

Education credentials and working lives

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Abstract

This paper is based on recent research into TAFE learning as experienced and expressed by students. The limitations of competency standards and national industry qualifications in particular will be addressed in this paper. Competency standards and national industry qualifications premised upon existing occupational categories are examined in terms of their capacity to equip TAFE graduates for changing employment patterns and social contexts.

As participation in post compulsory education and training continues to grow there is an emerging requirement to move beyond choices in TAFE learning between a narrowed vocational learning and a broadly based general education. Whilst these two approaches offer some choice, increased participation in post compulsory education in Australia calls for more diverse approaches to vocational and technical learning. The diversity of the student populations demands a diversification of approaches to, and choices in, TAFE learning.

Introduction

This paper examines contemporary TAFE learning through the experiences of three students. Frank, who as a school leaver completed an apprenticeship in fitting and turning, returned to TAFE to complete a diploma of liberal arts, Linda studied a hospitality management course as a means to more stable employment, and James completed a horticultural studies diploma as a way into a university course. These case studies demonstrate the temporal and pedagogical shifts in TAFE learning. Frank's experience reflects the breadth of learning TAFE can offer, while Linda and James, who both accessed TAFE very pragmatically, demonstrate the narrowing of TAFE as an incubator for industry driven and directed credentialism. It will be argued that despite major social and economic changes and a long list of education reforms to the Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, TAFE learning is narrowly conceptualised in policy terms by being organised around existing occupational categories and a credentialing function. While education for current forms of employment and the awarding of qualifications is important, it is my argument that education becomes really useful when it equips people to deal with known and unknown futures. Narrowing of TAFE education through a focus on existing occupations and an instrumentalist function of credentialing is directly attributed to the control by industry of VET curriculum.¹

Industry control of VET curricula is not only a policy sop to the short-termism of

¹ Industry involvement in TAFE in Australia has a long history that initially included artisan and crafts guilds. The reforms that commenced in the late 1980s were formalised bureaucratically through industry advisory organisations such as Industry Training Boards (ITB) and Industry Skills Councils (ISC) who were given the task of developing national industry qualifications (Training Packages). Industry, *per se*, includes the involvement of employer bodies such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), the Australian Industry Group (AiG), the Business Council of Australia (BCA) along with employee groups including the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and individual industrial union organisations.

industry powerbrokers but it is also based on a misrecognition of the social and economic arrangements which regulate employment. In a sense industry control of VET is based on a 'stability' that is illusory. Modern social arrangements are best conceptualised as fluid in Bauman's theory of liquid modernity.² It is part of my argument that the fluidity of contemporary social life demands recognition of the real differences that exist between actual **employment** and the required life **work** necessitated by liquid modern social arrangements. The three stories of the TAFE graduates contained in this paper illuminate both the breadth and depth of purposes for TAFE learning, especially at the diploma level. The students' experiences shed light on the possibilities for a reconceptualisation of vocational education and training to offer up a more expansive imaginary³ of TAFE learning. The recognition of the difference between employment and work will lead to a reframing of TAFE learning to include the relationship between VET and work, or more accurately, the role TAFE learning can play in constituting 'workable lives' (Pardy,2006).

Vocational education is internationally conceptualised as learning that is carried out for the purposes of employment. In Australia, TAFE organisations represent the largest provider system in the VET sector. TAFE Institutes are public providers and have their origins in the institutional merger of technical and further education programs. Trade training along with general and further education were formally institutionalised into TAFE organisations in Australia after the Kangan report of 1975. Prior to the Kangan report each state and territory had differing institutional and organisational arrangements for the provision of technical, trade and general and further education and training.

TAFE, as a publicly funded entity, has become a comprehensive national public provider network and a significant player in tertiary education in Australia. In 1975 Kangan identified the important educational purpose of TAFE as follows:

The concept of recurrent vocationally oriented education is especially relevant to technical and further education. It offers the best hope whereby the community can cope with *shifting job specifications resulting from technological and social change, and especially with new employment opportunities that open up.* (Kangan, 1975. My italics to emphasise this vision of TAFE learning.)

