Science and Mathematics Education Centre

Australian VET: A Case of Missing Competence

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

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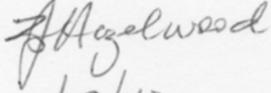
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Acknowledgments

Thanks are owed principally to Dr Roya Pugh for her guidance on how my lived experiences over decades of employment and personal learning might be written in a way that was meaningful to those operating both inside and outside the Vocational Education and Training (VET) education sector. Our many laughs as she continued her positive support to curtail what were my own conjectures into a correct epistemology, and my "Lesley-isms," into improved writing skills, will always be fondly remembered.

The opportunity to spend many Saturdays with Roya and the insightful Dr Bevis Yaxley and the Tasmanian *aPeiron* group of fellow thesis writers, pondering voices, philosophy and other oblique aspects of good education and good writing, is a unique privilege I will continue as often as I can to gain further knowledge and wisdom from the rich tapestry I now see educational enquiry provides. Knowing I had the professional and welcome support afforded by Professor Barry Fraser and the approachable Curtin University Science and Mathematics Education Centre staff, when needed, has been comforting too.

In pursuing this project over many years, the benefit from interactions with people associated with many different governing bodies, my co-trainers and friends is immeasurable. The term "colleagues" instead of individual names and particular instances as the timing of these interactions and the specific people present is not the important factor. These passionate discussions with Tasmanian and interstate Australian VET colleagues in Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and workplaces here, and fellow educators and VET operators in Kuwait, have been of great benefit to my current understanding of learning and teaching, and adding greatly to my social life.

Last, but by no means least, I acknowledge the continual comment made by family and friends, "Haven't you finished that paper yet!" My not wanting to admit I

had given up the project may be what pushed me forward to completion. Possibly
this is not surprising for an existential learner.

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Abstract

Australia has a long history of educating employees and potential employees that began with Mechanics Institutes in the mid-1850s. Formal Training and Further Education (TAFE) colleges were introduced into Australia in 1975 to ensure consistency of the skills and knowledge outcomes of Apprentices. Fifteen years later, in 1992, the then Federal Labor Government introduced the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA)—following on from the success in improving worker skill levels by the previously introduced national Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA) programs. When Vocational Education and Training (VET) was included in the *National Competition Policy,* RTOs were introduced into Australia's training market and the compliance perspective began soon after.

This thesis considers what has happened to our interpretation of 'competence,' since we introduced competency-based training in the late 1980s as "part of wider economic policy measures to improve the skill levels of the Australian workforce, enable Australian industry to be more competitive in global markets and establish new career structures for the Australian workforce" (NCVER, 2000). Two national training system reviews I was party to, *Moving on: Report of the High Level Review of Training Packages.* (Schofield and McDonald, 2014) and *VET Products for the 21st Century* (Joint Steering of NQC, COAG Skills & Workforce Development Group, 2008) have shown that not all of the many changes in VET in the last three decades have been positive yet the system continues on in a remarkably unchanged way. Recommended changes outlined in these reviews, and in many other Government funded and commissioned reports, do not seem to have been implemented. If these were considered important to conduct, what is the effect of not implementing such recommendations on competency-based training, and on our understanding of what competence means in 2013?

The importance of a recorded understanding of current thinking, at any time, cannot be overstated. Without this information, the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of previous decisions can easily lead to incorrect judgements being made and probably adds to the likelihood of cyclic, rather than forward, movement. Ray Browne, Lawrence Kreiser and Robin Winks (2000) explore in-depth the idea of

the historian as detective and consider that the recounting of such stories "teach the uninformed and remind the professionals of the details of everyday life of the past that may not be known or might have been forgotten" (Browne et al, 2000, p. 4). Our lack of a complete historical perspective of VET in Australia was highlighted by Martha Kinsman in 2009. Since then, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) has increased its efforts towards this end. This thesis attempts to add to those efforts by provision of a VET practitioner viewpoint for the period after the 1986 Australian Council of Trade Union (ACTU) led mission to a number of European countries considered to be better performing in a number of economic indicators at the time until the time of writing this thesis in 2013.

Skilling our current and future workforce has been the stated VET sector purpose since the 80s but are we still at the top of our game? In my lived experience, it is not uncommon for discussions between families and friends to shed light on stories of daily problems encountered as a result of people not adequately fulfilling their work roles in today's Australia.

After setting the scene for a discussion on competence by considering what this term means in different contexts, this thesis endeavours to 'objectively' consider the current position of VET in Australia from a variety of perspectives. I learned that keeping objectivity was not an easy task, however, as I discovered the truth for me in Max Van Manen's statement in *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (1990) that "In bringing to reflective awareness the nature of the events experienced in our natural attitude, we are able to transform or remake ourselves in the true sense of *Bildung* (education) (p.7).

This detective-historian account by a grass root operator investigates what has happened to the ANTA perspective on VET since the entity was subsumed. By following different Government changes, changes in Training and Assessment Training Packages and changes in language, a view of the current position of VET in Australia emerges. It is a view of a VET sector not sitting as comfortably as it did in the 1980s and not appearing to have easily identifiable leadership or straightforward linkages to, and between, the multiple components that were considered important

then in building a fully engaged, competent workforce and, supposedly, now and into the future.

Glossary of Acronyms

AAC	Australian Apprenticeship Centre
AATIS	Australian Apprenticeship and Traineeship Information Service
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACER	Australian Council of Educational Research
ACPET	Australian Council for Private Education and Training
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AITD	Australian Institute of Training and Development
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
AWPA	Australian Workforce Productivity Agency
Apprenticeship	Australian Apprenticeship
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
AQFC	Australian Qualifications Framework Council
AQTF	Australian Quality Training Framework
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
AVETMISS	Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard

AWPA	Australian Workforce Productivity Agency
BSZ40198	Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training
BSZ98	Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training (bolded when referring to total document)
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
COAG	Council Of Australian Governments
ComLaw	Repository for Australian Laws
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DIICCSRTE	Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education
DPMC	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
FMI	Frontline Management Initiative
HR	Human Resources
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM	Human Resource Management
IBSA	Innovation and Business Skills Australia
ISC	Industry Skills Council
ICT	Information, Communication and Technology
ITAB	Industry Training Advisory Board
JSA	Job Services Australia
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
KRA	Key Result Areas

NAATI	National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd
NQC	National Quality Council (renamed NSSC)
NSSC	National Skills Standards Council
NTIS	National Training Information Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
STA	State Training Authority (often part of State Education)
TAA40104	Certificate IV in Training and Assessment
TAA04	Training and Assessment Training Package released in 2004 (bolded when referring to total document)
TAE40110	Certificate IV in Training and Assessment
TAE10	Training and Education Training Package released in 2010 (bolded when referring to total document)
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TAWT	Tasmanian Assessor and Workplace Trainer Network
TDC	Trade Development Council
TQA	Tasmanian Qualifications Authority
Traineeship	Australian Apprenticeship (still called Traineeships in some states)
TSA	Training Services Australia or Training Services Australia (Tasmania)
TTC	Trade Training Centre
TUTA	Trade Union Training Authority

UniSA   University of South Australia

VET   Vocational Education and Training

VOCEDplus   Tertiary Education research database

Italicised Terms

Performance standards

A performance standard is the accepted minimum level of operation—the skills, knowledge, attitudes, timing, quality, quantity-type components depend on the task. This identified point is somewhere along a continuum between acceptable and unacceptable workplace behaviours. Such standards provide a baseline for measuring performance and enable specific feedback, information describing the gap between the actual performance seen and the expected performance level, to be given. A judgement is made when you observe someone's work performance, therefore, expected standards exist whether they are documented or not.

VET administration

All those organisations that have some input into the national training system. DEEWR, DIICCSRTE, DPMC, AACs, AWPA, AQF, AQTF, ASQA, COAG, ISCs, NCVER, NSSC for example.

VET programs

These are training programs that are fully undertaken in workplaces, or are undertaken by workers for a workplace specific, strategic purpose and are primarily undertaken in a workplace role.

VET qualifications

Certificate I to Certificate IV, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma. These qualifications were known previously as VET qualifications.

Vocational programs

These are training programs that are undertaken in schools, universities, community venues, or RTO premises and not related to particular workplaces. These programs are not undertaken by workers for a workplace-specific, strategic purpose, but primarily undertaken in a classroom or online by a person who is independent of specific workplace requirements and industry and work culture.

Introduction

It is hard for me to classify a form of research like my own within philosophy or within the human sciences. I could define it as an analysis of the cultural facts characterising our culture...I do in fact seek to place myself outside the culture to which we belong, to analyse its formal conditions in order to make a critique of it, not in the sense of reducing its values, but in order to see how it was actually constituted.

Michel Foucault, 1967

This Masters' thesis is the result of an in-depth consideration of thirty years of personal experiences as a practitioner providing Vocational Education and Training (VET) at the 'coalface.' This thesis discloses the experiential view of a practitioner who has been operating at local levels of practice and proposes practical understandings and questioning about the relationship of 'competency' to workplace competence as portrayed in Australian VET practices. Like Foucault's form of research, it is an analysis in order to see how VET is actually constituted. At the time of writing, many education and training activities with relevance to workplace roles are conducted across a variety of education sectors. Australian Governments and businesses invest annually in VET programs, the central aims of which are to enable Australian workers to competently participate in workplace productivity with satisfaction and pride.

My unfolding narrative explores and elucidates a story in answer to the question: How is competency understood in VET in Australia? This one question requires the exploration of a series of other questions, many of which are rhetorical and remain unanswered. The main sub-questions in my research are: What constitutes the national training system? Where does the leadership of this system lie? and What are the effects of changes to VET practitioner training and assessing practices? The story tells of distortion, disorder and disintegration and develops some understanding of what has happened from my workplace perspective. The questions offer an opportunity for other researchers and practitioners in the field of VET to enter a particular discussion of competency as a central idea in VET conceptualisation and practices.

Impetus for this thesis came from listening to a friend recount a dining experience. She and her husband had been invited by the manager of a hospitality institute to dine there as a group of students were graduating from their **Certificate III** studies that week and guests were needed for students to serve. Knowing I had a particular interest in VET, my friend queried in her conversation with me why no comment was made by the manager when one waitress stopped serving them to extol her opinion on the topic that guests were discussing or when another waiter tapped my friend insistently on the shoulder to gain her attention before asking, "Are you enjoying your meal?" Of course, the manager may not have acted at the time and may have followed up with each student later to avoid embarrassing the student. However, I pondered the bigger question raised by this scenario. How could students reach this point in their VET training without understanding that these two behaviours are not acceptable within the hospitality sector? Had something happened to VET training that meant it was possible this could be happening on a wider scale? Before looking into what might have happened, I must set the scene for my enquiry in this Introduction chapter.

Australia has created a national training system with many components including a language of a kind. This language, itself, requires comment and explanation to ensure my particular meaning in this thesis is clearly understood from the many possible interpretations. I apologise in advance for the number of acronyms used in this paper. Acronyms are constantly used in the VET education sector and most VET community members are more familiar with the acronym than the often lengthy full titles. After a period of oscillating between should I always include full titles or not in my exposition, they remain and a Glossary has been provided for reference near the front of this paper. To further assist my readers' comprehension, I have intentionally used a heuristic system of wording throughout this thesis. VET Training Package components such as Qualifications, Units, and their parts are in **bold** to alert my reader to when the specifics of an individual Training Package component are not particularly important. *Italics* have been used for five key terms which emerged in my enquiry as particularly meaningful—Performance standards, VET qualifications, VET administration, VET programs and Vocational programs.

The meaning I attribute to these italicised terms is provided at the end of the Glossary.

I need to explain that the terms 'VET' and 'industry' are two separate players in this paper. 'Industry' has been used in a generic form with different, possible meanings. Sometimes as a unique industry type within an industry sector, other times the whole of an industry sector or the business community in general. 'VET' and 'VET training' are intermittently used to describe training programs ranging from Certificate I to the Vocational Graduate Diploma, as it was once known. *VET qualifications* is used as a generic term for qualifications within this VET training range. Organisations that are directly involved in conducting these programs, that is Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), are termed the 'VET sector'. *VET administration* is the term used for bodies involved in approving, developing and administering learning programs associated with work in some way. VET training is a generic, inclusive term. *VET programs* has been used to distinguish training with a definite workplace-based learning expectation, such as Apprenticeships and Traineeships, from *Vocational programs,* learning conducted with limited access to, and association with, a particular workplace routine. The term *Performance standards* also has a specific meaning. In all cases, particular meanings for terms used should be taken from the surrounding context in which they are placed.

I saw VET language as an important place to begin my enquiry because VET language has continually changed, including how 'competency' itself is defined. In April 2011, the National Quality Council (NQC) advised they had changed the definition of competency from:

> The broad concept of industry competency concerns the ability to perform particular tasks and duties to the standard of performance expected in the workplace. Competency requires the application of specified skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to effective participation in an industry, industry sector or enterprise. (NQC, 2008, p4)

To:

> Competency is consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments.
>
> (21st Century Products, NQC, 2011)

Recalling the poor display of hospitality skills in a vignette that had appalled my friend, I began to reflect on how students, who had acquired and been assessed against the knowledge and skills listed in the **Units of Competency** (**Units**) covering the tasks in their Qualification from the Hospitality Training Package, could act the way they did. I surmised the behaviour of the students could happen if the kind of attitude students needed to adopt when relating to diners was not an overt part of their training. Were worker attitudes such as taking personal responsibility or showing respect, still understood to be needed in VET industry training now the words 'effective participation in an industry' had been removed from the definition of competency?

I had personally observed a series of similar occurrences that suggested to me that VET, as a particular part of Australia's education system, was possibly not operating as well in the new millennium as it had in the 80s and 90s. During those earlier years I, as writer-practitioner, had confidence in VET processes and hoped I might have been contributing to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and life style, albeit at a local everyday level. In the more than two decades that have passed since the 90s, our Government 'policy machine' has created many changes in VET. As the practitioner writing this thesis, these changes are poignant and motivate me to pursue an investigation into competency.

I was accompanied in my journey by colleagues who shared my apprehension about how rapidly changing agendas and lack of clarity in the intentions in public documents seemed to be gradually eroding the promising visions for Australian workers heralded in the creation of competency-based training—for us a recognition of how well people performed in their jobs. As colleagues we were anxiously recognising some of these changes whilst other people in more influential places in VET, with whom we sometimes interacted, did not show similar anxieties. It became clear to me that the people who felt like me were operating at a grass root

level like me, at the coalface, in the life world of workers. Not operating in VET administration, TAFE and other institute-type RTOs or conducting research.

At the start of my research journey, it was as if I was driving only barely conscious of something being wrong. Like a driver, familiar with our own car, we notice a slight shaking of the steering wheel but this is not important enough to investigate further until there is a log of concerns too worrying to ignore any longer. I had not considered whether VET as the vehicle for my research needed a costly major overhaul, one wheel bearing needed to be replaced, or it was me who needed to review my direction. I embarked upon my VET enquiry simply because, along with my colleagues, I had lost connection with the clear view for VET and what constituted competency-based training that once I held firmly.

Possibly something had happened to the VET training system that only a 'driver' would notice, someone who had lived and breathed VET over decades. My lived experience in training workers provides me with a solid background for enquiring into the environment in which VET trainers and assessors operate. This environment appears to have changed from the original conception, intention and direction of the VET education sector as I experience it from my personal frames of reference. The range of my working history allows me to approach this enquiry from a variety of perspectives—a workplace trainer, a TAFE teacher, a trainer of trainers in different industries, an RTO Manager, an Australian Government employee developing national employment and training strategies and a Project Officer for a State-level Industry Training Advisory Board (ITAB). As these roles make me an 'insider' researcher, I acknowledge that this positioning may mean I had access to limited information at certain times and this could have coloured my judgements or my memory main contain biases towards particular points of view. Sometimes in my use of metaphor or an attempt to display how I, and others, felt about a change that occurred the language used might be thought melodramatic. Van Manen says, that in research within human sciences,

> What we must do is discover what lies at the ontological core of our being. So that in the words, or perhaps better, in spite of the words, we find "memories" that paradoxically we never thought or felt before. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 13)

In my attempt to describe my memories, I may appear to glorify some parts and gloss over others considered of more significance by others. It should be

remembered too that my memories may not be what was later written in a report as the intention of an event or strategy. My memories are just that — how I remember something occurring for me.

From the grass roots level I found I could, with legitimate understanding, research and review documents and information about Government decisions, Training Packages, language changes and skill levels of trainers and assessors. Noticeably lacking in the information I located are the feelings of those working at the coalface of the VET sector which James Wilkinson, an historian from Harvard University describes as:

> The wish to hear the voices and feel the passions of a cast of hitherto silent actors has created a powerful tension between the desire to know and the availability of materials from which to derive that knowledge. In many instances, historians know least about what they would most like to explore, because too few subjects of research have left hints of their passage through time. The remains of the past are often absent, leaving the historian in a quandary about how to proceed. (Wilkinson, 1996, p.82)

My use the term "I, and my colleagues," throughout the thesis is an attempt 'to hear the voices and feel the passions' of such a cast. Whilst the cast is made up of hundreds, as I have worked my way via employment through many parts of VET and attended various conferences, meetings and events, I have not singled out any particular people by naming them here but they do exist. Any perceived reverence to the 'old days' is more a respect for clarity of purpose, collaborative understanding and a clearly perceived direct connection to workforce development.

Possible impacts of time on VET practices

Kaye Schofield and Rod McDonald's *Moving On: Report of the High Level Review of Training Packages* in 2004 revealed that major research undertaken in different VET areas by concurrent and successive State and Australian Governments had little impact in making changes to VET and iteratively raised questions about how Training Packages were structured, and about the roles industry and educators needed to play.

