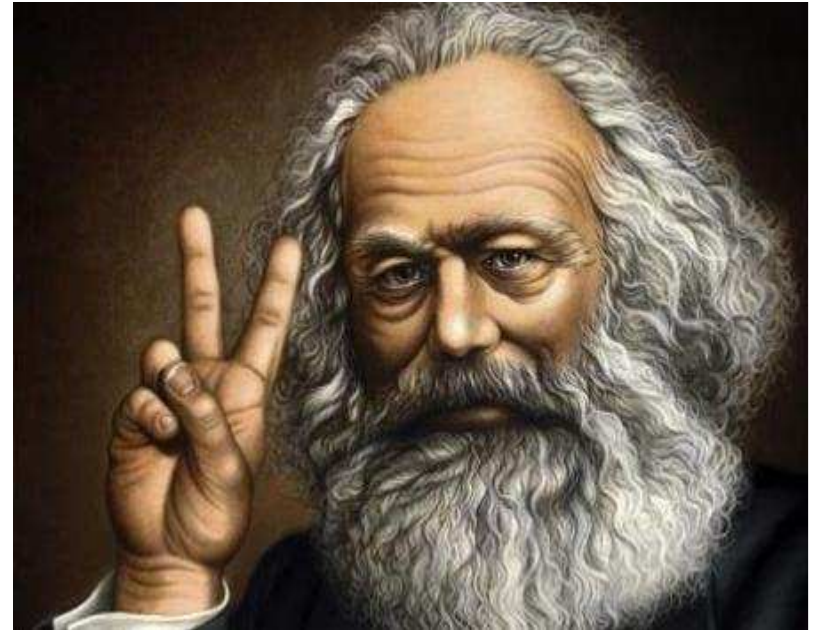
- Competence takes the form of “commodified human ability”.
- We call ‘commodities’ those things that can be traded, bought or sold in a capitalist system. The competence invented to represent the performance of capital accumulation, is put to the process of social exchange with salary, incentives, job status, and other informal rewards.



“I call my invention ‘The Wheel,’ but so far I’ve been unable to attract any venture capital.”

Social individual, social relationships

- Marx... “individuals are social individuals and are constituted or rather constitute themselves, as individuals of a particular sort through the social relationships in which they stand to other people.”
- The transformation of social properties onto material things is what Marx calls fetishism (Brewer, 1984, p. 26).



Measurable, specific, Manageable

- As Swanson a leading scholar in the theory of competence described, human competence is a “displayed characteristic of expertise, not the expertise itself, but very behaviour specific, definable, and measurable subsets within an individual's domain of expertise” (Swanson, 2001, p. 238).
- exactly the same characteristics of the 'commodity in general' in the capitalist market. The characteristics of competence as of the *measurable*, the *definable*, and the *manageable* are directly linked with monetary forms of marketable goods



Brain for Sale

- Competence is converted into not only a capability to produce commodities, but also a *commodity itself*.
- The nature of the commodity of one's own labor does not come from the work conditions or low payment, but from the **mechanism of the employment itself**, or so to speak, from the way one becomes an object of exchange in a labor market and acquires the 'nature of commodities of oneself'.



. . in Me... but not Part of Myself...

- . . . not to satisfy the need of the learner but for the purchaser of it:
- . . . a part of our experience, , part of *me*, and as such, it holds my own subjectivity;
- . . . alienated nature of commodities distorting one's experience, subjective identity, as a a form of capital.
- Qualifications in labor markets.



. . . for satisfying other's desire

- The action of selling and buying is mediated by an absolutely quantified monetary form, e.g. a quantified form of money, in which the natural characters of subjective and personal dimensions diminish.
- Only the standardized exchange value prevails in this process.
- In this sense, the competence seems still *part of me* but only an *isolated* part of my experience, estranging oneself and **waiting to be exchanged for other's desire.**
- It goes to be estranged, like it exists outside of oneself, independently, as something alien, or even confronting us.



Who am I ?

- what happens to our experience if we train ourselves with such 'commodified' competencies?
- How is the previous *self* transformed by this equipment of new competence, or this commoditized form of human ability?



- Most of the competence research focused on the 'outward' aspects of human life,
 - for example, what kind of human ability serves the needs of economic development and salary increases, etc.?
However, the research did not raise any serious questions about the *self*.
- More inward questions are necessary to ask about *my* experience,
 - for example, what kind of significant imbalances occur when certain kinds of competencies are secured in us?
what is the real meaning behind education when it seems to create a situation whereby learning experiences are equated with exchange values, where human experience is reduced to 'competencies', to be purchased by others, *especially in the knowledge capitalism?*

Work-Life Balance...

