Turning On The Careers Light

This is a crazy workshop and it explains (in case you were wondering) why I keep a purple feather boa and a Viking helmet in my office! I have run this workshop with arts and education students and it has terrific results every time. It is a wonderful workshop to run at the start of the academic year.

Perhaps the most important attribute for graduates is a willingness and ability to keep learning. That is an attitude that takes time to develop, but we can kick-start it with activities such as this one. The message for students is to think outside of the square, recognise that success means to be intrinsically satisfied with what you do, and to open every possible door by engaging with all of their courses, career counselling sessions, work experience opportunities, etc.

The following workshop was designed for music students, but it is easily adaptable for other disciplines. Please let me know if you try it.

Before the workshop, for which you need at least a couple of hours, students will have looked up the word ‘doctor’, ‘artist’, ‘engineer’ etc. in a dictionary. Use this as a springboard for an initial discussion. Music students will have looked up the word ‘musician’ in Grove’s Dictionary of Music and will have found that it isn’t there. We will have used that as a prompt to talk about how students would define a musician for themselves.
RESOURCES FOR THIS ACTIVITY

Archive box, bags or packs containing an assortment of the following items:

- Feather boa
- Viking helmet
- Sample contract
- First aid kit
- Blank business plan, business card, calculator, organiser
- Passport application form
- Grant application
- Marketing materials
- Telephone
- Teddy bear
- Apple
- Beginner book or teaching schedule
- Blank diploma/certificate
- Crystal ball
- Some music notes/tools
- Toy trumpet
- List of personal attributes
- A scribe sheet per group, with three columns headed Role/Activity, Skills, and Attributes (a template of which is attached)

I use present bags, paper shopping bags, shoe boxes, etc. to gather the materials. It is more interesting if each group gets to open a package and it keeps everything together for the next time.

You can use just about anything. I always throw in something new and it’s great to see what students make of it. However, some things are always there and have a particular purpose. For example, the feather boa represents the passion that drives a career; the Viking helmet represents strength; and the first aid kit represents the need to stay physically and mentally well, and also the need to plan one’s work to ensure that workload is manageable at all times, hence time management.
PROCESS

Hint: Groups of three students works best

1. Begin by asking students what they love to do. Give examples of your own likes and dislikes both within and outside of the profession, and students will join in with their own views.

I use this as both a class discussion and (later) as a personal reflection. Questions posed for reflection:
   a. What is a successful musician/engineer/architect/lawyer etc.?
   b. What skills are required to build and sustain this career?
   c. Where will they fit into this purview?

2. Activity to get everyone loosened up and thinking:

Students divide a piece of paper into 4 boxes and title the boxes: skills, attributes, likes, and dislikes. They write 3 things in each box and then put the paper aside. No one else needs to see it.

Hint: Whilst they are doing this, do it yourself.

3. A package is given to each group, which has assigned a scribe.

Some packages relate most to skills, some to attributes, and some to activities or roles. Some are obvious and some less so. The challenge is to think about how each item relates to their current and future lives, and write at least one word in each column of their scribe sheet.

After 3 minutes, the groups pass their package to the right. Continue until the groups have experienced several packages.

Hint: Suggest that students think about planning lives, rather than careers. This will encourage them to think broadly. Have a break after this activity.

4. The words from the scribe sheets are now transferred onto a flip chart/white board and everyone contributes and discusses what’s there, often with much hilarity. Here are some real examples of student responses:

Viking helmet: being a good actor; commitment; costume/set design; strength; dedication; resilience; vibrant personality; prostitution as a fall-back career (we didn’t discuss this one further...)

Teaching schedule: education; working well with others; confidence; patience; being loud; being able to explain what you know; making a living.

5. You can send the results to students individually, by email. They are tasked to consider each of the packages and the words we put against them, and to compare these to the words they wrote at Step 2. The reflective task, which doesn’t have to be shown to anyone else, is to develop these boxes in light of the workshop and activities. Most students will swap words around and add more. This is a useful moment to explain that they will be swapping and changing throughout their careers. They can also mark areas that need development, those at which they are strongest, and so on.

This, of course, leads to career action plans, with a follow up activity available at Career Action Plan.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role/Activity</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
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