> Nevertheless, the boundary between Training Packages and the VET system is porous. Training Packages are intimately intertwined with many other parts of

the VET system…A review of one without regard to the other elements inevitably has its limitations…in fact we are concerned about the capacity of anyone in the future to pull them all together to tell a coherent story.
(Schofield & McDonald, 2004, p. 8)

Schofield and McDonald were correct about this malady. It has not been easy to access detailed information on the learning processes engaged in particular *VET programs* and *Vocational programs* — even less obvious is the interpretation of competency at one given time. Research papers provide some information on training in institutes around this country and there are case studies which show how training programs operate, or have operated, within certain organisations. Numerous website references appear in my study reflecting the way information about VET is stored, and continually changing. Interpretation of the term 'competency' is not always clear.

Keeping our historical documents digitally is known to be a problem. An extract from 'The Science Show', a London-based Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) Radio National program presented by Naomi Fowler in 2009, featuring Simon Tanner, Director Digital Consulting Services for Kings College, London and Steven Bury, Web Archivist for British Library, highlights how problematic digital archiving is.

> Naomi Fowler: It's quite alarming to discover that the Domesday Book, written on sheepskin back in 1086, has out-lasted today's British Government records by a very long way; more than 1,000 years after it was written, we can still go and see it in its original form. But modern digital government records from only ten years ago are unreadable because it seems a decade is a very long time in computing.
>
> Stephen Bury: It's a little bit like climate change in that we know it's bad but we haven't quite seen the emergency problems coming up yet, and by the time someone gets round to doing something it will be too late and we will have lost a lot of data.
>
> Simon Tanner: That's why we might talk about this in terms of a digital dark age where we may look back at this last decade and say we don't know anywhere near as much about it as we should do because so much more of the communication of cultural meaning and technical information has been made in an electronic form, but then it was ephemeral, it was lost and died very

quickly because we didn't preserve it, we didn't take care of it.
(ABC Radio National, 2009)

In 2009, Martha Kinsman, Policy and Research Counsel for TAFE Directors Australia, in her 18th National VET Research "No Frills" conference Plenary session drew attention to the task of preserving Australian VET sector memories (Kinsman, cited in NCVER, 2009) — understanding the authentic reasons for decisions made at a particular time in history ensures that rational justification, based on absent evidence, is not used in making new decisions. Lessons learned in Australian VET may have already disappeared into a 'digital dark age'. Like in George Orwell's novel, *Nineteen Eighty Four*, if there is no agreed history it can be made up,

> And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed - if all records told
> the same tale - then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'Who
> controls the past' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the
> present controls the past'. (Orwell, 1987, p.19)

My enquiry investigates the purpose and substance of competency-based training with a view to clarifying what is meant when someone is spoken of as "having competency": is that the same as being a competent worker or the same as the 'vocational competence' in an industry sector needed to train and assess in that VET area?

Concern began to rise within me that Australia's future productivity could be based on something less than expertise, and with it, poignantly, a concern for western democracy. Barry Jones, former Australian Minister of Science and long time historian, when writing of Orwell's world view, said Orwell "scored two hits".

> One was the use of telescreens as an instrument of surveillance and the other
> that government linguists would create a new language that would make
> 'heretical thoughts' impossible. With 'management speak' this has already
> happened. (Jones, 2006, p.314)

Possible impacts of Government decisions on the VET sector

Boston Consulting Group's evaluation of the *Skills Australia Workforce Agreement* (2010), two years after Skills Australia was implemented in 2008, fuelled my concern. This report speaks of possible conflicts of interest as Governments are paying agencies on the basis of what they report, for example analysed data related to

Australia's industry demographics and workforce development needs (Boston Consulting Group, 2010, p.2). All governing bodies operate with the same risk of conflict. Once the path is set there is no way to say it is the wrong path. An agency will be paid. Government can pass by what does not work. Government spin — at all costs we must maintain community confidence in Government — keeps Government favoured programs or Government implemented organisations instated. From 1 July 2012, Skills Australia, like many other *VET administration* bodies, was replaced by another body, the "…independent Australia Workforce and Productivity Agency [AWPA]…as an authority on workforce development policy and advice and will direct funding to industry needs…[based on its] high level expertise, industry and union leadership and collaboration" (AWPA, 2012).

My concern amplifies as I speculate whether the representative people who constitute AWPA share similar definitions and understandings about the use of the word 'competence' as it applies in the workplace, and in qualification documents. How do they compare competence in the workplace and competence as qualification?

Kinsman's point is critical to the outputs of our national training system and the skill level required of VET trainers and assessors. Hugh Guthrie, a senior researcher with the National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd (NCVER), produced a preliminary paper entitled "*A short history of initial VET teacher training*" (2010) which traced the pathway to a **Certificate IV** qualification becoming the "de facto minimum teaching qualification because it — or equivalent qualifications — were mandated in the *Australian Quality Training Framework* (AQTF)" (Guthrie, p.10). If Guthrie was referring only to VET in a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) context, I can appreciate his statement that "The dependence of the sector on a diverse teaching workforce, some of whom see themselves as vocational practitioners who also teach, while others see themselves primarily as teachers, continues to be an issue" (p.11). If the statement relates to the broad range of industry training and development needs of staff operating in workplaces, it is ambiguous. My research will investigate this view.

A further statement below made in Guthrie's report intrigues me. He speaks of there being "no single reason" for the expected skill and knowledge level of trainers and assessors to have dwindled with each re-development of the Training Package

stating "It is hard to understand the rationale for the move during the 1990s from a higher level of mandated qualification to a minimalist one, with apparently no single reason for the reduction in qualification requirements for VET teachers" (Guthrie, p.12). Why has this minimalist approach occurred, contrary to government commissioned reports which insist upon the need to increase the skill levels of VET trainers and assessors? At its essence, vocational education and training, commonly known as VET, is about gaining the ability to competently work in a certain job. No matter whether a person gains knowledge and skills through an academic process or a practical on-the-job process, what is of importance is how certain factors combine when applied in a workplace role. Workplace specific programs were a major focus in VET before 1999 when the first wave of Training Packages was implemented.

VET programs are about learning how to do your job to the performance level expected by your supervisors. Work specific learning was applied and generally undertaken within a person's workplace. When a worker was sent off-site to attend a program, it was for a specific strategic outcome requiring implementation of new learning into work practices on their return, and, if appropriate, the writing of a report on the experience's usefulness to themselves and the company. Although there were also 'vocational education' programs run in institutes, they were not actually *VET programs* in an Award Restructuring sense. In VET, knowledge and its application go hand in hand. Michele Simons, Roger Harris and Erica Smith (2006) found one of the things to be 'reworked' with Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training learning was the "tendency to view action and thought as discrete entities" (p.7). Knowledge has always been a major part of training workers. Knowledge is applied in a practical, integrated way rather than an academically focussed one in workplaces. My conjecture is that this research finding is an essential one to consider. Certificate IV qualified trainers who can teach learners to a competent workplace standard understand competence is a certain combination of action and thought.

Possible repercussions from a cultural bias

According to Robert Dobson's thesis (2006) which looked at the historical influences on Tasmanian education, Australia's convict history plays a part in the

early differentiation of VET and academic studies in students' education in Tasmania and possibly Australia. Dobson states,

> The splitting and categorisation of Tasmanian population, by powerful 'interests' into scientifically validated social divisions, persisted in the historical substrates of Tasmania and continues to influence Tasmanian life. The idea of vocational education, although not determining the differentiation of Tasmania's young, was shaped by economic, social, political, scientific and educational thought and acted to direct destinies, especially of those in marginal categories. (Dobson, 2006, p.12)

James Turner, an educationalist who worked in VET in Victoria in the early TAFE years, completed a Doctoral Thesis, *Leaders, Learners and ABL* in 1988. In this thesis Turner detailed other research, such as the Henderson Poverty Commission Reports (1975), that made similar critical points to those in the Karmel Report (1973), regarding a bias against VET studies. Turner writes, "…a social class cultural bias (where education is formulated in cultural terms evinced in the values and expectations of an urban middle class) operates against those who do not belong to that particular class" (Turner, 1988, p.17).

I believe this 'cultural bias' towards VET continues to have influence on how these learning programs are perceived by many in the general community today and, possibly, the scholarly community and Governments. One example is the influence on post Year 10 to Year 12 career choices by students, and parents. Currently, this bias continues to often designate or relegate VET subject choices to students considered less intelligent. In fact, this is a misinterpretation of the intent of practically-focussed training 'VET in Schools' for future employment, and for contributing to the more universal goal of faster higher level workplace productivity. My enquiry will explore the possible impacts of this continuing view on Australia's national training system and, in particular, possible results from the misinterpretation of the intent and structure of Qualification frameworks.

Many of the language terms used in VET have not changed a great deal over my research period. Yet, numerous changes to the meaning attributed to these language terms have emerged over my years of conducting train-the-trainer programs. It might be, for example, that changes in the contexts in which certain terms were

applied resulted in changed meanings. Jones (2006) said that language would change in this way. My enquiry asks whether there were other effects that language changes had on the VET system as a whole. Use of the term 'VET Pedagogy' in many documents might suggest an academic influence in Australia. 'Pedagogy' replaced 'andragogy', a generally accepted international term used to describe the different perspectives involved in educating adults (Knowles, 1990: Choy & Delahaye, 2002: Harrison, 2005).

Malcolm Knowles' Adult Learning Principles were closely associated with VET training delivery practices before the 1990s but these principles are no longer clearly articulated in recent VET Training Package documentation. It appears when our focus moved from training delivery to assessment; these Principles were not considered as necessary. For example, in the Training and Education Training Package (TAE10) there is reference only to a "sound knowledge of adult learning principles" under the **Essential Knowledge** area, and then in some of the **Units of Competency**. Intriguingly, these principles are referred to predominantly within language, literacy and numeracy training units (TAE10, 2010, p. 94), not within core units. Is this because language, literacy and numeracy trainers are in a better position to identify that use of adult learning principles is essential in training adults? This interesting result engages me in the question, does this mean that leading "an active inquiry" (Knowles, 1990, p.27), for instance, is no longer espoused as an effective teaching style for adult students in Australia and for their teachers? Are the writers of **TAE10** validating "passive reception of transmitted content" (Knowles, p.27) as a preferred method for VET?

Another factor that has been undermining the prominence of industry in VET has been the interpreting and re-interpreting of the key terms as a result of the different influences on VET when academic influences come into play. We have a competency-based system for VET and Training Packages that promote sets of competencies. Schofield and McDonald (2004) suggested the limited knowledge and skill specification focus adopted in Training Packages needed a broader approach in regard to competency standards. The dilemma in my enquiry is that competencies are now referred to as 'learning outcomes' in the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) when, from the beginning of my work in VET, I understood competencies to be standards of work performed. Competencies are not the same as

learning outcomes which suggest instead pathways to learning on an education continuum. Competencies are much more; they need more time to be incorporated into the human body–the whole person needs to be engaged in the task. My view of a competent person is more in line with Turner's (1988) view of 'development' that integrates Fred Emery's view of enlightenment and understanding shown below.

> If enlightenment-understanding is not observable in transportation of learning, then we would have to reckon that learning had failed. Of course, we would reckon that learning had taken place if the first learner had conveyed this understanding to yet another whose behaviour showed transposability. I would argue that enlightenment-understanding must involve both informing and instructing; that is some element of training.
> (Emery, 1988, cited in Turner, 1988, p.22)

Is it the interpretation and reinterpretation of terminology that has moved VET away from important industry standards—especially in recent years with the focus shifting further towards RTO standards?

The 'national training system' has become a collective term for describing VET training of Australia's workers although various constituencies contribute to this task. The national training system has many influential stakeholders, such as Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) and State Training Authorities (STAs), which can affect its operation, and who maybe even control the current process. Another stakeholder is Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges which, as recipient of national Government funding since the Federal Government's Kangan Report (ACOTAFE, 1974), have played a central part in providing institutional training.

Many Councils and Boards have been instigated and subsumed over the last two decades with each having an effect on the direction of VET in some way. This frequent occurrence has also impacted on my research and required me to continually find my way through the maze of changing acronyms and purposes. As this continues to happen, and I continue to review and revise as a result, I acknowledge that some names or aspects may be incorrect at the time of presenting this paper. One such example is the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

Although the Australian Qualifications Framework Council (AQFC) was developing the AQF from 1995 it was not until sixteen years later in July 2011 that

the *Australian Qualification Framework First Edition* appeared (AQFC, 2011). It is puzzling to me that this was referred to as a "First Edition" when the AQF has underpinned *VET qualifications* from 1995 and was "fully implemented from 2000" (AQFC, p.109). An AQF structure was introduced as a national basis for determining the level of worker competence and, though this structure has been changing from year to year, from context to context, among the other purposes, AQF is still a structure that is considered fundamental for mapping workplace competence.

The 2011 AQF publication announces "the national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training" and "provides the standards for Australian qualifications." The documentation indicates previous *VET qualifications* such as Certificates, Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas are now universally achievable and independent of any education and training sector. Vocational Graduate Diplomas have been subsumed into Graduate Diplomas, for both Higher Education and VET. What effect does this approach have on qualifications that were once VET specific? Will small wording differences such as "advanced skill or paraprofessional work" under the heading **Advanced Diploma** and stating "paraprofessional work" for an Associate Degree, be enough to show the **Advanced Diploma** requires competency-based assessment (AQFC, p.15) while the Associate Degree, because it is deemed by a university, does not? Or, do neither require competency-based assessment now as University-gained Diplomas appear to be presented without any work experience?

While introduction by the Government of this policy may "assist people to move easily and readily between different education and training sectors, and between those sectors and the labour market" as the Government expects, (AQFC, 2011, p.8), for RTOs and VET students the "AQF qualification type learning outcomes descriptors" may create the feeling that gaining a VET qualification is more an educational achievement than having acquired a particular level of workplace acumen. The **Purpose** statement of the **Certificate III** in the AQF says the certificate "qualifies individuals who apply a broad range of knowledge and skills in varied contexts to undertake skilled work and as a pathway for further learning" (p.14). For me, the statement implies that the paper qualification qualifies the person more than it validates the level of their work skills. Is there no longer a VET domain in the AQF that uses VET words such as *training* and *workplace*? Has the

production of common qualification levels made it necessary to identify *VET qualifications* in another way or do we consider there is no longer any difference?

I could acquire a **Certificate IV** at a university, at a TAFE college or through workplace training. Who can say that my **Certificate IV** achieved at TAFE is of more value than the one my friend achieved at university? Might a university qualification be seen as more prestigious than a TAFE one? Who attributes value? Which certificate assures me and my employer that I can competently do the workplace job? I venture to say it would be impossible to verify that the qualification of one institution would be equivalent to that of another. No matter how hard the Government tries to bring sectors together through structures such as the AQF, it is difficult to imagine that there would be no competition between the sectors to prove one sector's certificate is better than another's. Tom Karmel, Managing Director of NCVER, in his contribution to an NCVER paper, *The future of VET: A medley of views,* suggests money is a prime factor in his statement,

> … many universities do not for financial reasons want to give up teaching the first year of their programs. This is almost certainly the reason why the strongest transfer programs are often those from university-owned or franchised foundation colleges.
> (Karmel in Beddie and Curtin, Eds. NCVER, 2010, p.32)

Transfer, in this case, refers to advancement from one level of certification to another. Will qualification policy continue to favour academic provision and accordingly weaken the strong alignment of *VET qualifications* with industry requirements? In my work practice, I question daily whether VET is entirely industry-driven. Must VET be industry-driven? If so, why? If not, why not? The questions in this paragraph lie at the heart of my enquiry.

The process of developing Training Packages was considered inefficient in the *Learning for Jobs OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training Australia*, hereafter called OECD 2008, conducted by Kathrin Hoeckel, Simon Field, Troy R. Justesen and Moonhee Kim in November of that year. Although, following this review, some major changes have occurred, such as changes to the templates of Training Packages in 2012, Training Package development and implementation practices do not appear to require involvement of a worker who does that task in

Unit documentation development. These formulae-based Training Packages have not decreased the number of problems in deciphering what is meant from what is written when using this documentation to train workers and to assess their performance. I will present evidence for this view in Chapter 5.

Possible blurring of direction for the VET sector

   A change in VET focus, from developing and recognising expertise in workplaces to gaining qualifications, may have happened unwittingly in developing the AQF, and not by any deliberate shift, for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) website states, "The key roles of the national training system are to drive economic growth and address areas of skills needs" (DEEWR, 2012). A decade had now passed since the workplace focus of the 90s. Was it a lack of specific direction on performance standards for particular workers which caused the expectation of being called 'competent' to fall from 'expected expertise' at the industry-determined level to now consider a possible range of options as being Competent or Not Yet Competent? It seems this change in thinking occurred despite the Government-stated emphasis having remained on economic growth and skilled workers throughout this decade. There does appear to me to have been an institutional or academic voice championing for 'levels of understanding' that has competed with the workplace need for worker 'levels of performance' at different time. Even though industry has continued to play a role in VET, an understanding of the importance of that role to Australia's productivity by key players appears tenuous.

   Since ANTA was subsumed I, personally, have not been clear as a VET practitioner which body is leading VET in Australia to achieve these economic growth and skilled worker goals. I wonder who the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) considers is responsible for achieving these goals? It could be the National Skills Standards Council (NSSC), who endorse that Training Packages meet the information outlined in the Training Package Development Handbook and other standards or it could be the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) who regulate RTOs. Maybe COAG considers it is AWPA? No *VET administration* body has its hand held high from my view point. Schofield and McDonald queried whether the leadership of VET was industry or 'educators.' If

VET qualifications are to reflect industry needs, it is logical that industry leaders assume an authorative role in qualification development. No matter how you argue about it, industry is a primary player in our country's economy and productivity. Industry deserves prominence in VET.

In the new era of RTO regulation, does the current training system have the means to detect a difference between the person learning about a work task in a classroom or online and the person demonstrating competence in that task in a workplace role? At the time of writing I can say it is possible for both persons to gain the same qualification. Clearly only the latter person can meet the performance dimensions industry requires. How has this happened? Do we believe skill levels and demonstration of competency and expertise are equivalent to qualifications determined by achievement of learning outcomes? Maybe Governments have not pondered this last question.

