

CREDENTIALS - WHAT ARE THEY GOOD FOR?

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This 2019 issue of *Scope: Learning and Teaching* focuses on the theme of Credentials: people, products, processes. In selecting this theme, we were particularly interested in pieces that addressed the challenges and opportunities presented by our changing educational landscape, and how this in turn informs contemporary understandings of credentials and credentialing practices.

But what are credentials? What function do they perform? We would argue that, where once credentialing functioned as a somewhat abstract formalisation of learning (knowledge and capabilities, competencies and dispositions) represented by a 'qualification', today credentialing as an attestation and recognition of learning can be seen as a "currency of opportunity" *mediating* the relationship between education and the workplace (Brown and Souto-Otero, 2018, p.1).

Indeed, educational providers/institutions and business, industry and professional bodies increasingly consult and collaborate on the shape of curricula in order to effect a tighter connection between educational outcomes and the skills, knowledge, and capabilities that the dynamic contemporary workplace requires. As the contributors to this issue demonstrate, this not only shifts our understanding of what credentials *are* but also what they *do*, and how changes in the conception of credentialing learning is informing learning and teaching practice.

Though not envisaged as such when the theme was decided upon, the contributions to this edition are in direct conversation with recent policy statements regarding the Reform of Vocational Education (ROVE) in New Zealand which proclaim that:

The Government will now take its first steps to create a strong, unified, sustainable system for all vocational education that is fit for the future of work and delivers the skills that learners, employers and communities need to thrive.

(Tertiary Education Commission, 2019)

While it is anticipated that the ROVE will bring much needed streamlining and coherence to the sector; as a casual observer following these recent pronouncements in the media, you would be forgiven for wondering what has happened to vocational education in New Zealand.

In the opening article of this issue, Oonagh McGirr presents the range of educational innovations in train at Otago Polytechnic in: teacher professional development, work-based learning and practice via Capable NZ, *EduBit* micro-credentials, and the *i am capable* learner capability development platform. As McGirr points out, these are the very innovations that provide the flexibility and workplace integration and learning recognition that that the Education minister argues is vital in securing economic and social prosperity.

This call for flexibility and integration into workplace practices is reflected in the increasing demand for micro-credentials which are quietly obliging higher education institutions to rethink the value of traditional assessment and credentialing practices and, indeed, how these practices are enacted. Andy Kilsby and Claire Goode elaborate

in their paper on Otago Polytechnic's *EduBits* initiative, how micro-credentials allow learners to demonstrate smaller or specific elements of learning, skills, knowledge accomplishments and achievements than are attested by larger programmes of learning. Kilsby and Goode note that learners may already possess skills and they can have these validated and quality-assured via the *EduBit* platform thus "aligning learning and credentialing with real world scenarios."

Equally important is the shift (underway for some time) in expectations of graduate capabilities. Today, employers take for granted that higher education institutions equip students with the appropriate content knowledge and skills in their respective specialisations as attested by their exiting qualifications. What they no longer take for granted is that graduates come equipped with a broad set of employability skills – well developed communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving abilities.

Amber Patterson sets out in her brief piece how Otago Polytechnic is responding to the challenge of the question *How do we create New Zealand's most employable graduates?* where she describes the *i am capable* innovation at Otago Polytechnic, currently being rolled out at the Dunedin campus. Research with over 160 local employers and 50 staff members representing 15 disciplines programmes, identified key employability skills which were mapped against current programme curricula. This has not only extended the curriculum-industry partnerships but has also led to the development of a customizable, online platform which acts as a dynamic e-portfolio and allows learners to upload and curate evidence of capabilities and showcase these to potential employers.

As Richard Mitchell and Adrian Woodhouse illustrate in their contribution, this enhanced focus on work readiness has already transformed teaching practice. Semi-fictional learner vignettes are used to illustrate two very different approaches to culinary arts pedagogy as 'experienced' by two learners seeking to become qualified culinary professionals. One experience is via a traditional master-apprentice mode, the other is through a design-led approach. As they suggest, not only does the design-led approach afford learners more agency, it also builds the required critical and creative problem solving skills that allow learners to become "liberated from the shackles of the *worker* to become the *professional* that the industry has called for decades."

The final article for this issue also focuses on teaching practice. David Woodward, Bronwyn Hegarty and colleagues (Elise Allen, Shannon Booth, Sarah Redfearn, Sarah Smith, Karen Wakelin, Jayne Webster) thoughtfully examine the process of developing a teaching philosophy as a key outcome of the Graduate Diploma of Tertiary Education. They explain how this drives their respective teaching practices and encourages a deep engagement with individual and shared assumptions, beliefs and values integral to both teaching practice and professional identity, and conclude by arguing for the importance of credentialing teacher professional development to recognise and acknowledge the learning journeys of novice and experienced teachers alike.

REFERENCES

- Brown, P., & Souto-Otero, M. (2018). The end of the credential society? An analysis of the relationship between education and the labour market using big data. *Journal of Education Policy*, DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2018.1549752
- Tertiary Education Commission. (2019). *Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE)*. Retrieved from <https://www.tec.govt.nz/rove/reform-of-vocational-education/>