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Questions for Vocational Training in Hospitality and Tourism in Australia

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Abstract

This paper outlines some of the dilemmas of turning graduates from vocational education and training courses into industry ready employees. It raises a number of questions which are ripe for action research with the context of the Boyer model of scholarship.

Keywords: Vocational Education and Training, Higher Education, Action Research, Boyer Model of Scholarship, Hospitality and Tourism Industries, Industry Training Packages.

Introduction

As humans we do not always long to be great or incredible, but we all have a constant longing to feel a sense of familiarity, a need to have that feeling of being comfortable whether it be at work or in a social setting, to be of real worth in our professional work. For us in the field of education, unfortunately that is not a luxury we can



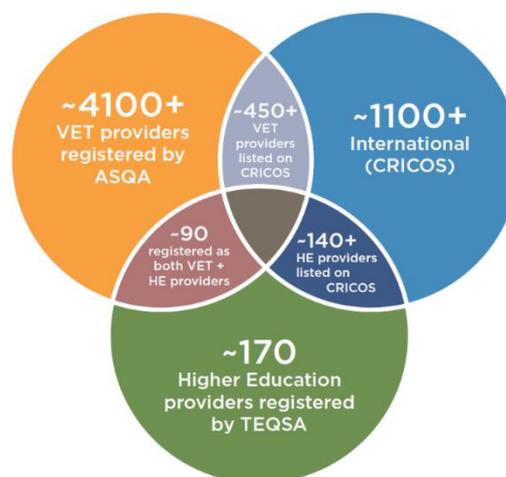
Figure 1: Structure of a small vocational college

afford. "Sometimes the smallest change can deliver the greatest sense of freedom and create the power to accomplish the unthinkable" all "easily achievable by simply allowing and opening ourselves to move beyond the stencils of fixed repetitive behavioural processes". Where do we inject changes for maximum fruition?

Quandaries

Yes, we can and we should cling to certain ideologies or andragogy that form the building blocks, the foundation for lifelong learning. But for the most part; change is our friend: we should embrace it, go on a journey with it and come to the realisation that in today's ever changing world "change is the only constant" [1]. The ability to move with it and embrace it has been humanity's greatest asset and has kept us constantly at the forefront of civilisation and at the brink of unimaginable possibilities.

We, as an 'education industry', can be afraid and scared to move away from that blanket of familiarity. We all talk about it, everyone involved knows it, we need it to stay current, we need it to stay relevant, we have to do it to be at the forefront. It is something which will take time, it will take perseverance and practice but will eventually help us give our students a lifetime of learning and set them on the right path for success. In turn equipping and reading the nation on the right trajectory for growth across multiple sectors. So what are the major issues facing our nation and how do we start to address these from a vocational education space? What are the shortfalls? How do we start to tackle them? Is it the international student body to blame, or is it their overall lack of interest (with an end aim of securing a ticket to Australia the only motivation)? Does the blame lie within our educational system? Is our system outdated and irrelevant? Has it been adapted and changed to reflect the needs of the Vocational Education and Training 'industry' today? [2]



These, plus numerous others, are all very pertinent questions that need being answered even if the answer itself scares us and puts us face to face with our worst night mare – Change!!! (Or as we like to put it: Adapting to stay current) [3]. And in an increasingly complex environment: In 2013 the Australian tertiary education landscape looked like Figure 2 [4] and it is not getting any simpler!

Figure 2: Australian Tertiary Education in 2013

To take one example that you hear most people talking about is the urgency and overwhelming need to address key issues facing the Australian Hospitality Industry - with a key focus on being able to attract and retain quality staff. Most of the discussion pertinent to this is coming from industry in general and higher education [5]; most – but not all [6]. Bennett and Lemoine [7] refer to VUCA:

- Volatility,
- Uncertainty
- Complexity,
- Ambiguity.

In the same vein, Trilling and Fadel [8] list in Figure 3 the so-called "soft skills" which can only be acquired in context.