Are we to understand that in VET an apple is the same as a pear? In recent times *VET qualifications,* from Certificate I to Vocational Graduate Diplomas, have been conducted within schools, community environments, formal institutes such as TAFEs and universities, and inside business enterprises. As these different program environments make a consistent level of workplace involvement impractical, I question why these programs are considered equivalent to each other. Universities conduct VET programs with the same titles, presumably from the same Training Packages as RTOs, but it appears students of these programs gain Higher Education qualifications not *VET qualifications*, and universities are audited by a different authority. It would seem unlikely that being competent is assessed in a similar way across such a gamut of training providers. It is for this reason, I have referred to those learning programs not conducted within workplaces or primarily using workplace-based learning as *Vocational programs*, where appropriate in this thesis.

Until Commonwealth legislation established ASQA to operate from 1 July 2011, different bodies had operated in each State and Territory to register RTOs and regulate through audit processes those RTOs registered to operate. ASQA currently has legislative powers to "regulate courses and training providers to ensure nationally approved quality standards are met" in all States and Territories except Victoria and

Western Australia (ASQA, 2012). These States regulate RTOs operating only in their State in a similar way to ASQA.

As ASQA established itself, RTOs and VET practitioners were unsure of how the Standards will be interpreted. We have received mixed messages in Tasmania in the past. For instance, previous Tasmanian Qualification Authority (TQA) auditors told RTO managers — those like me who attended TQA seminars — to concentrate our efforts on establishing business systems to deliver quality training and assessment and be less concerned with compliance. These auditors contended that compliance would be automatic with a 'quality system.' In good will, and out of uncertainty caused through lack of documented guidance or industry specific direction, will new auditors assume interpreter roles and expect trainers and assessors to implement their 'wisdom'? Perhaps they will take a checklist stance to documentation requirements and the subsequent unrecoverable high administration costs will cause small community organisation RTOs to disappear, leaving gaps in community-valuable training provided as a service rather than profit making exercise. This approach may mean small industry-specific training efforts are also lost to leave only the large institutes as RTOs — the type we moved away from for VET in the 90s because of their inflexibility at that time and whose financial viability possibly comes through other government subsidies and formulae adjustments which may not be costed into some costing comparisons.

ANTA provided clear directions for the Australian workforce, and training providers from 1992 to 2004. Since then, from a workplace trainer perspective, the VET system appears to have fragmented and disconnected from ANTA's original 'big picture' approach to our workforce's development. The Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) conducted the interrelated workforce development functions of ANTA such as re-development of unemployed people and career planning for youth and others, until it too was closed in 1998. With changing government policies over time, these functions have been distributed between different government departments and agencies. Where once one agency stored all crucial knowledge about Australia's industry and workforce information, the means of storing and interpreting this information is now divided between DEEWR, other Government Departments and many non-government organisations depending on

Government-funded contracts for their existence. To keep these now fragmented agencies in communication, and in accord, regularly enough to maintain a 'big picture' view of a competent workforce moving forwards is unlikely without a consistency of purpose and alignment not apparent from their website information.

Three decades ago VET sat neatly into what was referred to as post-compulsory education within the Education sector. Now, depending on what I read, VET is described as being part of secondary and senior secondary education, adult and community education, higher education and tertiary education (training.com.au, 2012; DEEWR, 2012; ASQA, 2012). VET can be distinguished within but not separated from these other Education sectors mentioned above. The identity of VET has changed. What effect will this new somewhat blurred identity have on the quality standard of *VET programs* delivered on productivity?

In the exploration of my questions I have cross-checked my lived experiences, primarily in Tasmania and South Australia, with sources of information within the Australian national training system. I acknowledge that my version of events might be distorted by 'hindsight bias' — "an over estimation of my prior knowledge (Fischhoff, 1975, Hasher, Attig & Alba, 1981, Wood, 1978, cited in Arnold and Lindsay, 2007, p.1854). I am attempting to fill in some of the gaps, at least, Kinsman identified in Australia's VET history.

My enquiry considers the word and notion of 'competency' from many angles. I set out to investigate the nature and outcomes of the two learning approaches we have on Australia's productivity. I wanted to explore competency as I find it displayed in two different perspectives of VET — as education and training carried out within workplaces and as education and training conducted primarily in academic or institute settings. Uncovering many interpretations of competency within the VET system made it necessary to set parameters around a broad discussion on competency in Chapter 1 and to explain in more detail what being competent can mean when approached from different contexts in Chapter 2.

My detection process asked questions and the answers provided clues to follow. Eventually, three aspects of VET emerged as impacting our shared understanding of competency. These three aspects — Government decisions, training and assessment qualifications and language usage — seem to have become entangled, intertwined

within and around how VET is conducted in workplaces and institutes though the history of VET in Australia. I investigate the impact some Government decisions have had on the overall competence of our workers by considering my workplace role against the identified research in Chapters 3. Clues are followed, further questions raised, and new possibilities explored as I probe the effect of changes to VET practitioner training practices in Chapter 4 and mull over what contributes to differences in language usage within the VET system and VET products in Chapter 5.

   Understanding different meanings and interpretations of competency is a central focus of my thesis, and illuminates the proposals that I make for discussion to be initiated, negotiated and mediated amongst the VET administration and with RTOs on what competency actually means in Australia and, possibly, what would competency better mean.

Chapter 1   Setting parameters for a competency discussion

> While it is extremely difficult to formulate a satisfactory
> definition of learning so as to include all the activities and
> processes we wish to include and eliminate all those which we
> wish to exclude the difficulty does not prove to be
> embarrassing because it is not a source of controversy as
> between theories.   The controversy is over fact and
> interpretation, not over definition.
>
> <div align="right">Hilgard & Bower, 1981</div>

A small group of VET workplace training colleagues and I, operating in a range
of industry sectors, noticed that a confusing shift in VET tradition has occurred since
the VET system was formalised by the introduction of the ANTA Act 1992 — early
in our VET careers. As Australian education sectors continue to merge and overlap,
VET as we understand it may be lost. If there was, and still is, a purpose for a
separate VET education sector to continue, its story must be told — a story that
revolves around competency in workplaces. Competency in Australia has a
changing story that requires parameters to be set.

History helps us to understand the ways things were, the ways things are and the
ways they became so. Finding details of VET's story and how the 'plot' has
developed has taken detective work. Historical documentation provides little of the
reasons for implementation and change. Ray B. Browne, Lawrence A. Kreiser and
Robin W. Winks (2000) explore in-depth the idea of the historian as detective and
consider that the recounting of such stories "teach the uninformed and remind the
professionals of the details of everyday life of the past that may not be known or
might have been forgotten" (Browne et al, 2000, p. 4).

The lived experience I recall and recount is of my personal work within different
industry sectors, and VET in general; the known and possibly forgotten 'details of
everyday life.' This recalling and recounting assists me to compose a narrative that
combines personally experienced and remembered events with government
documents and other reference material that I have found. My responsibility as
researcher is to search for reality and truth in the evidence of my lived experience
and the documents I access. As researcher, I am a present-day investigator
"revisiting the past while standing in the present" (Browne et al., 2000, p.5). I wish
to understand, and share my understanding, of different thinking around competency.
As a researcher, I can gather, interpret and explain my evidence, and, with reason

and veracity, develop an understanding of competency, an important anchor of VET systems in Australia that rests upon trustworthy recounting. As a researcher my methodical approach must be identified. As I am writing about the history of VET kinsman (2009) identified was now missing, my 'historian as detective' approach is also somewhat autobiographical as

> The tendency to generalize may prevent us from developing understandings
> that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience. (Van Manen,
> 1990, p.22)

To enhance my recording of events as I witnessed and experienced them I have used anecdote, narrative and analogy to strengthen credibility of my lived experience.

I begin my research into the Australian VET concept of 'competency' with the following three questions:

Why did Australia originally have, and still proclaims to have, a VET sector separate from mainstream education sectors when VET programs are now conducted within the other sectors?

In what ways was the VET sector linked to workforce competence in the 90s, and have these VET and workplace links changed?

In what ways might I come to understand what VET is today and its significance, if any, for workplaces, and for trainers and assessors?

VET 'in a nutshell.'

According to brief, time-line government documentation, Australia's VET history is one of continual change. Industry and society in Australia began to change in the 1960s and 70s and, as the traditional industries started to decline in economic significance, the communications and finance industries began to take their place, and women re-entered the workforce for the first time since World War II. By 1974, a newly formed TAFE sector offered preparatory and pre-employment programs, additional to Apprenticeships. Private training providers emerged in VET in the 80s, initially to train service industry workers as this sector grew (DEEWR, 2007) and these organisations continue to compete for a place in the training market.

In 1992, a Labor Government proposed that industry should drive the VET system for the economy as a whole to prosper, establishing ANTA to oversee "a co-operative national system of vocational education and training with strategic input by industry" (DEEWR, 2007). This Government approach developed as a result of the

Australian trade mission to Norway, Sweden, Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom in 1986 led by the ACTU with membership from specific Unions, the Department of Trade and the Trade Development Council. The report on the mission, published in 1987 as *Australia Reconstructed* published by the Department of Trade, ACTU and Trade Development Council, identified the importance of labour market policy to the economic stability of a country and the wellbeing of citizens and the need to make the training environment reflect workplace practices.

> Access to employment is perhaps the most decisive condition for the well-being of the individual… Labour market policy plays a significant part in efforts to attain the goal of work for all. It is a complement to and underpins economic policy generally. (Department of Trade et al, 1987, p. 103)

This report had other significant recommendations too that, though not specifically part of this analysis, have shaped the VET sector since then.

This initial element was followed by other possibly impactful policies — Australian Apprenticeships, a National Training Framework, a 'VET in Schools' strategy and Training Packages. Introduced by the *Fitzgerald Report* (1994), the concepts of User Choice, best practice and an industry advisory structure, along with *VET administration* and governance systems, remain current elements of VET. A new century saw the loosely connected national VET system aspire to be a nationally consistent, quality system in a rapidly changing global context of work and society (DEEWR, 2007).

Government policy has continued to push these later objectives, and others regarding the labour market, in response to our economic situation, employment figures and global markets. Governments have established additional agencies to achieve continuing 'workforce development.' Political parties that form government play a significant part in determining VET's structure in Australia. For instance, one year after the Howard Liberal Government had introduced Australian Technical Colleges, Kevin Rudd's newly elected Labor Party Government announced the closure of these colleges and implemented Trade Training Centres (TTC) instead.

Thus, it is apparent that some structures within our VET systems have been quickly changed, while others have continued. One continuing structure is how government payments for training provision are made. Beginning when the Kangan Report made "a series of recommendations, particularly in relation to funding" in

1974 to achieve Government results through TAFE (NCVER, 2007), this funding arrangement has underpinned TAFE-allocated monies ever since, and has been used as a model for other government VET funding such as User Choice. Despite consistent unfavourable comments appearing in successive reports (ANTA, 2003: Schofield & McDonald, 2004: Hoeckel et al., 2008), this payment for qualification completions arrangement remains.

My VET 'in a nutshell' portrayal to this point, leaves readers wondering how each of these elements has influenced understanding of competency in Australia today. There are further, deeper perspectives to explore that bring meaning to my enquiry about workplace competency in Australia. Australia in the 70s had a clear and openly discussed divided workforce: a 'white collar positions' and 'blue collar jobs' division. White collar positions referred to the white shirts traditionally worn by male dominated workforce professions and para-professions that required higher education or academic qualifications. All management positions and most other indoor workers were thought of as white collar workers. Blue collar jobs referred to apprenticed trades and auxiliary workers, factory hands, trades assistants, labourers, gardeners and the like. 'Blue collar' referred to the dark coloured clothing worn to cover daily work stains. Blue collar workers were VET trained and part of the post-compulsory sector.

It is not surprising, therefore, that trade unions are involved with VET. In 1975, the Whitlam Labor Government established the Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA) which quickly set up training centres in each state capital. At the same time TUTA set up the Clyde Cameron College in Wodonga, Victoria, to provide approaches to adult education courses that were ideologically and politically independent from individual unions and the Commonwealth Government (Voll, 1997, p.592). This era ended when the Howard Liberal Government wound up TUTA on 3 June 2006 (Voll, p.593) soon after regaining the reins of power. Nevertheless, according to independent research by Gerry Voll, and through my lived experience, trade unions exerted a strong influence on worker training programs for a longer period. Despite government changeovers, union members continue to serve on VET associated committees around Australia and on ISC development committees to determine levels of competency in Training Packages — as they did when I worked for Business, Administrative and Safety Skills Tasmania

(BASS Tasmania), a State ITAB. Employer associations appear to have gained in importance over time. Though the association between these players and VET might disclose interesting perspectives, my research excludes the influence of Australian Council of Trade Union (ACTU) on questions in my enquiry. Dealing with the political complexities and long industrial history are better left for another thesis more related to workers' rights.

As well as political tensions, a pull between 'academic' and 'technical education' continues regarding the training of Australia's workforce. In Turner's thesis, he comments as he writes, that academically trained staff dominated both technical schools and colleges because 'practical' staff were not eligible for larger responsibilities — it was considered they did not have 'the right education' (Turner, 1988, p.50). Robin Ryan, in his 2011 research entitled *"How VET responds: a historical policy perspective,"* comments on this emphasis on higher education as seemingly superior. During my time in ITABs and TAFE, I myself observed this tendency to purport that, because I have the right education, I know what is right in VET.

Turner (1988) suggests that, in technical schools, the "tradition of training could not be changed from its craft orientation" (p.51). Guthrie (2010) states a similar concern was espoused by university staff from the early 70s when skilled workers were recruited to become TAFE teachers and 'taught to teach' by university lecturers in the same way as school teachers. Eventually, it was conceded that trainers of adult learners required different skills from teachers of school children. One concern universities had, that Guthrie points out, is "the extent to which those with trade and other backgrounds possessed the skills required for successful participation in university-level awards" (2010, p.80), that appears to be founded in an attitude that some people are less intelligent, or intellectually inclined, than others because they choose a VET career pathway. I believe most business people would personally know, or know of, a 'blue collar' person who has gained a degree or higher academic qualification. The opposite perspective is displayed in more recent documentation for a Vocational Graduate Diploma which expects an experienced tradesperson to jump many AQF levels in a short period (TAE10, 2010, p.116). There are obviously different understandings of workplace competence and learning abilities to uncover.

My enquiry pursues a paradox that I see such concerns suggest — between academic attitudes towards the intelligence and skills of 'trades people' and unrealistic expectations that these same people can jump through AQF hoops rapidly and diligently. There seems to be an insinuation by some: you did not do well at school, so you cannot go to university. I, myself, did do well at school but I still cannot jump through the expected hoops easily without educative and training support. I need support as an adult learner to become competent in particular skills. Intelligence and academic study are not enough to make me competent. I need my teacher and my trainer. And, she needs to be not only intelligent and competent but personally supportive and respectful of my learning and understandings.

VET as a paradox

Annette Bonnici and Linda Simon discussed their survey of over 500 teachers working in TAFE NSW to identify what TAFE teachers considered they needed to do their jobs effectively at Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association's 2011 Conference. They had found the predominant response from teachers was that they needed a tertiary level qualification. Bonnici and Simon then surveyed the management staff in the same TAFEs — 420 Head Teachers, Special Program Co-ordinators plus others and found that management staff thought they needed particular management and coordination workplace skills. 63 percent of the management group surveyed had a post graduate qualification. 20 percent of this group had a Masters or Doctorate Degree, as well as original vocational qualifications and a TAA40104 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Answers from two people surveyed provide an idea of the skills the latter management group thought they were missing.

> Example 1 - The role of the Head Teacher includes HR management and team management skills, planning and project management skills, marketing and commercial activities, managing finances and resources. None of these are educational skills.

> Example 2 – Uni quals give the underpinning theory and framework but the Head Teacher role is very specific to TAFE administration.
> (Bonnici & Simon, 2011).

Academically educated people do, at some point, take up the workplace position for which they have qualified and, at that point, they need vocational education and training to succeed at work — to be competent in their work role. This obvious relationship between academic qualification and learning in the lived experience of a workplace, emphasised in original VET documents, is missing in later documents.

Why is the current trend towards university conducted courses rather than directly providing learning through businesses using business processes, gaining ground in recent years? Could not competence, however it is gained and demonstrated, be considered equivalent, whether decreed by a university institution or a college or any other reputable education and training institution such as an accredited training company? Could it be possible that Australians can bring these institutions into such close alignment that one qualification gained at one institution will not be more revered and valued than one gained at another institution? This is really a rhetorical question, which I believe is impossible to answer, but it helps me to integrate in my discussion my sense of injustice about the disenfranchisement of competence by whoever gets authority to sanction and privilege qualifications.

Karmel's view of likely changes to the national training system in the next few years, is helpful in forming my understanding.

> Some professions are inextricably tied to universities — in my wildest dreams
> I cannot see those training the medical workforce (as distinct from the health
> workforce) or lawyers working in a 'vocational' institution. Similarly, the
> training of scientists, philosophers, economists and historians (I'm not sure
> about theologians), to name a few, is not going to happen in any serious way
> outside the universities. But the training of accountants, journalists, marketers,
> paralegals, nurses, musicians, dancers, painters, sculptors could well be done
> effectively outside universities.
> (Beddie and Curtin, NCVER, 2010, p.61)

I note that vocations of scientists, philosophers, economists and historians have practical competency components. Karmel is astute — universities will always assume the right to build their faculties. The changes he indicates could be moving Australia circularly back to a dual 'professional' training system of universities and colleges of advanced education similar to the one Minister Dawkins dissolved, according to Jones, by his "…forcing through [of] a single minded reform crusade

with a mix of system planning, market rhetoric and the determination to crush all political opposition" (Marginson & Considine, 2001 p.35 cited in Jones, 2006, p.349).