Recurrent education was the precursor of today's policy orientation of lifelong learning as an imperative for sustainable participation in societies subject to persistent change. Education in Australia has undergone reforms in response to global cultural and economic change. Participation in the post compulsory education in Australia has mushroomed to levels well above 80%.⁴ Education systems have been reshaped to be more responsive to the needs of industry, and education providers themselves have been transformed into businesses operating with market principles.

The stories of three TAFE students contained in this paper provide an opportunity to

² According to Bauman: 'Solid' modernity was an era of mutual engagement. 'Fluid' modernity is the epoch of disengagement, elusiveness, facile escape and hopeless chase. In 'liquid' modernity, it is the most elusive, those free to move without notice, who rule (Bauman, 2004, p.120).

³ Calhoun, G. (2002) uses the term imaginary to suggest that culture is an activity that is created not simply inherited. I am using the term in a similar manner to signal the centrality of students in creating TAFE learning.

⁴ Teese, R. & Poloesel, J. (2003) report on the increased economic significance of participation in post compulsory education including increased completion rates of years 11 & 12 and their equivalents which include TAFE certificates.

assess the impact of these changes. The discussion will be framed around what the users (students), or, in the reformed context, consumers of TAFE reported about their experiences. Their insights will enable a discussion about how the reforms that have reshaped TAFE learning *overstate the credentialing function by eclipsing the developmental experiences of learning*.

Competency based training, introduced in the 1980s as a foundational plank to VET curriculum, is discussed in terms of its dividends to students. In particular the role of industry parties in shaping the reform of VET and TAFE learning will be critically examined. This examination will be informed by the aspirations and experiences of three consumers of TAFE learning whose different stories provide an insight into what constitutes TAFE learning and its possibilities for enhancing participation in contemporary social *milieu* characterised by the unholy trinity of uncertainty, unsafety, and insecurity (Bauman, 2004 p.181).

Bauman's sociology of liquid modernity examines how:

these days patterns and configurations are no longer “given”, let alone “self-evident”; there are just too many of them, clashing with another and contradicting one another’s commandments (Bauman, 2004, p. 7).

This sociology of irregularity, randomness, and fragmentation attends to the proliferation of endlessly different social forms and patterns. For Bauman, the distinction between society and sociality is central to understanding "the processual modality of social reality...(it is) a category that refuses to take the structured character of the process for granted—which treats all found structures as emergent accomplishments (Bauman, 2004, p.35)." With regards to employment patterns, Bauman's theorisation examines the changes from a solid modernity associated with the arrangements of industrial production to the much more fluid and in-process liquid modernity of consumer software capitalism. Production has been replaced by consumption as the main social focus and organising logic in people's lives. Randomness is enacted through consumption. Identity is embroiled in choices and the tasks of performing the invention of the self through consumption. This shift from solid to liquid modernity has resulted in a considerably eroded public space, in that individual concerns colonise the public through market choices that precipitate a particularised sociality.

The title of this paper, *Education Credentials and Working Lives*, seeks to underline the increased emphasis of credentialism in contemporary education and employment arrangements. And further, *working lives*, signals a sociological reading of TAFE learning that asserts an individualisation thesis where individuals are required to bear much more responsibility for their own position in the labour market, the economy, culture and society. Individuals today bear responsibility for both their potential successes and inevitable failures. The conceptual distinction between employment and work separates out the industrial and economic dividends afforded through TAFE learning as reconfigured through VET policy reforms from the compulsory requirements for individuals to craft for themselves a 'workable life'.