Figure 3: Life skills

Learning and Innovation Skills:	Digital Literacy Skills	Career and Life Skills:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creativity and Innovation ○ Critical Thinking and Problem Solving ○ Communication and Collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information Literacy ○ Media ○ Literacy ○ ICT Literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Flexibility and Adaptability ○ Initiative and Self-Direction ○ Social and Cross-Cultural Skills ○ Productivity and Accountability ○ Leadership and Responsibility

Questions and Issues

There is an apparent shortage and lack of quality commercial chefs/ cooks in the industry today. The better the answer. The better the world works" [9] This can be transferred back to a number of different reasons and causes, the main ones being:

1. An apparent shortage of knowledge and fundamental know-how (basic building blocks), among the current crop of commercial cooks going through the system.
2. Why is there a shortfall? what is causing it? Is it predominantly due to the method of teaching and the way in which knowledge is being imparted from trainer to learner.
3. The question begging an answer, is the trainer not informed enough? or qualified enough to provide a quality education? This most likely may or may not be the case, but in most instances the fact is that they are governed too strictly by a set of rules or training packages that govern how and what should be taught. Which in most instances are out of date and not in touch with what the industry is currently looking for. The training packages are also most commonly created by academics or government bodies that are run by red tape, and they are more about assessment than training. Whereas in fact they should be created in consultation or with people who are currently involved in the industry or have been previously heavily involved in the industry.
4. For most facilitators / trainers this is also just a job or a means to an end, a lot of industry chefs that have been disgruntled by low wages, hard conditions and now do this as their only alternative to using the skills they have to gain paid employment.
5. In a lot of cases it is also the learner who is to blame due to lack of engagement, lack of motivation and an overall lack or loss of interest. Which in turn does not help with the trainers dis-engagement or lack of motivation to help push the learner.
6. The learner is disengaged due to the fact that the consensus in the industry is the actual course itself is only a means to an end for e.g.: in the case of a country like Australia the course is only a stepping stone (cheapest way) to get your residency into the country or your ticket to stay in the country.
7. In most cases it is common knowledge that you can actually learn a whole lot more by actually working in the industry as compared to going to chef school, but the issue is that when you get to industry you have a false expectation of salary requirements, skill level or your position in the kitchen hierarchy/ brigade based on an apparent knowledge you think you have gained at culinary school.

8. As a learner or chef that has just qualified, when you soon realise that there is a massive disparity in between what you learnt and what the industry “real world” expects from you, you feel cheated and even more disgruntled with the system.

9. In the real world there is no time to learn “on the job” as everything comes down to the \$ and no one has the time or patience to teach you (99% of the time).

10. WHY? Because they say you’ve just finished culinary school and are recently qualified – “so shouldn’t you know this stuff already”? So as an industry, in this instance the Hospitality and Tourism industry, that is food, operated and fuelled by the quality of talent and future hospitality heroes that we as educators qualify and put through the Vocational Education and Training sector as being competent. What is our responsibility, what is our degree of accountability?

Conclusions

How do we make sure that there is quality in our output (students) and that this is valued more over the quantity of output - in this instance skilled hospitality workers?