Being competent at work tasks requires a level of theoretical knowledge, practical skill and an appropriate attitude rather than a particular Intelligence Quotient. Some areas of academic study have been supplemented by a lengthy period of on-the-job experience before graduation for this reason. Meeting people who have passed the theoretical components but been found not suited to the actual workplace tasks, when faced with them, is not uncommon. This mismatching is more likely to happen in situations where learning is not conducted in actual workplaces as work roles are then broken into learning components rather than the natural flow, and tasks are performed in simulated often not realistic environments. I am afraid we will not achieve what is needed for the betterment of Australian workers, and our society, if an academic approach to learning and assessment in VET prevails — particularly as, according to Dr Stephanie Burns, an internationally acclaimed adult trainer, a more practical approach to learning best suits the majority of learners (2000, p.79).

The fit between labour force and learning

The fact that Australia's VET history has seen learning move from a practical approach to an academic one on more than one occasion may be relevant. One practical approach was introduced in the early 1900s, following the visit to Australia of Albert Mansbridge, founder of the Workers Educational Association (WEA) in Britain in 1903. Mansbridge commenced WEA as he believed in "an alliance between labour and learning, in which university authorities could be brought in touch with the workers through their various organisations." Mansbridge was certain such a partnership "would help to show that working people had the determination and ability to undertake serious, systematic study of a university standard and would represent their educational needs on a national scale" (Jackson, undated, p.2). Branches of this renowned international organisation were established in all states soon after his visit. WEA's international success appears to confirm that working people can undertake serious study to develop the basis required to reach high qualification levels when supported in a systematic way. What does the fact WEA only operates in South Australia and New South Wales in 2012 say about Australian

education and training focus in recent times? Has the large number of previous general adult and community education programs that must now be run as nationally accredited training programs to obtain funding had a bearing on VET administrators and researchers' views of what constitutes a VET program?

For me, the constitution of 'the VET sector' has become indeterminate as the names of the different components have changed many times. When I relocated to Adelaide in 1990, an organisation's Training Section staff member was known as a 'workplace trainer' and, except for apprentices, who had a formal training component delivered off-the-job in TAFEs, by my recollection, VET was about 'training' which had a knowledge or education component — training which was undertaken within and by industry. My Training Section role was a team one. We developed and conducted all required departmental staff training through specific practical sessions designed to improve the skills, knowledge and attitudes — the competence — of people in each work role. We scheduled practice time during training sessions and, after every training session, supervisors were organised to allow learners time to practise their new learning in their actual work role. Practice time was a management expectation. Supervisor's monitored on-job performance until a worker could consistently demonstrate the expected requirements. It was only at that point the Training Section's task was considered complete.

Industry focus is only one side of the current VET coin, so to speak. From stories told by one of my old aunts, who had learned to be a legal secretary in a business college in the 1930s, I understand Australia has had academic training programs for some work functions since that time at least. I remember Aunty Lil considered she gained her excellent ability in her work role through learning on-the-job. Programs not directly aligned to a particular workplace, such as those offered in trade schools and night classes, were not considered 'VET programs' for a long time. My recollection is those *Vocational programs* like Aunty Lil's were called 'formal training', if people were coming off-the-job to attend and 'further education' if people attending were unemployed. An off-the-job, formal training component was introduced into Apprenticeships at around the same time as TAFE was established. Prior to that point, all apprentice training was on-the-job — meaning each apprentice learned only what their employer knew. The resultant level of performance was

limited by the combination of knowledge, skills and attitude an employer or master tradesperson had, and their training ability. This combination was again found to often be problematic when Traineeships were first introduced, and resulted in three day Train-the-Trainer programs being conducted to increase employer's ability to train their worker when I worked for Training Services (Australia) or TSA.

This two-tier, separated approach to training workers continued until the 90s, when I worked at Elizabeth and Salisbury TAFEs, prior to Training Package implementation. A range of pre-vocational and re-entry to the workforce *Vocational programs* were conducted during the day for unemployed people and Certificate programs, such as the Certificate in Frontline Supervision I conducted, were run at night for mostly employed people. TAFE and other academically-oriented private colleges, schools and community education providers, including providers of programs delivered on-line, either received Government funding or charged learners a fee for programs conducted of this type. With the introduction of User Choice funding, all 'nationally-recognised' programs appear to have started being called 'VET programs.' When investigated, I found many courses are associated with work, and provide a level of workforce skills but whether they provide training in Emery's 'enlightenment-understanding' end of the learning continuum is debatable. We seem to have adopted a belief that learners' in all training programs related to work can produce people with the *performance standard* industry requires. Where the training is conducted is irrelevant. Of interest here is the resultant level of abilities. My disquiet comes from how some current VET program*s* would fit better into the previous 'vocational education' category but that option appears to have been lost along the way — hence, my decision to highlight a difference in training outcome from those *VET programs* run in workplaces. Whilst I discuss this change in more detail in Chapters 2 and 4; I can say here, why this has happened remains, for me, an unresolved mystery.

Governments use of VET programs

Australian Governments have used vocational education and training for purposes in times of particular need (Ryan, 2011), and always by direct involvement in workplaces. During World War II, my mother was employed at the Cadbury chocolate factory preparing medical barley sugar for our troops overseas. In another

period, Award Restructuring aided the Australian workforce to prepare for entry into a global market. Programs like the Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS), introduced to train youth when fifteen to twenty four year olds had a high unemployment rate, came later. In his research, Ryan found the "gap between the training and education cultures and their policy communities" (2011, p.10) sharpened during the economic crises of the mid 80s resulting in "A quite remarkable ideological eruption which saw a swing away from what could be loosely described as the Kangan student-centred culture of access to the industry- and employer-centred culture of the 'new vocationalism' (Ahearn, 1993, p.14 cited in Ryan, 2011, p.10).

From my workplace trainer's perspective, workplace training programs did not lose their learner-centred approach but the structure for this 'new vocationalism,' built by a stitching together of different pieces of VET fabric into a 'patchwork quilt' in the ANTA era, did somewhat leave TAFE without its customary powerful leadership influence for a while. To me, government departments, school leavers, unemployed people, people employed in different industry sectors, unions, large and small business management were all working together as *One Nation*, the name for the national policy on employment launched by Prime Minister Keating in February 1992.

Ryan found we have not had a similar committed Government focus during our stable times however — resulting in once implemented strategies not being followed through all of the time. The impact on VET in times of war is obvious. People need to be quickly skilled in the best way possible — with short intensive programs held if possible on the shop floor. Is it Australia's recent good times or our failure to critically analyse our current workforce skill levels which has seen us move away from our focus on training being undertaken in workplaces — from Government funding employers to train their staff or funding needed community projects as a way to train unemployed people on-the-job? Has our moving Government funding to the individual and the RTO instead achieved better results? NCVER statistics show we are achieving higher qualifications figures but is this measure equal to worker competency?

A comment by Gert Biesta, a writer on the theory and philosophy of education and educational research, appears relevant to the situation I find in VET with regard to clarity of purpose.

> The danger here [with any approach] is that we end up valuing what is measured, rather than that we engage in measurement of what we value. It is the latter, however, that should ultimately inform our decisions about the direction of education, which is why I have argued that we should give prominence to the question as to what constitutes good [VET] education, rather than just paying attention to effective [VET] education. (Biesta, 2008, p.43, my brackets)

I thought we wanted to measure against industry performance standards — the expected standard which lies somewhere between acceptable and unacceptable workplace behaviours. Such standards are required to ensure improved future production efforts are both possible and easy for businesses and their employees. An *Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) Policy Review* (2008) definitely supports this view. This paper highlights hospitality sector employers doubt about the "veracity of competency based assessment and the role of industry in the assessment process," particularly when those assessors making the judgement have "long past experience in industry (ACCI, 2008, p.1). In answer to the question "Why is assessment an Important Issue for Employers?" ACCI makes the points below:

> When a person is issued with a qualification and has been assessed as having those skills without really having them, then the employer ends up picking up the cost of the lack of quality by having to retrain the person in the workplace…In addition, where appropriate delivery and assessment by a minority of RTOs result in qualifications being issued that do not match skill levels, it drives down standards in industry, and gives a bad name to the training industry and makes it difficult for quality RTOs to achieve the confidence of business and enterprises. (ACCI, 2008, p.3)

Is this problem somehow connected to that 'cultural bias' I mentioned earlier regarding VET education? Surely educators do not consider they are better placed to tell industry what level of competence is needed or to dictate the level and type of education required.

Joy Selby Smith's ANTA research shows the National Competition Policy, a government intervention resulting in the creation of RTOs, occurred because of the government's poor perception of the training being provided by TAFE Colleges prior to ANTA being formed. Selby Smith speaks of a shift in policy focus occurring — a move from governments scrutinising and adapting the service provided by TAFEs, as their service providers of choice, to give "...greater attention to the demand side of the market; in particular, paying regard to industry and union concerns about its operations" (Selby Smith, 1994 p.10).

Specific work-based training programs such as the Frontline Management Initiative (FMI), implemented by our Government to increase manager skill levels, have not continued. Instead, our later Government pushes have been to increase numbers gaining higher level qualifications (NCVER, 2007). Neither qualifications or workplace training automatically relate to increased productivity but Joyce M. Clark from DigitalThink Inc., a business consultancy, has found when workplace training is connected though to mastery of "competencies that are directly linked to company performance objectives" then it is more likely that "peak performance will become a reality" (Clark, 2003).

'Economic Rationalism', a term coined in Australia in the 90s as a short cut to the meanings of microeconomic policy, seems to have been a dominant force in shaping Australian understanding of VET. Government departments in particular, as well as many large businesses, shed Training and Development staff at this time, perhaps inadvertently creating what became known as 'brain drain.' Guthrie saw Australia enacting "a mantra of growth through efficiency" (Guthrie, 2010, p.10) by these actions. When the effects of this approach became a reality in businesses, and in the Government Departments in which I worked, knowledge management systems were immediately established and succession planning mechanisms were introduced to ensure a more stable future. I recall that many HRD sections began to concentrate on reducing risk rather than building staff capability at this point and a number of key proponents of 'new vocationalism' moving from influential positions within organisations and *VET administration*.

If government agencies referred to and reviewed the history of their decision and policy making, they might see inconsistencies in their practice. This referencing is made harder as our successive governments keep changing the names and the aims of

their agencies — the required consistency of thinking and action is not possible in this climate. Australian Training Packages' 'Code of Practice for Assessors' is based on a seventy-five year old American organisation's code. These Americans appear to have seen the benefits of keeping a consistent standard-setting organisation for the stability this provides. Australian VET, it seems, continues to be a 'moveable feast' whether or not it causes confusion and wastes resources lower down the VET chain, closer to the shop floor.

I dare to suggest that the impetus such proponents made in favouring business and industry provision of *VET programs* ceased, and precipitated a return to institutionally-focussed people leading the way in VET training provision, a position which has continued. Without adequate knowledge of the history of VET, I doubt whether today's new players in *VET administration* would be aware of industry and business commitment to real life workplace training provision, or the additional benefits that participation in this type of program can provide to learners. The 'brain drain' effect, I suspect, was a more significant shift than that understood even by those who participated at the time. Ramifications of the 'brain drain' effect for Australia's productivity may not be clearly identified for a long time.

Industry participation in VET programs

Although still espousing an industry focus, the clear work performance focus VET once had may now be rhetoric rather than fact. While industry continues to be involved in front-end VET, through governance and Training Package development, one important factor for effectiveness and efficiency appears to be missing. The direct connection between learning about an area of work and applying that learning on-the-job is no longer intentional. Before Training Packages were introduced, learning and practising your learning on-the-job were synonymous with *VET programs*. An important part of my workplace training role revolved around analysing workers' performance, developing customised learning for particular needs, and evaluating whether the training designed met expected learning and performance outcomes such as increased productivity or decreased accidents. A regular performance review was part of formal Training and Development Strategies in businesses, and closely linked to senior managements' strategic intentions.

Duty Statements reflected very specific, documented requirements for each work role and, as such, included Personnel Specifications describing the anticipated attitudes, aptitudes and personality types likely to suit that position and expected amounts of time spent on each task. Today the detail in many of these statements and specifications is missing in more generic documents that depend on individual interpretation by employers. This later, unattached to specific workplace performance approach encourages generic training programs that often miss the mark for workplace competence to be identified as a *performance standard*. The slippage from customised training programs to generic training programs risks mediocrity in Australian productivity and performance — to risk mediocrity is a mysterious choice by governments.

Australia's often marketed 'laid back' and 'she'll be right mate' cultural image, does appear to be at odds with the 'quality,' 'consistency' and 'continuous improvement' language touted in VET publications with regard to industry requirements. Maybe we feel we truly earned our right to relaxing and complacency after having worked very hard. "We can rest on our laurels" after earning our laurel wreath by being the best. To achieve these three important productivity factors in our industries — quality, consistency and continuous improvement — workers first need to understand and identify with the term 'standards.' When I was growing up, this concept was introduced into my schooling through formal examinations. Although the examination process no doubt could have been improved, we students were clear there was a standard to be reached. In 2010, when I worked with Year 11 and 12 students in a TTC, many students did not comprehend the idea of striving to achieve clearly identified VET performance standards — to my dismay this conversation was not often taken up, and put to right, by VET teachers either.

I spoke about this with a very experienced college teacher, and highly thought of 'VET in Schools' trainer colleague, who revealed her understanding. It appears there was 'some kind' of collective decision in Education, made some fifteen years or more ago, to remove pressure on students to achieve set standards in favour of being supportive of whatever results they attain. My teacher colleague believed this decision had two significant effects on students' potential outcomes. It gives a false impression to students about their own ability which means they do not strive to

achieve their best result, or any result, and the lack of practice in striving to overcome any blocks minimises student resilience when something unexpected or worrying shows up later on in their lives. It is hoped that new Australian Curriculum standards, progressively implemented through 2011 to 2014, will reintroduce overt, understood 'standards' to ensure students are familiar with this important workplace concept when they leave compulsory schooling and these initiatives will hopefully improve how well future workers will be equipped to begin their employment.

There is another point to be raised here. Employers have commented in reports, and in my hearing, on this situation for years. That the Australian Government has only recently begun addressing poor literacy, numeracy and language performance makes it justifiable to suggest the possible learning from this event is that all layers of Government need to thoroughly analyse the possible consequences of any Government decisions that could potentially affect current and future workers' ability to either become or remain workplace competent. I would question to if it is good governance that implemented programs that are meeting previously identified goals and current requirements need to be changed when a different political party takes office.

Regrettably, the meaning of 'competency' has changed many times in Australian VET over its lifetime. Emphasis on the combination of skills, knowledge and attitude applied in workplaces crested for only a short time. Each wave of language changes for learning and assessment procedures and practices skewed previously direct alignment of *VET programs* with industry standards towards aligning VET training with Training Package wording for nationally-recognised VET qualifications instead.

Attitudes, essential criteria in workplace roles, have not been part of VET training for decades. This point will be investigated further in Chapters 2, 3 and 5 of my thesis where I consider VET from a Human Capital Management Philosophy perspective, that is, from considering each person's ability — how they think and act, and their intrinsic value to their organisation. My own view of the centrality of competencies to good VET training practice is summed up in David William's statement, as Editor of humancapitalmangement.biz website:

For practical purposes, 'Competencies' may be defined as sets of observable job-related skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. Competencies play a central role in aligning each Human Capital Management function with business strategy. (Williams, undated, retrieved 11 January, 2004)

Introduction of the **BSZ98** Training Package changed VET in two ways. First, the word order of my workplace role was changed, on paper anyway. We were known as 'workplace trainers and assessors' but assessment was moved into the primary position for a reason not clearly understood even at the time. Second, the new **Certificate IV** qualification had eight units — covering a range of skills similar to the Training Services Australia (TSA) trainer training program I was employed to deliver to industry at that time — but, because RTOs had gained importance, understanding of the new qualification requirements became minimalistic. The unfortunate result was: "Workplace trainers only required one unit, BSZ404A Train Small Groups, Assessors required only the three units, BSZ401A, BSZ402A and BSZ403A to plan, conduct and review assessment" (BSZ98, 1999, p.25). I remember it was suggested at the time that this change may have occurred to cut the costs of TAFE staff training when it was decided people teaching in institutes also required this certification to continue with their employment (Guthrie, 2010).

The once promised professional career path in Training and Development within industry, important for those people engaged within workplaces, was gone with this change. Hindsight appears to show there were fewer opportunities for advancement as a vocational trainer from when the wide range of skills and knowledge required to operate before the **BSZ98** qualification. The decision to focus on assessment also made the interdependent links between training and assessment, which experienced workplace trainers understand as necessary to reach high standards of competency in workplace roles, no longer obligatory in VET training. Perhaps this change in thinking was exacerbated by the timing of the decision — immediately before the first wave of Training Packages in 1999 (NCVER, 2007). Perhaps this is why it is often thought that Training Packages commenced in 2004. Unfortunately, this approach appears to have created an expectation that already qualified VET trainers and assessors need to gain the latest training and assessment qualifications. I, and many colleagues, would argue this is a fundamentally flawed process because each

new version of the qualification has seen the expected level in skill and knowledge decrease.

I stop here and reflect as it was only when I went to write the full title of **BSZ98**, I realised I would normally name the industry the Training Package was about — CHC08, Community Services Training Package, for instance. But **BSZ98** did not belong to an industry sector — it provided the underpinning training and assessment qualifications for Australian VET as a whole. That this Training Package underpins a culturally less significant part of the Education industry sector, rather than a separate and independent industry sector, is perhaps an important consideration in this thesis with regard to its discussion of workplace competency? There may be a tendency for Education sector employees to regard themselves as operators within professional organisations rather than workplaces. The same tendency might exist for employees of other government departments. The notion of 'workplace competency' therefore may not adhere for them in relation to their 'professional' situations.