TAFE, as Kangan envisaged, would enable individuals and communities to deal with shifting job specifications and social changes. The tensions of *learning for employment* and *learning about employment* are central to the definitions and curriculum practices that underpin and inform TAFE learning. Learning for employment involves achieving qualifications or licensing via certification processes

which secure the right to practice a particular skill or profession. On the other hand, learning about employment involves an inquiry into the forms, patterns and conditions of labour and employment in a more abstracted way. Both learning practices involve work that is essential to, and necessary for, individuals to acquire the knowledge and skills for a range of purposes that may at times include employment. According to Bauman:

To work in the world (as distinct from being ‘worked out and about’ by it) one needs to know how the world works (Bauman: 2004, p. 212)

Given TAFE learning’s connection to employment it is instructive to consider whether or not Kangan’s vision of enabling people and communities to deal with social changes and shifting patterns of employment is possible today. The restructuring of the Australian economy from the late 1970s has resulted in the rise of ‘non standard forms of employment’ (Watson. I, Buchanan. J, Campbell. I, Briggs. J., 2003). The standard ‘job for life’ scenario has fast become the exception rather than the rule. As an example of the changing economic and social contexts of employment, forms of employment and patterns of labour market participation have changed markedly to become more episodic and workplaces themselves have become more diverse. The increased participation of women, older people, people with disabilities and the culturally and linguistically diverse in paid employment, exemplifies the diversification of the contemporary workplace. The table below illustrates the shifts that characterise this rise in ‘non standard’ employment. A predominantly ‘non-standard’ model of employment can also be understood in terms of the ‘flexibility’ that is necessitated in the economic relations of globalisation.

Table One: Characteristics of Standard and Non standard forms of employment ⁵

Standard model of employment	Non-standard model of employment
Fulltime	Part-time, Casual, Contractor
Permanent ongoing	Fixed term, temporary, labour hire
Male	Gendered
Mono cultural	Culturally and linguistically diverse
Secure	Risky and uncertain

In view of these changes to forms and patterns of employment, I will now examine the ways in which TAFE learning responds to, and prepares people to deal with these changes.

Frank’s experiences of TAFE learning ranges over a twenty year period that involved two excursions into TAFE. His experiences encapsulate the institutionalisation of both manual and mental education in TAFE. Frank completed an apprenticeship in the early 1980s in fitting and turning and then returned to TAFE after being retrenched in the late 1990s to undertake a diploma of liberal arts.

As part of his indenture as an apprentice fitter and turner Frank’s employment in a metals manufacturing factory included a day a week of learning at TAFE. Frank described his TAFE learning during his apprenticeship as very connected to employment:

It was in a working environment. If you came late, you’d get docked; that kind of

⁵This table was produced using the binary concepts of standard and non standard forms of employment contained in Watson et al (2003).

stuff. They were very strict. They took no nonsense. Absolutely no nonsense. For instance, if you didn't want to learn, they'd just tell you to leave. And they'd get in touch with your employer, who would then take action – disciplinary action. (Frank)

Frank describes a regimented lock step approach to his trade training at TAFE connected to workplace expectations and practices. Through his apprenticeship Frank developed tool making and machining skills that gave him more choices in tasks and duties on the shop floor in the factory. Frank was clear about how the division of labour in the factory was organised and the benefits of getting trade certification:

The apprentices always seemed to get the better positions in the factory. One of the general managers was an apprentice, so the road we were lead to believe was open. (Frank)

The history of trade and apprenticeship training has relied on the passing on and development of trade skills to ensure the provision of trades and crafts men and women to industry. The relationship between an apprentice and an employer today is more individualised replacing a bygone era of more collectivist relationships between masters and apprentices in the earlier periods of industrialisation. The recent economic practice of privatisation and deregulation has resulted in the privileging of increasing bottom line profits by reducing costs through the abolition of, or outsourcing of, systems maintenance processes and skills training. No longer do the now privatised essential services and utilities such as the State Electricity Commission (SEC), the Melbourne Metropolitan Boards of Work (MMBW) or Telstra (formerly Telecom) recruit and develop large cohorts of trades' people.

Trade skills and trade labour have historically been associated with 'blue collar workers' and the so-called heavy and manual labour industries. According to Frank's account, such associations were reproduced in the organisation of the trade training. In describing these arrangements, Frank evokes an atmosphere of the divisions in mental and manual labour in his days at TAFE during his apprenticeship:

So, in the mornings (we'd start at 8.00 o'clock) we used to be in the upper levels doing theory, and then in the afternoons we'd go downstairs (into the basement) where all the machinery used to be – under the foundations – and we'd spend the rest of the afternoon there.