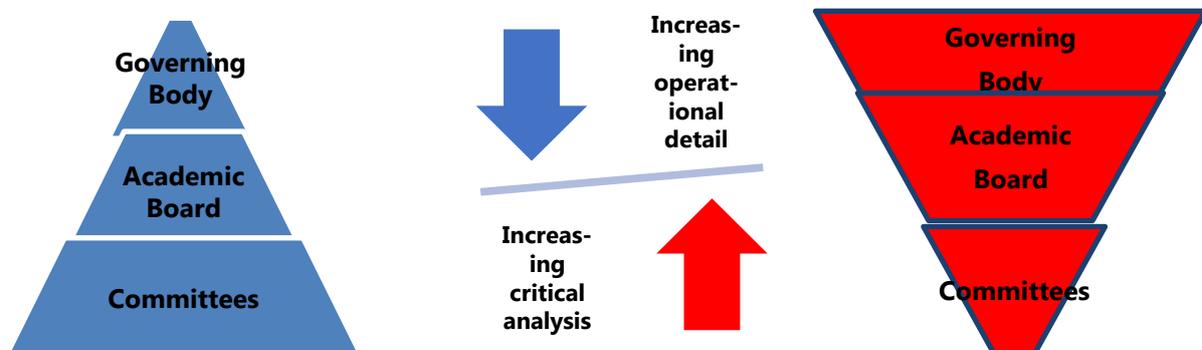
Should governing bodies that regulate and monitor the VET sector be re-assessing their game-plan to focus on desired outcomes rather than just achieving targeted outcomes. What is the difference between desired and targeted outcomes and what ‘changes’ need to happen to achieve this?

Those who design “training packages” do not always have current relevant industry experience, nor do they always have instructional experience, so that such packages frequently turn out to be more about “assessment” than “training”

The problem is exacerbated because

- Internally the governing bodies of the training institution must balance the operational costs with the critical appraisals of the training, without micro-managing (Figure 4), and
- externally the training institution must conform to the compliance requirements of government regulators, who are often more concerned with the paper work than what happens in the classrooms.

Figure 4: Balancing the institutional decision making



Most importantly what are we as the guiding light, the trainers, the educators or the so called “custodians of hospitality generations to follow” going to do, to help address and effect change in an industry that we passionately love and have spent many years building up. Are we going to let the future be dictated and run by a set of outdated guidelines that bear no semblance to current industry needs or wants, or are we going to stand up and speak out for a crippled industry, for no fault of its own, that funnily enough according to most major polls employees and generates a significant chunk of this great lands incoming and outgoing revenue streams.

It is time for us ‘the custodians’ to take control of the situation, and aggressively vocalise the change required and turn it back around giving it its rightful spot as an industry that showcases the best of everything. An industry with a proven track record both locally and internationally, an industry with limitless potential where the ‘sky is the limit’ has and never will be a figure of speech. While this paper has not followed the traditional *pro forma* of the conventional research paper, it anticipates much action research which is actually within the intersection of Boyer’s four categories of scholarly activity [9].

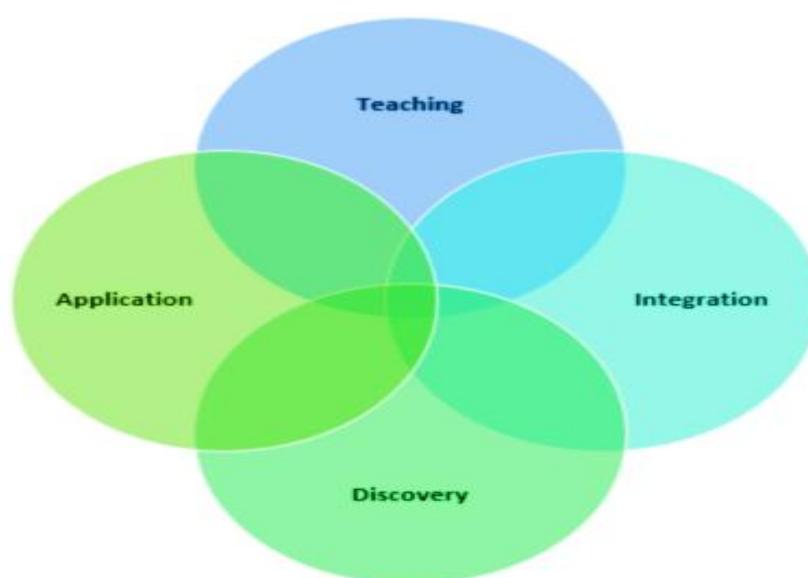


Figure 4: Boyer’s Model of Scholarship in Action Research

Data availability

The data which have been cited in this paper are readily available with bibliographic searches of the public documents in the reference section of the paper.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to report.

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