Australia's introduction of a broader range of Training Packages was both exciting and bewildering for those delivering VET training to the masses! Large groups of grass roots VET people attended meetings held around the country to introduce this new phenomenon. Both workplace trainers and 'VET teachers', as those working in TAFE colleges were called at this time and later, grappled with comprehending what the papers presented all meant. This new documentation did not look like the curriculum resource many TAFE personnel had thought they were getting from the title 'Training Package.' There was a huge backlash of negative feedback from my local TAFE teachers, and throughout Australia, which continued over a long period and necessitated seminars and workshops being held to 'unpack the competencies' — to explain the language, format and use of a Training Package (Downs, 2001). In these seminars, my colleagues and I were told a **Unit of Competency** is a task or a unit of work; **Elements** are the steps you take in doing the task and, as such, these action statements begin with a verb; and **Performance Criteria** are just that — the main points in performing each step of the task.

Like many points I am raising in this thesis, the following one is debateable as I have not been able to substantiate or dismiss my point of view because VET historical documentation interprets rather than documents processes. I believe it is critical though to any future discussion on competency to make it clear here and now, my view is that when Training Packages were introduced, 'Performance Criteria' were not seen as being 'performance standards.' Performance standards were known to be a separate thing entirely. Performance standards were expected to be set by RTOs for individual **Units** in the **Qualifications** on their Scope of Registration. It was openly acknowledged then that an RTO needed to cover all **Elements** and **Performance Criteria** in establishing the performance level they were expecting in a competent person. Each RTO, however, was free to choose a performance standard which fitted somewhere along a continuum of performance levels for the task in question — similar to the international star-rating system used by hotel accommodation and services. This exercising of individual RTO judgement is why 'validation' and 'moderation' practices figured so prominently during this period. Such practices were necessary to ensure the different levels of performance fitted within the accepted continuum and approaches to assessment were consistent for each **Qualification**. I assert here, industry saw performance standards as being more precise than the words written into **Units**. I italicise *performance standards* from this point on to highlight I mean something more measurable than competency standards written in Training Packages.

Qualification or competence to complete a task within a workplace

It seems reasonable to assume that when the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) was introduced two years after Training Packages, the individual and collective understanding of the first auditors of the VET system would have had flow-on effects throughout Australia. I recall that many of the first auditors, at least in Tasmania, were previously employed as clerical staff within State Education offices — auditing was seen as an administrative role. It was no surprise that, when looking for a consistent approach, auditors with this background chose checklists. Industries and businesses are not consistent however. Difference is a necessary component of market segmentation for businesses. As this difference factor was a given for workplace RTOs, these organisations adopted approaches to

suit industries in the market segment they serviced. While ensuring they were consistent across industry sectors, workplace RTOs delivered the individual training and assessment services each business required. It is more than likely that institutional RTOs took a generic approach — possibly a "the book says" approach at this time.

One positive effect I observed from the AQTF having more clearly specified RTO requirements was a general raising of the performance expectation bar for RTOs. This factor alone saw many poorly performing private RTOs close their doors. I do not remember hearing of a Government-funded institute closing its doors, even when their poor results against industry standards was widely discussed in the market place. One negative effect of the AQTF, in my view, was the 'cementing' of the assessment rather than training focus for VET. The current focus on comparing learners' training against RTOs' training system processes and what is written in Training Packages rather than industries' voiced expectations of a trained worker seems to have begun at this point. I experienced this 'unreal' approach in an Australia Tourism Data Warehouse 'boot camp' event in Adelaide in May 2013 and found it very disorienting. Tourism industry representation was saying "this is the level we are looking for" and RTO representatives were telling them what the Training Package requirements were to gain funding — clearly a lower level training program. It took some time for recognition by the RTO that if they trained to the industry expected standard then the learners would have met the lower level **Unit** requirements.

Andrew (Twiggy) Forrest, currently non-executive Chairman of Fortescue Metals Group which conducts successful work-based training programs for indigenous Australians to gain employment in mining industries, made the statement below to the National Press Club in May, 2012. His words could be showing the effect such dogmatic *VET administration* thinking about VET funding has.

> Any training not attached to a specific job risks is joining the long record of
> billions of dollars wasted by consecutive governments…We have in our hands
> the policy power to refuse training for training's sake and we must refuse it.
> (Vasek article in The Australian, 2012)

Forrest's statement reflects there is no point in having an assessment focus in VET if you are not assessing to the expected industry standard. Competency at

industry standards in VET is achieved through practice and application within workplaces. It is in this way that learners can acquire a 'whole body' or totally connected understanding of the work processes, plus the cultural aspects peculiar to each industry and to each workplace role. As well as developing truly competent workers, providing funded training and development within industry has the added benefit for industry of built-in potential for innovation of work practices. I schedule a meeting with management to convey participant-identified possible changes to their practices after conducting in-house training as there is always information to convey. Whether this occurs as a result of training or because time was allowed for discussion I am unsure.

Many industry leaders and researchers have, over decades, made similar statements to Forrest's in questioning the value of parts of our national training system. Yet, our *VET administration* appears to move on in an ever-growing and, dare I say, possibly self-perpetuating way. Why? One clue might be the loss of focus on the VET sector that ANTA provided. Aghast! — is how I and VET colleagues responded to the announcement that ANTA was to close. We saw this closure as a monumental blow to Australia's VET system and, therefore, to the VET sector professional careers we were working towards. Unrest was felt for a considerable time after ANTA's demise and, the continuing changes to VET's direction that my research uncovers, testify that this decision was to contribute to the loss of a unified system for training workers to operate at a high standard.

I liken the effect on the VET sector of the decision to close ANTA to what happens when you change tack midstream in a yacht, without the wind having shifted. There is a huge 'flapping' noise for a while and then everything returns to normal — albeit the vessel is heading in a different direction. As a crew member, in a surprisingly short time your attention moves to where you are now heading and what must be done immediately, leaving you no time to consider the effects of your change in direction. Like all change management processes I have experienced, there is a high risk of losing something or someone important if the change process is not well managed. Was VET's previous focus on direct workplace outcomes 'scuttled' by the ANTA ship's sinking?

Leading VET sector direction

By use of the term 'leading' the way by ANTA, I mean an acknowledged place to contact when what is happening lower down in the VET system creates problems for operators, or an unsatisfactory situation cannot be resolved for either an individual or an industry group. When BASS Tasmania closed in 2001 and the Training Package developers had not consulted with National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), the profession's national peak body, who could NAATI contact when they found the **Units** developed for their industry were unacceptable to the needs of their profession, for instance? NAATI's attempts to contact the ISC involved failed to provide advice about where to lodge their complaints. The degree of misunderstanding between the industry representatives and the Training Package developers about expected *performance standards* escalated. No mediation intervention could occur with ANTA's closure and the result was ugly — there was so much anger and disappointment at their disenfranchisement that security personnel were required to assist protesting NAATI members to leave meeting rooms around the country. When a representative from NAATI finally contacted me to argue their case to withdraw the unacceptable **Units,** these were removed from the Training Package documentation sent for endorsement.

If a similar impassable difference between industry experts and ISC staff regarding expected levels of competence occurred today, I am not sure which body would handle the matter within the huge mechanism VET has since become. I purport there are more organisations involved in *VET administration* in some way than ever before, and this has increased ambiguity about which 'agency' is responsible for what in VET. No organisation had claimed leadership of VET's direction by 2010 when Dr Peter Shergold, Chairman of NCVER Board, wrote "There are far too many committees, councils and advisory groups with overlapping responsibilities for vocational education, higher education and skills development" (Shergold, 2010). Changes to high level administration functions are regularly made but the lack of clear leadership continues for VET practitioners. During 2012, new names were allocated to Standing Committees supporting COAG's education direction and new wording was written for their new Committees' functions and responsibilities. Continual changing of wording has been a consistently annoying factor throughout the period of my research. I would write about a particular agency

or committee and find that when I return to review my writing something significant has changed.

I have even located many different interpretations of what is identified as 'the VET sector' within published VET documentation leaving me with no doubt these definition changes are adding to the bewilderment of VET operators. NQC's Training Package Glossary, still often referred to in current information, states that the VET sector, "…encompasses both recognised training leading to a qualification/statement of attainment under the Australian Qualifications Framework, and the non-recognised training, such as in-house, product training" (NQC, 2006).

Whereas, ASQA's later developed website states,

> …the VET system is about RTOs...[ASQA is] the new regulator for
> Australia's vocational education and training (VET) sector. VET enables
> students to gain qualifications for all types of employment and specific skills
> to help them in the workplace. (ASQA, 2012)

> Which is it? And, where do universities delivering *VET qualifications* fit?
> This type of indecision between qualifications and skills creates problems at
> low and high levels in VET. Providers of nationally accredited training are
> the only training companies required to be an RTO. As is obvious, training
> programs conducted 'in-house,' that is, programs conducted about a particular
> product or conveying company specifics, have no need to be part of any
> national system yet several definitions include these. This suggests two
> separate approaches are considered acceptable rather than an all-inclusive
> approach to competency in workplaces. Other similar public statements
> found, show that language terms and definition conflicts occur too often for
> there to be consistency across our 'national training system.'

VET and Human Resource Development

My enquiry brings to light some inconclusive clues regarding happenings around the VET system. When VET became competency-based, and the system expanded to include institutional training programs, the Human Resource Management strategies operating in industries appear to have become disconnected from Australia's view of VET training. The following Community Services & Health ISC's (CS&HISC) response to a *Skills Australia Discussion Paper* on the future direction for Australian VET, confirms the writer's lack of knowledge about the

previous 'strategic' associations of VET training, or the later disassociation with the advent of Training Packages.

> Reform of the vocational education and training sector is needed as part of the effort to improve workforce performance. However, it must be recognised that the VET sector is usually engaged with the learning and development aspect of enterprises. A new workforce development agenda that has an impact on productivity and performance will be far broader than learning and development and will engage with enterprises at a more strategic level…Skills Australia's focus, through Australian Workforce Futures on workforce development is a step in the right direction, including changing policy focus from skills delivery to skills utilisation. (Community Services &Health Industry Skills Council, 2010, p. 3)

On reading this response, I was shocked and dismayed. VET did once have a direct 'impact on productivity and performance' far broader than 'learning and development.' My lived experience of delivering *VET programs* in the 80s and 90s is of operating at this high strategic level as common practice, particularly in Australia's larger businesses, and in many Australian Government and some State Government sectors. Such an approach was not consistently adopted throughout these sectors even at that time: these differences became obvious each time my Government Department's title changed and we were merged with other smaller divisions. Small businesses, where most of our Australian workforce is employed, is likely to be more operational than strategic or administrative in focus because of their financial imperatives — often they simply do not have the resourcing to be strategic in advance. If we continue to stretch 'VET programs' to incorporate training of unemployed people in classrooms, and fund training of employed people without direct input and support from their own management personnel, how can Australia adopt the strategic approach or the skills utilisation that CS&HISC is advocating?

Determinants of successful training practices in large Australian firms, a 2003 Government-funded research paper by Susan Dawe, outlines ten key training practices to develop workplace competence at the levels required then, and into the foreseeable future. I question why 'VET programs' have not been expected to match Dawe's ten 'critical' points since this report was presented. I question the purpose of

funding research when those in charge of VET policy do not connect results found with improving or validating VET training provision. Schofield and McDonald's review of the VET system raises this point when they state,

> Although this is not an area we examined closely, we have been struck by the substantial body of high quality of academic and practitioner literature on various aspects of Training Packages and also by the difficulty in using it in a systematic way as an evidence-base for Training Package policy and practice. (2004, p.34)

Introducing Government legislation in 2011 around RTO system compliance in an attempt to provide skilled workers to industry seems a decidedly indirect approach. This might be a rational approach if having a consistent system within an RTO ensured their successful learners could perform in workplaces to industry's expected skill level. Unfortunately, checking that an RTO's competent students meet on-the-job requirements does not appear to be included in ASQA's documented processes. I suggest RTO compliance only confirms the RTO's performance against its own, and ASQA, standards. It does not guarantee the deemed competent learner meets expected industry standards—which is what VET training is attempting to achieve in the first place, is it not?

I find an absence of research or evidence to show that the many hundreds of **Qualifications** developed to date and the work standards of people who have gained these **Qualifications**, consistently reflect the standard industry wants from their employees. I have found though, through searching advertised vacancies for many months on the Australian Public Services website that few of them required applicants to have *VET qualifications* to qualify for Government positions — even in the departments administering *VET qualifications* — although many of these **Qualifications** have been on offer since 1999. I have not found a rationale for this, seeming anomaly to occur.

When Karmel, as the head of NCVER, chose to redefine the term 'industry' to mean "an amalgamation of Australian VET stakeholders" in a 2012 NCVER report, for me, he added to the tangle of meanings the VET sector has accumulated. Was his decision to define industry in this way a pragmatic one when the term 'industry' already has a common internationally understood business meaning with regard to

large-scale production? The Microsoft Word *Encarta Dictionary* (2012) has two definitions for industry.

> 1. organised economic activity connected with the production of a particular product or range of products;

> 2. an activity that many people are involved in, especially one that has become commercialised or standardised.

While I acknowledge Karmel's new definition fits within dictionary meaning, I question his decision to focus on the VET system itself as the 'industry.' Possible problems become more apparent when Karmel (2012) says his view of industry comprises four other groups of "individual enterprises/employers" and is

> …made up of a wide range of stakeholders, all of whom have a direct interest in what training is delivered and how it is paid for. The level of public funding of VET is very high, and the industry stakeholders have a direct interest in the level of these funds and how they are disbursed. Therefore, when I think about the value of VET research for industry, I tend to concentrate on research into issues that go to the institutions that provide the structure for VET, and the efficiency and effectiveness of public funding. (p.8)

I am concerned that the influence of Karmel's definition might restrict a full understanding of the bigger picture of VET in Australia. I wonder if Karmel is alone in this focus on institutions and public funding when speaking of 'industry' in regard to VET or he is reflecting the *VET administration* view? Does his description include enterprise and private RTOs, and VET training delivered unfunded on-site? Karmel's line of thinking had me reflect on the different ways policy makers could be currently viewing VET. Do policy makers think of VET as two different systems? Or, do they see one system with two different parts — institutions and workplaces? Perhaps a similar crossing-over of information occurred at some previous time with regard to VET learning outcomes and worker *performance standards.* Any such occurrences are likely to create differences in interpretation and, therefore, possible misinterpretation.

Wherever I turned in my years of VET experience the questions below confronted me, and return in my research journey.

What statement of competency is being used to develop 'VET programs'?

Is this same statement of competency being used to check VET system compliance requirements?

Does the statement of competency being used **guarantee** we have skilled productive workers?

I understand it is unlikely I will find answers to the questions I raise during my attempt to find constancy in the notion of competence as it pertains to Australian workplace standards. My hope is to set solid ground work for future discussion between all those with an interest in VET training. Australian VET is not an administration system for Training Packages development or for implementing Government's workforce development strategies as it sometimes appears. *VET programs* need to ensure we have competent, expert workers in our workplaces and future workplaces. Before developing this competency discussion further, by looking separately at each of three intertwined aspects identified in the three questions above, it is necessary to investigate how the term 'competency' is considered, and utilised, in different VET arenas. The question "What does being competent mean?" is examined more fully in the next Chapter.

Chapter 2   Being competent means…

> The intellectual equipment needed for the job in the future is an ability to define problems, quickly assimilate relevant data, conceptualise and re-organise the information, make deductive and inductive leaps with it, ask hard questions about it, discuss findings with colleagues, work collaboratively to find solutions and then convince others.
>
> Robert B. Reich, 1993

The term 'competency,' has been bandied around in Australian VET for decades. Is there consensus on what competency means in the Australian VET system? Does our view of worker competence fit with Reich's view of the 'intellectual equipment for the job in the future'? Is competency a concept or an arbitrary term? Having already drawn attention to other inconsistencies in terminology within the current VET system, seeking clarity for the meaning of the term 'competency' is a crucial and on-going task. What meaning does competency or being competent have universally? Is this similar to how competency is viewed in Australian VET documentation? In seeking clarity we might begin to piece together various representations of competency into a kind of jigsaw even if it might mean that some pieces are still missing. We would then perhaps be able to identify the separate understandings of competency and bring them together into unified understandings that could be more universally shared. This is an aspiration for my second chapter and I recognise it could be one that is impossible to fulfil but it is one that I am purposefully disposed to try.

Defining competency

Beginning with standard dictionaries, *Encarta Dictionary* (2012) states:

Competency (noun) 1. Same as competence 2. An ability to do something, especially measured against a standard

while the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Fourth Edition (2004) provides a legal focus in stating:

Competence *n*.(also **competency**) **1 a** …the state of being competent. **b** an area in which a person is competent; a skill. **2** dated an income large enough to live on, usu. unearned. **3** Law the legal capacity (of a court, a magistrate, etc.) to deal with a matter.

> **Competent** *adj.* **1 a** …adequately qualified or capable (*not competent to drive*). **b** effective (*a competent batsman*). **2** *Law* a (of a judge or a court) authorised to deal with a matter. b (of a person) having legal capacity and qualification. (p. 280)

Bing, another on-line search engine, offers informative descriptions which can readily be applied to a VET-specific focus:

> Competence or Competency is the ability of an individual to do a job properly. A competency is a set of defined behaviours that provide a structured guide enabling the identification, evaluation and development of the behaviours in individual employees…Some scholars see "competence" as a combination of knowledge, skills and behavior used to improve performance; or as the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified, having the ability to perform a specific role. For instance, management competency might include systems thinking and emotional intelligence, and skills in influence and negotiation.

> Competency is also used as a more general description of the requirements of human beings in organisations and communities…To be competent a person would need to be able to interpret the situation in the context and to have a repertoire of possible actions to take and have trained in the possible actions in the repertoire, if this is relevant…Regardless of training, competency would grow through experience and the extent of an [individual's capacity] to learn and adapt…Competency has different meanings, and continues to remain one of the most diffuse terms in the management development sector, and the organisational and occupational literature. (Bing, 2013)

Following Bing in this way, I can see that the term 'competency' is indeed prey to 'diffuse' interpretation. I believe I am justified in using words like 'inconsistent' and 'ever changing' to describe the ways the national training system diffuses the meaning of the term. The Bing description is quite comprehensive compared to the description in **BSZ98** where the word 'competence' was first advocated for standard-based training. **BSZ98**'s notion of competency lacked contextual meaning: "Competency: The specialisation of knowledge and skill and the application of that knowledge and skill to the standards of performance required in the workplace" (1998, p.135).