'Upstairs' involved theoretical study in engineering drawings, minerals and heat treatment processes, mechanical indicators, and trigonometry. Down in the basement on the machines amongst the 'foundations' the apprentices developed skills in working with vertical spindling machines, optical projectors, and surface grinding machines, external and internal grinding machines and linear measuring instruments and standards. Developing the capacities to operate and drive these machines along with understanding the operating principles and knowledge that 'engineered' them was the content of Frank's trade education. Working on and operating the machines was undertaken at TAFE and in the workplace. Frank's apprenticeship involved the development of 'know how' together with an insight and understanding of the 'know why'.

Although apprenticeships in fitting and turning continue today the arrangements of the learning has been recalibrated through VET reforms that have resulted in national industry qualification frameworks. These frameworks include qualifications that are premised on *industry determined units of competency*. Unlike a curriculum that lists recommended and prescribed content, national industry qualifications are made up of

units of competency that are assessment standards. The national industry qualification is an 'outcome' model in contrast to curricula which was an input model.

Industry restructuring in the 1990s saw Frank's employment as a fitter and turner become less secure and his prospects more uncertain as a result of global economic pressures. Manufacturing in Australia was restructured through a shift away from protectionism leading to tariff reductions. Since the 1990s the service industry has outpaced manufacturing as the fastest growing sector in the Australian economy. The road that Frank felt was 'open' actually began closing down for trades' employees. It was in this context that Frank decided to take up a redundancy offer. Three months after taking a voluntary redundancy Frank made a decision to pursue further education. Frank was motivated in his learning choice by relationships he encountered in the staff part of the factory. In choosing to pursue liberal arts at TAFE after seeing an advertisement Frank sought out learning he reckoned would provide him with a more individualised dividend:

I was just floating around. And, in the meantime, I found an advertisement in the newspaper to do Liberal Arts at Wakefield TAFE.

Why liberal arts

Because I realised when I was at work that there were people that were... there were people really smart through education. Does that make sense?

Yes.

It's not that they were any brighter than anybody else, they just seemed to have a lot more knowledge about the world, and why things were happening.

Because I used to be able to mix with lots of different people while I was in the staff side of work. The factory at work is really the shop floor on this side, a great big firewall down the middle, and on this side all the staff offices. The head engineer at our work, the guy I used to spend a lot of time with, was from England, and he just seemed so worldly, and I presumed an education. And the other engineer was from Oxford in England. I don't know. And then with the marketers that I used to associate with. They just seemed to be. There was a difference. You could tell the educated people and the people that weren't educated. And because I came from the shop floor, it was really pronounced.

General adult education plays an important role in the gamut of TAFE learning. The combination of technical and craft training with general adult education involves a settlement between pedagogic modalities that precipitates a set of learning options for *skills acquisition* and the *pursuit of knowledge*. Frank's recognition, however vague, of 'educated people' can be understood as a broader recognition of difference without threat. When Kangan developed the report that resulted in TAFE becoming an important 'national system' he argued that:

Although society is much more than a collection of individuals, its level of sophistication can be no higher than the capacity—and of course, the willingness—of individuals to contribute collectively. This is what education of our time should be about—increasing the collective capacity of individuals to contribute to the good of society—their own good. (Kangan, 1979, p.9.)

Adult education concerned with the development of the self was readily and widely understood in terms of the 'collective good'. But the social changes and economic restructuring associated with globalisation changed all that. While the craft origins of TAFE learning persist they have now been sieved through the national industry qualifications provided by training organisations (including TAFE) that operate through 'customer choice' and 'users pay'. The collective good or even the public good

of education has been hollowed out and reduced somewhat by a commerce in credentials that renorms education including TAFE as a 'positional good'.⁶ Frank's pursuit of a liberal arts education speaks of learning for the purposes of building a workable life for himself:

I never really had what you would call an education, because it was always in engineering, and automotive, and all that kind of stuff at Secondary Tech.⁷

Why did you do liberal arts?

Just to become more knowledgeable. I had great difficulty in writing, and I wanted to learn how to write better. And from writing better you speak better.

After completing his diploma studies in liberal arts Frank went to university and completed a social sciences degree with honours. Frank is not currently in full time employment but divides his time between voluntary work and family support activities. He is currently a volunteer in a community environmental and energy park, where he is building and maintaining a permaculture garden. In addition to this, he provides support to his elderly mother, taking her to doctors' appointments among other things and advocating for her in social security matters. Frank aspires to use his engineering trade certificate along with his social sciences degree in an educational or community development context on a part time basis so that he can continue his other activities.

Frank's TAFE learning traversed both trade and general adult education while Linda's and James's experiences of TAFE learning involve a purely vocational credentialism. Linda and James sought out qualifications in distinct vocational fields. Their experiences will be discussed by outlining the policy shift from a learning based on curricula to national industry qualifications. The difference in the two constructs will be illustrated through two tables that contrast the differences in the models that now underpin much of TAFE learning.

Linda approached TAFE learning pragmatically, she wanted recognition of her skills and abilities in the hospitality field. Having been employed in hospitality for over ten years, Linda undertook diploma studies to enhance her employment prospects:

Every time I left I had to start at the bottom again. And I didn't want to start at the bottom again. So, I figured, if I went to school, got my diploma in hospitality management, I wouldn't have to start at the bottom.

The relationship between qualifications, the labour market and economic position abound in Linda's motivation to undertake TAFE learning. With a goal in mind, to achieve a qualification in hospitality, Linda studied fulltime for two years. In reflecting on her TAFE learning Linda identified a lack of content and an overemphasis of simple or routine activities, such as how to make coffee. When asked what she learnt at TAFE she replied:

Simple little things like, this is how you make a coffee. And it's like, oh, my gosh. And then you get a diagram, step by step diagram. Coloured pictures, pictures of how to make an actual coffee. It's like, yeah, okay. To me that was silly, because the majority of people like coffee so they know exactly what they're looking at, and dah, dah, dah. Little things like that I just thought.

6 Brown, P. (2003) argues that education is best understood as a positional good.

7 Frank's secondary schooling took place at a Secondary Technical college. Secondary technical colleges were closed as part of the reforms that saw the introduced of broader curriculum choices in the Victorian Certificate of education (VCE).

How did that make you feel?

How did it make me feel? I thought it was funny. At the time I thought it was funny. I just thought it wasn't necessary. Hand out a booklet: this is a coffee machine. Fair enough, show people ... pull it apart, put it back together, clean it, but not how to make a coffee

For Linda, her TAFE learning is summed up as 'getting that piece of paper'. Her experience was not entirely satisfactory but she is nonetheless practical about it. Linda's TAFE learning brings to the fore the role of qualifications as a *raison d'etre* of education:

What it really gave me was a piece of paper – that's all I really wanted – was that piece paper to say, hey, I've done it. I know what I'm doing. Thank you very much. And that's all I wanted because the majority of it, like I said, the practical stuff, I already knew anyway. I already had experience in it.

(Linda)

Gaining a national industry qualification for Linda as an end in itself has limited use and exchange value in supporting employment mobility both within and outside hospitality. Not long after completing her diploma, Linda left the hospitality field, gaining employment in an importing and exporting company. Her decision to leave hospitality was directly connected to employment patterns in hospitality. Linda was employed in the hospitality field for over ten years but found the uncertainty too much. Linda understood that, even with her qualification, starting at the bottom was inevitable. In discussing the casual nature of the employment and effects of labour hire companies, such as 'the agency', Linda accurately identified the barriers to her own career progression:

So your course did it actually give you a full-time job, somehow?

No (laughter).

Why not?

Because I went through an agency. Because I was working for an agency, and I had just started my first year, I wasn't going to go anywhere; I knew that. Agencies are only for a short time, not a long time. They don't look for permanent staff, as in to go up the ranks sort of thing – unless you get into a company environment, where an agency sends you to like Town casino, and you can work your way up through there – through those ranks. But Town's pretty... you don't go to Town because you do start at the bottom.

What do you think that course has given you? How have you been able to use your qualification?

I haven't used it at all.

Was the diploma important then?

No. The diploma didn't mean anything. Diplomas mean nothing; nobody cared. It was just the sort of thing that if you can work we love you. And I could work – I knew what I was doing.