Many descriptions of competency can be found in glossaries used by different authoritative VET bodies over time. NQC's latest definition still invites flexibility in its interpretation as it does not require demonstration in an actual workplace role.

> Competency is consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments.

> (21st Century Products, NQC, 2011)

The current *NCVER Full Glossary* uses two terms, 'competency' and 'competency standards,' in different ways, thereby diffusing meaning and further confusing VET practitioners:

> Competency: The consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments.

> Competency standard: An industry-determined specification of performance, which sets out the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to operate effectively in employment. In vocational education and training (VET), competency standards are made up of units of competency, which are themselves made up of elements of competency, together with performance criteria, a range of variables, and an evidence guide. Competency standards are an endorsed component of a training package. (NCVER, 2012)

> Here we have a new term 'competency standard' introduced by Training Package developers I suspect in response to their negotiating understanding between them and industry about *performance standards*. It appears that the Training Package developers' response is a theoretical one that has adopted a particular system of language which allows them to generalise industry training performances, independent of industry contexts. These theoretical descriptions become meaningless without being embedded in the particularity and practicality required for working in a workplace site.

Service Skills Australia's website, for one, does not agree with NCVER's view that competency standards are an endorsed component of a training package. Their website states there are three components to a training package — "qualifications, units of competency and assessment guidelines." With such differences in understanding, it is little surprise Schofield and McDonald's review found that VET

training was no longer hitting the mark expected by industry, and "that this implies the current definitions and understandings of competence must be reconceptualised and broadened to encompass broader learning domains" (Schofield & McDonald, 2004, p.10).

The latest NSSC definition reflects what was originally understood, except the attitude component is missing: "Competency is the consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments" (NSSC, 2011).

When I contacted NSSC in 2011 regarding these latest changes to this definition, the email response I received reads,

> Knowledge and competency are inseparable – both are needed in the
> workplace and so both have their place in VET and higher education
> qualifications. Learners can't demonstrate competency without also
> demonstrating the knowledge that underpins skills and the applications of
> skills at work…Knowledge requirements are already identified in units of
> competency but not consistently across all Training Packages. The new
> knowledge requirements stress the need for explicit, defined knowledge and
> preparatory units in all Training Packages.
> (NQC, 2011)

I found the VET context the NSSC displays in this email response puzzling as knowledge and competency have always been inseparable but being written in this way they might be separated in learning. When I read the *National Quality Council/Council of Australian Governments Joint Steering Committee VET Products for the 21st Century Final Report* (April 2009)*,* from which this definition, and emphasis on knowledge, is said to have been derived, there appears to be a discrepancy between this report and my historical experience, and discrepancies within this report itself. Point 5 of this report, Definition of Competency states:

> The current definition of 'competency' within the Australian VET system
> emphasises the importance of workplace experience in terms of the
> demonstration of competence. Competency standards were first introduced to
> provide a benchmark against which states and territories could accredit

courses and qualifications, however, with the introduction of Training Packages competency standards are now directly aligned with national qualifications.

The primary focus of competency standards in Australia is therefore on the achievement of performance standards required for specific occupations. Each unit of competency must also embed employability skills relevant to the unit and contain explicit language, literacy and numeracy requirements relevant to the unit, however, these reflect but must not exceed the work requirements for the unit. Similarly, knowledge requirements in the unit of competency must be derived from the requirements of the work task. (p.16)

Jumping, as this report does, from 'the importance of workplace experience' to saying competency standards originally provided 'benchmarks for courses and qualifications' and then moving back to 'performance standards required for specific occupations' causes me concern.

Competency's relationship to Competency Standards

I know I, as a workplace trainer assessor, operated with something we called 'competency standards' in the 90s. The report claims that competency standards were first introduced to provide benchmarks for accrediting courses and qualifications. In my knowledge and experience, those competency standards were first levels of competency intentionally conceived to reflect *performance standards* of workers and were used in workplace assessments of worker abilities during Award Restructuring. These performance levels linked with an AQF document that stated what was expected of 'workers' at different levels shown on the next page. Though competency standards have been used for providing benchmarks for accrediting courses and qualifications, as well as conceiving performance levels, we must not assume that competency standards are the same as benchmarks, nor are they the same as performance levels. All three terms refer to related but different functions for describing workplace competence, benchmarks for judging, and levels for guiding performance. In this sense, the report reveals an absence of correlation of terms. To explain the relationship between the terms would enhance understanding of workplace competence, accreditation, and performance achievement, as parts of a whole, purposeful intention to improve workplace productivity.

Table 2.1   Original AQF Level Descriptors

Qualification	Level Descriptors	
Certificate I	The worker will normally be engaged in a workplace in which they:	• demonstrate knowledge by recall in a narrow range of areas • demonstrate basic practical skills such as the use of relevant tools • perform a sequence of routine tasks given clear direction • receive and pass on messages / information
Certificate II	The worker will normally be engaged in a workplace in which they:	• demonstrate basic operational knowledge in a moderate range of areas • apply a defined range of skills • apply known solutions to a limited range of predictable problems • perform a range of tasks where choice between a limited range of options is required • assess and record information from varied sources • take limited responsibility for own outputs in work and learning
Certificate III	The worker will normally be engaged in a workplace in which they:	• demonstrate some relevant theoretical knowledge • apply a range of well-developed skills • apply known solutions to a variety of predictable problems • perform processes that require a range of well-developed skills where some discretion and judgement is required • interpret available information, using discretion and judgement • take responsibility for own outputs in work and learning • take limited responsibility for the output of others
Certificate IV	The worker will normally be engaged in a workplace in which they:	• demonstrate understanding of a broad knowledge base incorporating some theoretical concepts • apply solutions to a defined range of unpredictable problems • identify and apply skill and knowledge areas to a wide variety of contexts with depth in some cases • identify, analyse and evaluate information from a variety of sources • take responsibility for own outputs in relation to specified quality standards • take limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others
Diploma	The worker will normally be engaged in a workplace in which they:	• demonstrate understanding of a broad knowledge base incorporating theoretical concepts, with substantial depth in some cases • analyse and plan approaches to technical problems or management requirements • transfer and apply theoretical concepts and/or technical or creative skills to a range of situations • evaluate information using it to forecast for planning or research purposes • take responsibility for own outputs in relation to broad quantity and quality parameters

		• take some responsibility for the achievement of group outcomes
Advanced Diploma	The worker will normally be engaged in a workplace in which they:	• demonstrate understanding of specialised knowledge with depth in some areas • analyse, diagnose, design and execute judgements across a broad range of technical or management functions • generate ideas through the analysis of information and concepts at an abstract level • demonstrate a command of wide-ranging, highly specialised technical, creative or conceptual skills • demonstrate accountability for personal outputs within broad parameters • demonstrate accountability for personal and group outcomes within broad parameters

Original Source: Old photocopy of Australian Qualifications Framework (Date Unknown) re-typed by L Hazelwood 2010

The NSSC report did not provide any detailed guidance for recommending the following nor for facilitating the action these two statements required.

> The consultations indicated that there is no significant pressure to alter the current definition of competency in a major way, although there is common agreement to clarify the scope and that the explanation that underpins the definition can be improved by simplifying, and strengthening its meaning.

> Multiple definitions of competency appear in key VET policies and documents, which may inhibit the development of a uniform understanding of competency, and need to be made consistent. There is also support for developing or improving documentation that explains what is meant by the different elements in the definition. (p. 16)

> Thus, I might be permitted to propose that the 21st Century Report has not succeeded in allaying confusion, and additional explanations of 'different elements' of the definition, recommended by the report, have not come to light of day. Two important recommendations below also appear to have been ignored.

> Ensure that this definition [that is, by NSSC, 2011 above] is used consistently in all key VET documents and Government publications.

> Ensure that the dimensions of competency underpinning the definition of competence are explained more simply and clearly so that they are conceived in ways which meet the full range of needs of industry, industry sectors, enterprises and individuals. (p.17)

The second of these recommendations is noticeably absent in important keystone VET documents, the TAA04 and TAE10 Training Packages. Though the report recommended providing simple and clear explanations of dimensions of competency, in **TAE10** the term "dimensions of competency" is not explained, throughout 1013 pages of text—no meaning is given anywhere. **TAE10** advises VET practitioners to utilise information contained in the 2002 ANTA produced CD resource entitled *Learning and Assessment Strategies* (TAE10, 2010, p. 98) which was presented to RTOs at the time. Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) does not appear to list this resource as available for purchase, making obtaining a copy difficult for newer RTOs.

2002. This is possibly about how far back you need to go to find a large amount of Government funding provided for developing good practice, generic resources for the VET sector. The numerous 2002 resources were developed to assist RTOs to change VET's focus from training to assessment. This may be an important point, even a possible cause, for the changing understanding about competency I have described. When we had a training focus, the objective was to have people reach a particular level of workplace performance. When we moved the goal posts to an assessment focus, for some inexplicable reason, our focus seemed to shift to meeting RTOs' own assessment strategies and the stated Training Package qualification requirements. Coincidentally, a focus on auditing RTO systems began. The current, continuing deployment of Government resources towards compliance following a UK model, according to Murray Cree from People Count Today (2013), demonstrates how important an investment this part of VET has become.

Workplace Training before Training Packages

For history's sake, I wish to recall how competencies were developed for competency-based training programs prior to Training Packages. In my researching I have not found any historical documentation of competency-based training in workplaces in the time that led to the advocacy of Training Packages. I offer the following brief narrative to fill the gap that I perceive.

When competencies were first introduced, I conducted many Developing a Curriculum processes, generally referred to by trainer assessors as DACUM that guided the identification of workplace competencies. Workshops, usually three days, were conducted for educators or specified workers to learn how to identify and document the skills and core knowledge needed to perform key duties and tasks in an organisation. These people aimed to record each step of each task and its enabling details. They also captured unobservable requirements for each step so that workers knew what understanding was necessary to demonstrate in completing the task to the level required.

At this point in time, I saw the important role of educators to be in identifying VET competencies that is, how a person needed to think, act and be when 'doing' the work task, each step seamlessly following the one before. Educators wrote 'performance criteria' specific to achieving expertise in the overall performance of

the task in question. The performance criteria written did not set the standard for performance expected but, at this historical point, they did detail an 'expert' stance. It was the RTO that determined or acclaimed the *performance standard* in accordance with the standard a particular industry desired. The term *performance standard* became the means to describe the expected culmination of the skills and knowledge components and a range of other factors in workers' performance — such as their efficiency, displayed work attitude, body position held or timing of actions. Discussions with long time colleagues confirm that, before Training Packages were introduced, 'competent' meant displaying a level of expertise which became only possible after considerable practice. A check of current VET documentation does not show the term 'expert' in association with competency, although I suspect industry still has this expectation — for what other level would be acceptable in industry? When Australia's Award Restructuring took place, pay rates aligned with industry determined levels of expertise for each job in a workplace. People received qualifications at the level at which they operated in a workplace role.

   Many of the workplace trainer and assessor practices, which I engaged in before 1998, were not included in **BSZ98**. For instance, as part of Human Resource (HR) sections of companies, we developed Training and Development Strategies each year. Management of different sections, and those in charge of the organisation's strategic direction, advised HR of future developments and expected training needs. As a part of checking on our training efforts, a thorough evaluation process such as Donald Kirkpatrick's four levels of learning, known as The Kirkpatrick Model, was adopted in the way shown below.

   Level 1 - Reaction – To what degree participants react favourably to the training.

   Level 2 – To what degree participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitudes, confidence and commitment based on their participation in a training event.

   Level 3 – To what degree participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job.

   Level 4 – To what degree targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training event and subsequent reinforcement. (Kirkpatrick Partners, 2012)

We used this method to measure the results of staff training that our section was deployed to evaluate. Our training before **BSZ98** covered methods that mirrored businesses practices.

VET training was introduced to focus on workforce requirements but it appears industry processes did not come along with this change. Evaluation, training needs analysis and other strategies used by HR departments at the time to measure worker aptitude against required competence, and still used, were not incorporated into the BSZ98 Training Package. Perhaps such direct relationships between VET and workplace performance were omitted from relevant VET documentation at the time for a well thought out reason. I propose it is more likely they were missed as their importance to workplace performance was either not fully understood by document writers or the workplace performance focus was already losing importance for these influential people.

Donald Kirkpatrick, with fifty years of experience in evaluating training program results, says there is a direct correlation between the degrees to which company or team support for learning is provided and the level of improved performance and positive outcomes achieved (Kirkpatrick Partners, 2012). The relationship between on-the-job training and workplace performance possibly remains misconstrued in Australia as currently the Government requires RTOs to submit 'Learner Survey' and 'Employer Survey' data which provide information on the level of satisfaction rather than an evaluation of training or if an increase in knowledge or skills has occurred. It is most likely, however, that learners who are not working may be satisfied with their learning when they undertake *VET qualifications* but will have forgotten much of what they learned in this 'pre-vocational' type of program if they fail to secure a job soon after.

Assessment type effect on competency level required

Changing direction for a moment, it is important in this chapter to identify how assessment decisions are made regarding whether someone is competent or not. VET practitioners make use of a common set of 'Assessment Guidelines' provided in each Training Package to collect evidence and then make an assessment judgement call. From my reading of the intent of these guidelines, it is unlikely an assessor could judge a person operating in any off-the-job learning situation as competent at

any level higher than a Certificate II. The only exception to my interpretation of the guidelines would be when a person has been closely monitored, over a long period of time, working in a 'simulated environment' — an environment which meets **all** stated criteria for simulations as outlined (TAE10, p.56). Costs associated with setting up simulations of this calibre are usually prohibitive in other than emergency service, aircraft and maritime industries where using real situations is too risky and expensive to set up. Yet, it is not uncommon to hear of a person being judged competent at a Diploma level without being seen performing the tasks in the flesh by either their assessor or a workplace supervisor.

One reason for these two interpretations of competence, mine and that of others, is that assessment requirements have been changing subtly over time. For example, it appears on first glance as if the *Code of Practice for Assessors,* developed as part of **BSZ98,** has been faithfully trotted out with each re-development of Training Packages, but this is not the case. The current Code no longer reflects its once broader application right across VET. The original Code was aligned to *Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards* considered "benchmarks for assessment and training in all settings across Australia" (p.13) and had the following distinctive features:

> The Standards are "cross-industry" in nature. Assessment and training occurs in most, if not all, industry and workplace settings. Cross-industry standards are based on competencies common to a range of industries and workplaces.
>
> The Standards have "guideline application". These competency standards should be incorporated in other industry or enterprise competency standards. The outcomes should be the same as in the cross-industry standards.
>
> The Standards apply to people carrying out assessment and training regardless of the setting. This means they apply just as much to staff in vocational education and training institutions as to people training and assessing in the workplace. (BSZ98, 1998, p.21)

A VET system that has referred to two different components as 'competency standards' is problematic of course — even if introduced decades apart.

BSZ98 (1998) Training Package became **TAA04** (2004) Training Package then **TAE10** (2010) Training Package, the number denoting the endorsement year. *Assessment and Workplace Competency Standards* being incorporated in other

industry competency standards for 'guideline application' 'appears misplaced in later versions. My memory is AQF levels matched workplace competency levels and remained consistent across industry sectors until the base level qualification of the Information Technology (IT) Training Package was positioned at AQF 4 Level — which, at that time, was commonly known as a supervisor level in other industry sectors. Using the original AQF levels, shown on the next page, an assessor assessed the worker's level of operating and then awarded them that particular qualification or prepared new training plans to assist the worker meet the level of operating required.

I consider a quandary regarding competence continues across industry sectors between the amount of knowledge a worker needs to perform their role, the level of authority and responsibility they have in a workplace and AQF qualification levels. The Australian Apprenticeships and Traineeships Information Service's (AATIS) website provides examples of current inconsistency across the current national training system. One example is AUR30711 Certificate III in Outdoor Power Equipment that has a shorter Traineeship qualification in one state and the longer Apprenticeship qualification in all other states. Although these qualifications are no longer said to be 'time bound', one would think that a difference in length of qualification funding is likely to change the standard expected.

Lack of resolution to this type of quandary is likely to continue to impede consistent VET outcomes across industry sectors, RTOs and States with regard to competency. NSSC's latest *Training Package Products Policy* (2012) allows ISC's to merely mention the Code of Practice for Assessors by name. It is not surprising then that the latest version of the Australian Meat Industry Training Package (MTM11) for example, contains no details of this important component for achieving consistent assessment across that industry sector. We will need to wait to see if the effect of this NSSC decision on Australian meat industry performance is a positive or negative one.

Regrettably, there is other confusing information in the current **TAE10** regarding assessment. It was to be expected that the Rules of Evidence, against which presented evidence is first verified, and the Principles of Assessment, which specify how that evidence is to be assessed, would support each other to strengthen consistency of assessment. **TAE10** (Version 2.0, 2012, p.54) does not specifically mention Principles of Assessment. Where does that leave assessors? I suggest

omission from Training Packages of essential information about how to act as an assessor undermines the professional approach expected of VET assessors. These Principles and Rules are mentioned again later in this chapter when I discuss the newly legislated Standards for RTOs.