So you haven't used this qualification?

No, I haven't. And see, I left hospitality last year. I had enough.

Linda's TAFE learning experience, understood through the rubric of the national industry qualification, did not provide her with the desired employment outcomes she was seeking. The logics of industry and of its interaction with education systems and learning, differ immensely. In moving on from hospitality to importing and exporting, Linda's national industry qualification in hospitality management has little value or recognition. The narrowly defined focus of national industry qualifications does not

bode well for individuals operating in a world of non-standard forms of employment where the patterns of mobility are more likely to be lateral than vertical.

Linda's diploma, a national industry qualification, is couched in job related tasks and duties. Table two illustrates how the content of the superseded *curriculum based program* contained broadly based business and accounting knowledge and principles in contrast to the competency standards of the national industry qualification. Such broadly based course content may have more fully equipped Linda, in making a lateral shift in her employment situation. Clearly broadly based business principles, knowledge such as legal studies and industrial relations, together with accounting processes, have application and recognition across industry contexts and employment sites. The national industry qualification atomises TAFE learning by breaking it down into detailed occupationally bound routines and tasks.

Table Two: Comparison of National Industry Training Package qualification in hospitality with superseded Curriculum course in hospitality

National industry Training Package qualification Diploma of Hospitality Management Operations	Superseded state accredited curriculum based course HHP23 Diploma of Hospitality (Hospitality Management)
Work with colleagues and customers	Advanced accounting practices
Work in a socially diverse environment	Introduction to hospitality management
Follow health, safety and security procedures	Legal studies
Develop and update hospitality industry knowledge	Structured industry placement
Follow workplace hygiene procedures	Staff organisations
Communicate on the telephone	Communication and leadership
Promote products and services to customers	Industrial relations
Deal with conflict situations	Safety and security
Coach others in job skills	Hospitality sales and marketing
Receive and store stock	Inventory purchasing budgets and control
Control and order stock	Computing
Monitor work operations	Food nutrition
Implement workplace health, safety and security procedures	Multi outlet operations
Lead and manage people	Language and culture
Interpret financial information	Club reception
Develop and implement operational plans	Advanced operations of gaming machines
Establish and maintain safe and secure workplaces	
Roster staff	
Manage quality customer service	
Manage finances within budget	
Prepare and monitor budgets	

James, in contrast to Linda, was seeking a qualification for a career change. James undertook TAFE studies in horticulture.

What did you expect from TAFE?

I expected a really pragmatic approach; I just thought I would be taught how to perform a trade, or something – I'm not really sure. I think I was quite naive about education. I expected the standard to be higher. I expected more from TAFE than it actually provided me, I think.

So were you seeking a trade, what were you looking to get out of TAFE?

I wanted a practical qualification, that I could translate into cash; into work. And I

thought a qualification would provide that.

For James, a qualification was being acquired to achieve knowledge, skills and credibility in horticulture. James expected more than what he got from his TAFE learning.

I was surprised at how low industry had set its standard. Because they trained me to that level, but I was hoping to be at a level above that. All I knew was that this was a field I wanted to go into and TAFE was a way into it.

James views TAFE as ‘a way into’ his chosen field. Changes to the organisation and patterns of employment have seen an increase in the correlative relationship between qualifications and employment. The demise of the standard ‘job for life’ scenario further cements the relationship between qualifications and employment. James used his diploma qualification in horticulture to secure a place in a graduate diploma in landscape architecture at a local university. James believed that a university credential would hold more weight in the employment he was seeking:

The diploma in horticulture has got me into Horticulture College for a Grad. Dip. You need a degree in any field other than Horticulture, and some horticultural experience. Because I’ve got a diploma of horticulture – I’m in. That’s all I need to do to fulfil the criteria.