Also missing from the current writing of Assessment Guidelines in Training Packages is detailed guidance for what is expected of a VET assessor — the person collecting evidence to make a judgement on competence. I have found that the last place instructions on what assessment of competency entailed was in **BSZ98** under the heading 'Collecting Evidence of Competency' and read as follows,

> Assessment of competency should involve demonstration of competence in all dimensions of competency (task skills, task management skills, contingency management skills, job role/environment skills and transferability). Evidence should involve a range of evidence types, which demonstrate that the assessment and training aligns with relevant units in the Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards.
>
> In assessing against Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards, at least one form of direct evidence should be considered to make a judgment on the practical performance component of the competencies, for example, observation of actual workplace activities.
>
> Supplementary and indirect forms of evidence to:
>
> - extend on direct forms of evidence, for example, a range of situations, with different types of persons being assessed, or in conflict situations
>
> - ensure transferability of competencies to new situations and contexts
>
> - assess underpinning or required knowledge and understanding; and
>
> - provide information on possible performance in rarely occurring but critical situations, for example, crash, breakdown, industrial conflict.
>
> Third party reports are used only to verify and support evidence obtained using other methods, unless the third party is a qualified assessor and is familiar with the Assessor and Workplace Training Competency Standards.
>
> Self-assessment against the competency standards can make the person being assessed aware of the standards they are expected to achieve, prepare them for

formal assessment and/or contribute towards final assessment particularly as part of a recognition of current competencies. (BSZ98, p.21)

I am sorry to find that this quality guidance for collecting evidence is missing from the most recent Training Packages, particularly its omission from **TAE10**.

Some of my references to date have mentioned the term 'dimensions of competency'. Now seems the perfect place to properly introduce this important constituent of training and assessing in VET. This term was first introduced in **BSZ98** to assist in documenting the many components of the level of competence expected by industry (ANTA, 1998, p.15). After originally starting with five dimensions in BSZ98 (p.15), four dimensions of competency have been quoted ever since. Dimensions of competency were included to ensure the competent person could complete a task to a level of managing the many different components and activities that occur when a task is being undertaken in an actual workplace. A demonstration of all four skill factors listed below is needed for an assessor to legitimately make a judgement call of "Competent" on evidence presented to them.

Task Skills. [These involve being able to perform the task to an acceptable level to the organisation or industry. This may include carrying out individual tasks such as: operating equipment, serving customers and using a presentation software application.]

Task Management Skills. [These refer to the ability to manage a number of different tasks that form part of the job. This involves being able to integrate a number of different tasks to achieve a complete work outcome. This may include: following OHS procedures while operating machinery, completing documentation for an order while serving a customer and responding to an audience while making a presentation using a software application.]

Contingency Management Skills. [These refer to the ability to respond appropriately when things go wrong or if there are irregularities and breakdowns in routine. This may include responding to: equipment breakdowns, difficult customers and emergency evacuation.]

Job Role or Environment Skills. [These refer to the need to fulfil the requirements and expectations of the organisation. Each workplace is unique and requires the individual to be able to adjust to their working environment.

This may include: working in different teams, following workplace procedures, communicating effectively with colleagues and interacting with clients.] (Adapted from Training Package assessment materials kit, ANTA, 2001, p.23, my brackets)

The four skill meanings are listed in brackets to show I adapted these explanations from old documentation as current Training Package Assessment Guidelines mention the dimensions of competency by name only. Omission of the detail of dimensions of competency from current Assessment Guidelines limits newer trainer assessor understanding of these terms — critical information for consistency in assessment judgement in VET training across Australia, and in training programs delivered overseas to Australian standards.

Without detailed information on how to collect evidence and what the dimensions of competency require, how will people who gain training and assessment qualifications assure their own assessment and evidence collection methods are valid and reliable? Are not the omissions I have exposed a mistake for Australia's national training system? These omissions, and the gaps in trainer assessor understanding that they leave, are likely to contribute to differing and perhaps unreliable interpretations of assessment standards. I question what assessment standard ASQA is auditing each RTO's assessment tools against for instance. Maybe *VET administration* are not alert to such missing factors. It is these different VET training requirements—assessing competence against clearly defined, industry-specific performance measures—that required VET to be a different stream of education. One can appreciate that academic approaches to education could afford to be more generically oriented—academic reward is qualification.

Effects on competency over time

Each time I found parts were missing or had been changed in the VET system I contemplated about the effect on competency. Questions arose like, "Is this action an oversight or is it a deliberate change in interpretation by those in charge of VET?" A definite answer has continued to evade me. I consider an important clue to why some of my reported changes have occurred may lie in the following statement from preliminary information in **TAE10**. Under a heading 'Historical and General Information,' **TAE10** states

TAE10 Training and Education Training Package represents part of the continuing cycle of quality improvement in Training Packages. In its current structure, the Training Package represents a step-change approach to the scope and focus of the Training Package, reflecting the place of training and assessment in the wider education landscape and in the context of career pathways that recognise a professional management structure, as well as the increasing importance of the export market to VET as a business. (2010, p.33)

The TAE10 Training Package's title change suggests that those providing advice to IBSA, the Training Package developers, consider this Training Package should be seen as part of a 'wider education landscape.' This most recent approach does not reiterate the long-held position of previous, similar Training Packages — that of underpinning of the training and assessment practices of the VET system as a whole — thereby leading the way for trainers and assessors across all industry sectors. Instead, **TAE10** is considered just one 'part of a continuing cycle of quality improvement.' As I enquire into VET's history I find it increasingly difficult to find signposts that mark ends of some developments and beginnings of others. If **TAE10** does not lead the way, what does?

Putting on my VET practitioner hat for a moment, I query IBSA's decision to change the title of the VET trainers' Training Package from Training and Assessment — a familiar and clear delineator to identify a Training Package about only VET practices — to the broader and all-encompassing education context the new 'Training and Education' title implies. Perhaps this change explains why IBSA has produced this Training Package in a format which seems out of sync with other Training Packages? In using this title of Training and Education are they considering where VET training businesses are located and how their management structures are arranged? If so, I suggest this is a new approach to Training Package development as currently, other industry Training Packages retain their industry specific titles. Maybe it exemplifies IBSA consider the VET sector is an industry? Without a leadership statement from somewhere, announcing such an intended shift in purpose, the new **TAE10** title of Training and Education only adds to the VET disorder I have been describing.

Training Packages became a part of VET training and therefore impacted on competence. Before too long it became obvious each National ITAB had developed its Training Packages in their own style. At that point, guidelines were developed in an attempt to achieve consistency in approach. With each Training Package development model instigated since, we appear to have moved further from specific and practical task application to general, often verbose, theoretical ideas on the knowledge and skills required to perform a task. This change becomes evident when you observe the path over time of a **Unit of Competency** — once 3 to 5 pages now often 8 or even 12 pages — without the benefit of greater clarity for the trainer assessor, employer or participants' reading of these.

A *Training Package Developers Handbook* was introduced to specify a consistent format for Training Packages applying for endorsement by the National Quality Council (NQC). Over time, many government authority changes have been made regarding who controls this Handbook — NQC was replaced by the National Skills Standards Council (NSSC) in June 2011 and, at that time, COAG significantly changed its reporting Ministerial Councils' structures and their composition. NSSC is now a committee of the Standing Council for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE). SCOTESE provides advice on national standards for regulation of VET and is the authorising body for the endorsement of Training Packages. This change indicates a very different operational context has come into play for NSSC. VET, as a separate education sector, appears to no longer be the focus of the Council to which NSSC reports on Training Packages and VET Standards. What effect could this reporting change have on the interpretation of a VET-specific competency term?

In looking through the original Handbook, I became a disenchanted investigator when I found an important industry business practice, that of checking end products reach required standards before goods are sent to the market place seems to have been missed in the documented 'Training Package Development Endorsement Processes.' For the product, Training Packages, this means workers who perform the documented task would check a **Unit of competency** for correctness and suitability of wording — can a person reach the required performance standard following what is written? Vaguely mentioning who might be consulted and giving no guidance for how they might be consulted, as shown below, creates a woolliness that bothers me.

The following stakeholders will typically be involved in national consultation and development processes:

- key enterprises, subject matter experts, employer and employee representatives

- STA and the Department identified stakeholders nominated to be part of the consultation and development process

- licensing bodies and regulators

- STAs and the Department in accordance with their request for engagement during the formative briefing. (DEEWR website, 2010)

New more 'standardised' *Standards for Training Packages* (2012) replace the Handbook on 31 December, 2012 — in fact, three 'products' will replace this Handbook. To my dismay, in the *Training Package Development and Endorsement Process Policy*—the only product to mention consultation — the list of stakeholders to be involved in this later development process has shrunk even further to be a page titled 'Industry Validation' which advises:

The following stakeholders will be involved in the industry validation:

- key enterprises, employer and employee representatives

- industry stakeholders nominated by governments to be part of the validation process

- licensing bodies and regulators. (NSSC, 2012, p.15)

It is alarming that previously included 'subject matter experts' have now been removed from validation processes. In view of this approach, I wonder if the people listed here are only asked to read **Units** in order to confirm if the wording used represents the task as it is carried out in their industry. I query whether any group of people, unless they are working through the wording while watching the **Units** being used to train and assess could determine if the **Units** are written in the best way to achieve the performance levels expected. Perhaps stakeholder groups are not even asked what level of performance they are expecting?

After reading an ISC advertisement for a Curriculum Writer on the Government Skills website in 2012, I begin to ponder if developers of Training Packages actually speak to competent performers of particular work tasks or watch them during Training Package development processes. If not, might one assume that Training Package development has become mechanistic. I have trained competent workers to train others for decades. I

can testify training documents not developed by watching the task and later speaking with workers about information recorded can easily omit information crucial for quality training and assessment. Are we now documenting what a Curriculum Designer believes is required rather than the 'industry-led' Australian VET system often spoken of? If this is happening, might VET be better described as 'having industry input' rather than 'being industry-led? I believe I show in this chapter that our current VET system has been converted into a new form since the year 2000. In following chapters I show how, not only the rules, but also the bases and home plate in 'the VET game' have been recast multiple times through the influence of different policy directions and procedures.

VET qualification as primary or secondary focus

Gaining a VET qualification began as a secondary focus for industry and employees — and, my experience says, it still is for many employers and their staff. Government funding received for personnel who undertake Apprenticeships and Traineeships has always been an incentive for some employers, particularly small business owners, large retail overseas-owned stores and international food franchises, to train staff to a competent level. It is whether you gain a qualification, not whether you reach a level of workplace competency, however, that determines the deployment of Government monies for VET training provision. Today there are many ways to gain a *VET qualification*. Some people might study in a classroom, others at home on-line or at school. Another group might learn in the traditional way — working in a job role.

Employers I come in contact with are aware people often gain *VET qualifications* with limited or no relevant work in their industry sector and, just like ACCI mentions in their 2008 Policy Review, these employers "want sign off in the workplace rather than by the RTO." They state it is only in that way, "they can see for themselves that the skills have been demonstrated to industry standards" (p.3). What employers understand is that many RTOs only require written answers to hypothetical work problems and people to undertake just a few weeks work placement. Beside the two young hospitality workers, whose incompetence started me on this research journey, I remember many other people with qualifications but not competence. A young woman with a Certificate III in Business immediately comes to mind, who thought

she only needed to type letters not check their correctness before passing them on —
when questioned she advised me that is what she did in her VET classes.

Prior to our Government only funding nationally accredited programs, the
education and training of those wishing to enter or re-enter employment was
conducted informally in community centres, vacant shop fronts, country halls and the
like to remove any 'schooling' association or stigma. Programs such as Adult
Literacy operated for many years in this way. It was only when unemployment
reached high levels in the early 80s that Government funding became available and
TAFEs quickly put up their hands to run Adult Literacy, English as a Second
Language (ESL), pre-vocational and programs for adults to complete secondary and
senior secondary certificates.

Conducting work-specific training during high unemployment and economic
downturn is part of my lived experience. One example of developing worker
competence, prior to nationally accredited programs, is a *VET program* for young
unemployed people called Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS). After the
introduction of nationally-accredited training, it was a logical outcome that
successful participants in this type of workplace-based intervention program gained a
Certificate I and II qualification as these learners had been working, and training,
every day for six months to a year developing competence in doing the work tasks
forming their qualification. This occurred in a similar way to how apprentices gain
their skills and experience in higher level Certificate III or IV qualifications.

What level is deemed as being competent today? A continuing and unresolved
dispute between me and one of my peers indicates that at some time, between the
introduction of the term 'competency-based training' and today, a change in
perception has occurred regarding the term 'competent.' I believe it is this change
which has created the difference between our views. The dispute takes this form: for
my colleague, competency relates to achieving the level written into a **Unit of
Competency** within a Training Package and, for me, competency relates to
completing a task to an expert worker standard — wherever industry consider that
standard is set. We do agree on one point — that what is written in a Training
Package **Unit** does not meet the higher standard that we believe industry often

expects. It seems this dispute will continue to baffle my colleague and me whilst we are unable to find a clarifying statement to answer the level of competency question. Thus, I continue to query the intelligence of conducting VET training and gaining *VET qualifications* for any other reason than having shown, by your workplace performance, you are considered expert against industry standards.

I find this recent emphasis on knowledge by NSSC interesting, particularly in light of a continuing reticence to include attitudes, or specific behaviours, in Training Packages. Gaining knowledge is a natural occurrence in workplace programs — how could a person do their job to the required *performance standard* without displaying the necessary knowledge, skills and personal attributes? Unable to locate any historical references on this apprehension around attitudes inclusion, I offer a personal view. My memory is that restricting VET texts to include knowledge and skills, and exclude personal attributes, took hold while TUTA was still in vogue. It became 'politically incorrect' to discuss a worker's attitude. Trade Unions asserted that it was only 'behaviours' that needed to be displayed in a job role — a person's values were their own. Management was to refer to a worker's problem attitude as a particular 'behaviour.' Personal attitudes or values held could not be challenged if a person was behaving as expected when at work. Whatever was the cause, attitudes have not been included in Training Packages to this day. I, and other workplace-based colleagues, lament leaving out what we believe is arguably the most important component of a competent person. This situation is more inconceivable when research commissioned by ANTA back in 2001 acknowledged, "Employers seem to place more value on behavioural capacities, rather than cognitive skills and technical competence" (BVET 2001, cited in ANTA, 2002).

For my part, and I would suggest for industry's part, the skill, knowledge and attitude requirements for competency are always specific and measurable — and can be written as *performance standards*. Decades ago, employers complained that people who had gained *VET qualifications* were not suitably prepared for the workplace. As a result Key Competencies were included in Training Packages. Later, Key Competencies were broadened into **Employability Skills**. The *Employability Skills Framework* (2002) had an asterisked phrase at the foot of a page which highlighted how a person needed to act and linked this to behaviours. It is important for me in the competency discussion in this chapter of my thesis to note

that an asterisked point, relating to human attitude and behaviour, has never been duly emphasised in succeeding training and assessor documentation. "* Personal attributes that contribute to employability, identified in the report but are not part of the Employability Skills Framework," is the statement which testifies that developers of this Framework considered 'personal attributes' — a softer term than attitudes or behaviours—are worthy of attention in determining competency.

Changes to Principles of Assessment and Rules of Evidence

Tracking forwards and back, as I have in my detective-like way, through changes in wording for both 'Principles of Assessment' and 'Rules of Evidence,' I was surprised to discover the wording used in *Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2011* — legislation enacted to give ASQA legal powers to prosecute non-compliance — is not what is written in current Training Packages, and in other VET documentation. If I had remembered these two terms have changed in definition many times — some changes are shown in Appendices 1 and 2 — I would not have been surprised at all.

Four 'Technical Principles of Assessment' were first described in **BSZ98**, namely validity, reliability, flexibility and fairness. These Principles were to be "addressed in the development of assessment tools, and in the design, establishment and management of the assessment system" (BSZ98, p.17). In **BSZ98** the term 'validity' meant a "valid assessment assesses what it claims to assess; evidence collected is relevant to the activity and demonstrates that the performance criteria have been met" (p.18). Enacted Standards Legislation also states there are four Principles of Assessment but lists the principles in a different order — a significant change as the order was originally important. One checked the validity of assessment tools **before** the other principles were considered. Has the significance of the original starting point been lost? The Standard's wording for 'validity' below is more open to differing interpretations, and is not written in plain English.

> There are five major types of validity: face, content, criterion (i.e. predictive and concurrent), construct and consequential. In general, validity is concerned with the appropriateness of the inferences, use and consequences that result from the assessment. In simple terms, it is concerned with the extent to which an assessment decision about a candidate (e.g. competent/not yet competent, a

grade and/or a mark), based on the evidence of performance by the candidate, is justified. It requires determining conditions that weaken the truthfulness of the decision, exploring alternative explanations for good or poor performance, and feeding them back into the assessment process to reduce errors when making inferences about competence.

Unlike reliability, validity is not simply a property of the assessment tool. As such, an assessment tool designed for a particular purpose and target group may not necessarily lead to valid interpretations of performance and assessment decisions if the tool was used for a different purpose and/or target group. (SNR3, ASQA Standards, 2011)

During this research, I have found it is in the 'small print' where alteration to wording used within VET documentation has changed meaning again and again. Such changes, possibly thought unimportant by others not interpreting meaning when assessing evidence, are critical to how competency is assessed. For example, when the VET focus shifted from training to assessment, the reliability focus shifted to getting consistent results from an assessment tool. 'Reliability' was described in **BSZ98** as:

…consistency of the interpretation of evidence and assessment outcome. To make reliable assessments assessors must be competent in terms of their own assessor competencies, have the relevant technical competencies or have access to a subject matter expert who can advise the assessor on the relevant vocational competencies at least to the level being assessed. (p.18)

In essence, this same wording is used in **TAA04** and the *Transition Guide to support the delivery of the reviewed TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment,* produced by IBSA in 2010 (p.37). Yet, Legislated Standards describe 'reliability' in quite different terms, as shown below.

There are five types of reliability: internal consistency; parallel forms; split-half; inter-rater; and, intra-rater. In general, reliability is an estimate of how accurate or precise the task is as a measurement instrument. Reliability is concerned with how much error is included in the evidence. (SNR3, 2011)

One has to beg the meaning of that first sentence. Is this paragraph telling us that calculating 'types of reliability' is more important than producing reliable assessment results? 'Types of reliability' being used to show the amount of error in evidence collected by an assessor is an interesting approach when there should be no error.

Surely the aim of reliability is to come to the same results no matter which properly qualified person does the assessment.