TAFE learning for James, similarly to Linda, involved obtaining a national industry qualification. In table three the comparison of the two modes of organising TAFE learning reveals the performative nature of the qualification in comparison to the curriculum. They are constructed using different language and the grammar of TAFE learning in the national industry qualification construct in emphasising the occupation is ahistorical and enacts fixity. James expressed dismay at the discrepancy of his TAFE learning from the academic transcript he received

At the time like you’re doing classes called Botany, or Soils, but then your results come out printed with these bizarre titles that had no relation apparently to you’re looking for, what I got for Botany, and it’s got these managing plants, blah, blah, blah, blah, with these big long numbers.

The national industry qualification format evacuates from TAFE learning any acknowledgement of applied disciplinary knowledge. The sciences of soil and botany gives way to performative industry standards such as ‘manage weed, pest and disease infestations.’ These standards are explicitly assessment-focused outcome standards, whereas students in the classroom or out in the field, experience TAFE learning through collective engagement with information, knowledge and skills. The industry standards in a competency format contrast with the former segments of learning that were part of the superseded curriculum to reveal the replacement of curriculum with qualifications frameworks.

Table Three: Comparison of National Industry Training Package qualification in horticulture with superseded Curriculum course in horticulture

National Industry Training Package Qualification Diploma of Horticulture (Parks & Gardens) RTF 50603	Superseded State accredited curriculum based course 2501AAA Diploma of Horticulture (Landscape)
Meet Workplace health and safety requirements.	Plant materials
Use Hazardous Substances Safely	Applied Botany
Act in an Emergency	Maintenance programming
Recommend Plants, Products and Treatments.	Plant Health
Provide Specialist Advice on Plants, Products and Treatments.	Advanced Turf Preparation

Manage Weed, Pest and Disease Infestations.	Mowing Programs
Develop and Integrated Pest Management Program	Machinery maintenance Supervision
Plan Turf Establishment	Sales Supervision
Plan Garden Restoration Works	Tree Assessment and Treatment
Develop a Plant Nutrition Program.	Work team Communication
Prepare Estimates, Quotes and Tenders.	
Design Irrigation, Drainage and Water Treatment Systems	
Collect and Manage Data	
Prepare reports	

When industry was invited to participate in VET reform there was much talk about making TAFE learning more relevant providing learning applicable to the authentic employment contexts. The assumption in this thinking was that TAFE learning prior to national industry qualifications didn't do this. Further, national industry qualifications have positioned teachers as mere implementers of industry pronouncements about what are relevant knowledge and skills. Knowledge and skills for employment and work contexts have always informed the contexts of TAFE learning. Actually there is really no such thing as context-free learning.

Conclusion

The contexts in which the three students discussed here find themselves lead them to pursue TAFE learning as a strategy to mitigate uncertainty and insecurity. The three students' stories reveal a desire to steer their life prospects in a direction that builds a navigational capability to provide for mobility in employment and in life generally. A credential in itself, or a national industry qualification based on units of competency is based on stasis or fixity and therefore enacts a closure and an impediment to mobility.

It can be reasonably argued that TAFE learning should be understood and developed beyond competency for employment to become more connected to individual needs in liquid modern social arrangements. As recently suggested by McWilliam (2005), education for liquid modern arrangements would benefit from relations where the teacher and student become co-creators of value. "(C)o-creating value would see the teacher and the student mutually involved in assembling and disassembling cultural products (McWilliam (2005), p.5)". Such a co-creation would occur in a context mindful of the impact of globalisation on employment and the work required by individuals, communities and industry to attain buoyancy in fluid socialities. The increasing diversity of people accessing TAFE learning suggests that they are deploying TAFE learning in order build a workable life and position themselves differently in a social *milieu* where employment itself has become 'non-standard'. This is not a local operational issue confined to the relations between the teacher and student but a broader issue of educational concern and development. Occupations are not stable and individuals' encounters with employment bear this out. The three people discussed in this paper have not secured standard employment and now craft their lives through a combination of non standard employment and life work. A TAFE learning that enables (re)positioning and mobility through the development of skills and knowledge can support individual, social and industrial adjustment for unknown futures. It is clear that 'national industry qualifications' fall short of this mission. A TAFE learning that moves beyond a narrow credentialism to be more engaged with a craft learning that includes employability skills, enterprise education and a general education will move some way to assuring the mobility now needed in liquid modern socialities.

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