It alarms me that trust in an assessor's ability to make a reliable human judgement does not have prominence in the Standards' definition of 'reliability.' After all, an assessor must be qualified. It would help if Government and industry fully and publicly gave recognition to and respected the professional standing of trainers and assessors. Where the quality of trainers and assessors is in doubt, of course there must be some responsibility for identifying and acting upon an assessor's inability to perform reliably. My view is that assessors ought to be able to assess within workplace contexts and conditions. Too often I meet trainers and assessors who have VET teaching experience, and the required qualifications, and yet have not participated in developing a training and assessment partnership with a business. If the imperative of vocational education and training is to work with and assist business to identify, develop and acknowledge worker competence, and to train and assess workers towards improved productivity, one assumes then that trainers and assessors comprehend and are able to respond to the human complexities of workers' roles within a business organisation.

It is with some consternation that I suggest that the unintelligibility of what constitutes reliable judgement blurs ASQA's capacity to carry out their legal functions. The Standards' wording for **Rules of Evidence** have also changed from the simply descriptive — valid, sufficient, current and authentic, to nouns dense with meaning and authority — validity, sufficiency, currency and authenticity (DEEWR, 2010, p. 25). Possibilities for interpreting the quality of evidences suffer from such obfuscation, that is, the nouns with their 'thingness' become bewildering. Nouns used in this way are more likely to lead interpreters astray than enlighten them. Here I am making the point that the language of the workplace has more to do with action described by verbs, doing, and adjectives that qualify verbs, than with abstracting action into nouns that only name action. I am pleading for plain English in VET documents once more to improve the possibility of consistent levels of competence.

When interpreters go astray this is what happens. Two critical processes of competency assessment — Principles of Assessment and Rules of Evidence — are

now confused. I found both incorrectly written into at least two Training Packages that I recently had cause to use — the Health Training Package (HLT07) and the Australian Meat Industry Training Package (MTM11). Using the latter to demonstrate my point, **MTM11** states there are five Principles of Assessment instead of four — validity, reliability, flexibility, fairness with sufficiency added. Sufficiency remains as a Rule of Evidence in this Training Package. It seems the developers have confused themselves by using the word 'sufficiency,' instead of 'sufficient' in relation to both the Principles of Assessment and the Rules of Evidence in this Training Package. Under the Principles of Assessment we find the following:

> Sufficiency relates to the quality and quantity of evidence assessed. It requires collection of enough appropriate evidence to ensure that all aspects of competency have been satisfied and that competency can be demonstrated repeatedly. Supplementary sources of evidence may be necessary. The specific evidence requirements of each unit of competency provide advice on sufficiency.   Sufficiency is also one of the rules of evidence. (MTM11, 2011, p.125)

One might expect that sufficiency as a Principle of Assessment means something different from a Rule of Evidence if one is to understand that this usage of the word sufficiency, quoted above, serves two different processes. An assessor needs to collect evidence that meets the Rules of Evidence. Each piece of evidence collected for judgement must be valid, sufficient, current and authentic. Principles of Assessment concern means for ensuring the equity of assessment for everyone. They are universal as Principles. Rules of Evidence are particular to the piece of evidence presented for judgement. The Principle of 'validity' protects that the assessment process is sound. The Principle of 'reliability' ensures that judgement in assessment is consistent. The Principle of 'flexibility' requires assessment to be modified appropriately and contingently. The Principle of 'fairness' expects that people are treated equally without favouritism or discrimination. We find two errors as a matter of common sense. Sufficiency cannot be a Principle of Assessment as Principle implies quality. Sufficiency cannot be a Rule of Evidence: the Rule is that there is sufficient evidence presented for assessment. Sufficient evidence implies quantity. Reasoning through such confusion my enquiry leads me to question the language competency of VET developer-writers. Re-adopting a consistent approach across

writing teams might refine and maintain the coherence and the integrity of VET documentation.

Once assessment was quite a simple process that could be understood by participants. Participants could either successfully demonstrate they had the required skills, knowledge and attitude to do tasks at the performance level required, or they could not. Competency in industrial settings, from my lived experience, covers many 'subtleties' not always apparent to those who are looking for a structured information-based method of assessment. Without an understanding of how all these subtleties combine to form a competent worker 'construct' — a formation of the factors required and at what level — it might be easy to think of skills and knowledge listed in Training Packages as 'subject matter' to be taught rather than as a performance level to be perfected through practice, after learning has occurred. I suggest this is why VET practitioners, who fully understand a competency-based type of assessment, are unlikely to be heard to say, "I will be giving you a written test later today and if you get 50 percent or more you will be marked as competent," as I heard a VET-in-School teacher say to a VET student.

"Not Yet Competent" was the term originally built into the VET assessment process to signify additional attempts may be necessary for some people to prove they have grasped work concepts and can perform competently at the required *performance standard*. Assessors at the turn of the century, sought out competent operators who worked at the *performance standard* expected — completing skills using necessary underpinning knowledge and demonstrating the required attitudes of a job. A learner's ability to recite answers was insufficient in best practice VET assessment. An acceptable standard of assessment required different forms of evidence to be available to an assessor. Direct evidence collaborated with indirect forms of evidence. Evidence of 'products' or 'examples' was collected over a reasonable period of time from different sources. Even if an assessor observed a learner in a workplace role, the assessor still looked for several other forms of evidence to ensure the person being assessed knew why they were doing something, or to show what their attitudes were to performing their tasks, as this information is not always visible to the assessor or supervisor.

Competency as it occurs in higher level VET qualifications

Most of my examples so far have been about gaining competency through lower level *VET qualifications*. Anne Priest from Southbank Institute of TAFE, which delivered the previous highest level, a Vocational Graduate Diploma qualification, conducted research into "the positioning of high-level qualifications side by side but located in different [education] sectors." Citing Kearns, Schofield and McDonald, Priest suggests that industry has been demanding workers with more than just technical skills and more than just theoretical knowledge for some time as a result of the growing emphasis on the role of knowledge in economic development.

> …industry is seeking workers who can identify and work creatively, solve problems, drive innovation and work across skills areas to create new bodies of knowledge. Vocational education is seen as the potential provider of these skills, implying that current definitions of competence need to take account of these broader learning outcomes. (Kearns 2004: Schofield & McDonald 2004 cited in Priest, 2009, p.8)

Karmel suggests, in his introduction to the Priest paper, that if developers are careful with the language used in the written competencies, it is possible to ensure that higher-order thinking and theoretical knowledge is embedded in training for high level qualifications (Priest, 2009, p.3). I believe that what Karmel suggests was envisaged when Advanced Diplomas, the original highest VET level qualifications were first conceived. RTOs should be able to develop a training and assessing structure which combines theory with applied learning in a real life context of a workplace. One might enter a higher education sector or a VET sector to gain qualifications. Neither sector guarantees a person's capability or competence in his or her workplace without him or her engaging in the contingencies of the workplace. The theory of workplace education has been taken out of the workplace into educational institutions — colleges and universities. The college and the university have not entered the workplace. It is ironic that this has happened because it is contrary to what common sense might expect — workers learn in the lived experience of their workplace. I cannot help but comment that such an irony causes me wry amusement. Why must educational institutions assume non-contingent authority?

Reading Priest's paper, I feel uplifted. I detect a possible first step back towards the idea of a 'professional VET trainer' that was envisaged when ANTA was formed. If this is what industry wants, it makes sense that industry, not academics or *VET administration*, should lead VET back this way. VET history shows caution may be needed to ensure any such further language 'development' is true to industry requirements and not influenced by academic biases. Perhaps current Government policy along with its obsession to keep all young adults at school to age seventeen, and push them towards academic qualifications before gaining employment, as a first step to establishing their career pathways, is tainted by a similar irony.

From my discussions with people in the general community, VET can only be understood, as a separate and specific education sector, when I say VET involves people practising to perform particular tasks to an identified high level of skill, knowledge and attitude — to a competent level. As mentioned earlier, Schofield and McDonald (2004) highlighted the need to re-affirm and broaden existing assumptions about competence and to clarify policy. I query if any broadening has happened since, and if this broadening is thought to have happened, has it followed the path these researchers intended in making the statement below.

> In particular, there is a need to continue to emphasise that competency is a broader concept than the ability to perform workplace tasks. To achieve this, competency must include:
>
> - Effective performance in employment;
>
> - Application of skills and knowledge within and across a number of work contexts and contingencies; and
>
> - Ability to transfer skills and knowledge across and within work contexts and within a changing context over time and (where relevant) by a combination of higher order skills. (2004, p.17)

Schofield and McDonald's anxiety regarding this matter is evident by the emphasis they gave to this point in stating,

> This is not an arcane conceptual point. It has practical implications for the definition of competence, for the design and structure of Training Packages and for the processes through which they are developed. It challenges the

current approach whereby performance and outcomes are assumed to be the same as skills and knowledge, and competency standards are taken to be specifications of knowledge and skills. (2004, p.17).

In light of Schofield and McDonald's worry, my own and colleagues' concerns, one part of the Bing definition on competency, cited at the beginning of this chapter, seems particularly pertinent, and worth restating.

> To be competent a person would need to be able to interpret the situation in the context and to have a repertoire of possible actions to take and have trained in the possible actions in the repertoire, if this is relevant…Regardless of training, competency would grow through experience and the extent of an [individual's capacity] to learn and adapt. (Bing, 2013)

Does this description of competency reflect VET in Australia today? If the Bing definition is more aligned to this country's expectations, does the language used in Training Packages and other VET information channels support Australia's intent to have competent workers? In Chapter 5 of this thesis, I aim to show that 'performance and outcomes' are definitely not the same as Training Package lists of specified 'skills and knowledge'. Before then, in Chapter 3, I attempt to identify how Australian VET systems arrived in their current place by documenting my investigations into Government decisions that have impacted on the ability of *VET programs* to deliver 'effective performance in employment' and in Chapter 4, I discuss and reflect on the history of training and assessing qualifications.

Chapter 3   What Government decisions have affected competency?

> It is, then, a sound instinct which identifies freedom with power to frame purposes and to execute or carry into effect purposes so framed. Such freedom is in turn identical to self-control; for the formation of purposes and the organisation of means to execute them are the work of intelligence.
>
> Dewey, 1938

Before the turn of the 21st century, Australia had an interlinked system for training workers to a consistent and high standard. Colleagues I spoke with during my research have a similar view. We agree that the system was not perfect — can such a thing exist in an ever-changing world? Separate and different coloured pieces had been interlocked and stitched together into a 'national' approach to worker productivity and competency. The aim, at that time, was to achieve the performance levels thought necessary for competitiveness in exchanging our goods and services with the greater world. As colleagues, we considered whether it was possible to see how separate 'threads' — schools, work, industries, families, communities, and Governments — were woven into a 'workforce fabric' within our society like a patchwork quilt. I will investigate our view that this old fabric has faded and now has holes where previous threads and connections have been broken. This chapter identifies changes made by Government, and my view of their impacts on the VET system to illuminate a grass roots perspective on the last three decades of Australian VET history. My documenting occurrences may provide a different viewpoint for current *VET administration*. It may even lead to re-establishing a few threads to develop a new, stronger and resilient VET fabric for future generations 'to frame purposes and to carry into effect purposes so framed' the organisation of which Dewey suggests is the 'work of intelligence.'

Unravelling of the fabric of VET

The stitching between the patches that made up the workforce quilt I portray above might have begun to unravel with Minister Dawkins' lowering of annual funding to universities in the 80s. According to Jones (2006, p.349), this decision resulted in universities developing VET training arms to access more fee-paying clients in an effort to recover their funding losses. The effect of this decision on the national training system was that delivery of VET training was expanded — more

programs were to be offered in institutions rather than in workplaces. Meanwhile, Australia began to undergo 'workplace reform' following the Federal Government endorsement of *Award Restructuring: Implications for Skill Formation and Training* (1989*)*, an internal report by Laurie Carmichael, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) representative on the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) (NCVER, 2009). This process saw *VET qualifications* being gained in recognition of their level of competence in workplace roles.

Support by the States for *The National Competition Policy*, recommended in a 1993 report by the Committee of Inquiry chaired by Professor Fred Hilmer, and initiated by Prime Minister Keating (NCVER, 2007), saw support mustered for an "open integrated domestic market for goods and services" (Hilmer, 1993, p xix). Skills training, which was part of this market approach, continues to be funded in this way today. Albeit unfortunate, the training market place has never operated on the even ground envisaged by Hilmer's committee. Would TAFEs have continued to have such an influence on VET direction in a truly 'open market'? We will never know. Changes were happening very fast as the new century drew nearer. Maybe too fast for *VET administration* to notice what was happening with regard to their expected alignment of training with workplace competency

Tom Dumbrell, when researching funding arrangements post ANTA, found a "lack of integration between VET and labour market policy exists in Australia" (2004, p.51). We may have an overall deficit in funding levels when compared with other countries but this could not be confirmed due to differences in statistical collection and analysis used by countries. Dumbrell's concluding paragraph below reflects my understanding of how much industrial and educational history affects the current VET system and training outcomes.

> If one of the major policy challenges for VET in coming years is to raise the level of VET funding, it will be necessary, both for economic efficiency reasons and equity, to adopt a more holistic approach to the provision and funding of VET. This means developing a better understanding of how formal qualifications-based provision can interact more effectively with the informal sector, whose size rivals the formal sector. In the development of a more holistic approach to funding, it is important to recognise that an industry-by-industry approach is required in order to reflect the different historical and

cultural attitudes that influence both government- and industry-sourced

funding. (p.51)

Within industry, Human Resource Management (HRM) sections revolved around staff performance reviews and training needs analyses ensured employees could produce 'products' at consistently high standards. Any organisational changes required were seen to provide strategic opportunities to initiate staff 'up-skilling' programs by senior management. Training was, and is still, seen by industry as a major financial and physical resource investment in staff development — to increase productivity and the 'bottom line,' that is, a business' profit or loss margin. In the 1990s, Leonard Nadler's 'systematic approach' or Critical Events Model (Nadler, 1989), shown in Figure 3.1 below, was commonly used as the basis from which to develop an organisation's training and development strategy.
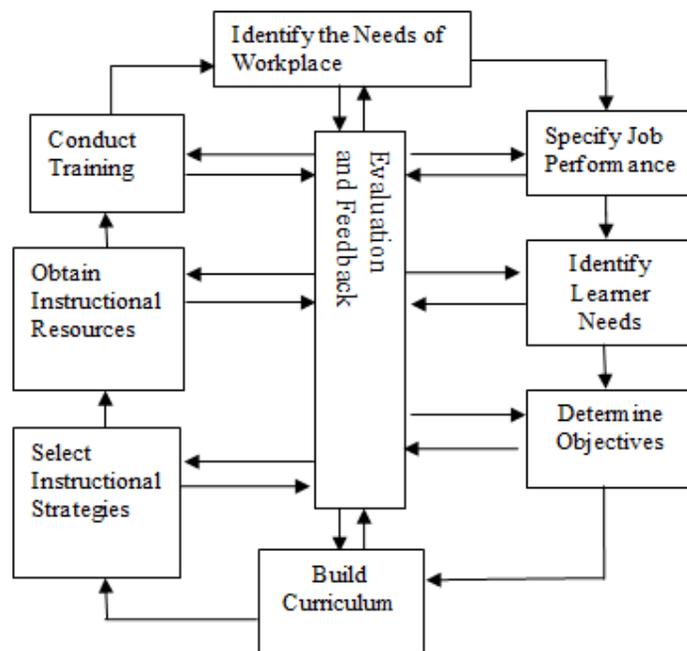
Original Source "Designing Training Programs" (1994) Leonard and Zeace Nadler re-developed by L Hazelwood in 2010

Figure 3.1   Nadler's Critical Events Model

VET training in large companies and in Government Departments was usually run 'in-house' by staff employed in a training role and this approach allowed any identified worker productivity requirements to be directly addressed. Industries needed workplace trainers who could operate within a flexible and constantly changing context, due to machinery replacements, markets shifting overnight and the

speed with which advancing technology changed work processes. Industry requirements such as these appear to be no longer considered by ISC's developing Training Packages.

In 1994, ANTA was established to oversee an integrated work and training future, all parts appeared to be working together towards one goal — an employable and fully employed community to support Australia's ongoing productivity and comparatively high standard of living against western, democratic standards. To this end, the ANTA Agreement set out the six objectives below for our VET system:

> a national training system
>
> industry involvement and increased industry responsiveness
>
> an effective training market
>
> an efficient and productive network of publicly funded providers
>
> increased opportunities and improved outcomes
>
> improved cross-sectoral links. (Taylor 1996 cited in Ryan, 2011)

By 2000, the Government focus was on workplaces. There was a general acceptance that Australia needed to develop a multi-skilled, adaptable workforce, a competent, competitive workforce, to assist us to enter the global market. After efforts like Award Restructuring in industry, more people had qualifications for the job they performed. Industries had workplace trainers who could operate within the flexible and constantly changing context they required. VET training and workplaces had become synonymous in the view of most of us. Guthrie's comment, "a situation that gave rise to a burgeoning role for the workplace trainer" (Guthrie, 2010, p.6) implies people were starting to believe workplaces were legitimate sites of learning. This was certainly a time of hope for me, and for my colleagues, working within industries. We might get acknowledgement for the level of acquired knowledge and skill used in our daily training efforts—even some glory. I definitely thought this was the beginning of a professional Training and Development career for me, and remember thinking, on the day I began studying through University of South Australia (UniSA), for my Bachelor Degree of Teaching (Education and Training of Adults), I am on my way at last!

In the 90's, besides training Apprentices, TAFE Colleges were publicly funded to conduct a range of programs of community need, often referred to as 'further education' — pre-employment or Pre Voc, English as a Second Language for migrants and classes to complete senior secondary education — transition programs to assist people to further their learning and, thereby, their employment opportunities. These programs were often written in a competency-based format but learners were not expected to reach workplace competency standards by the end of the program.

With the introduction of ANTA, the Government moved direct training for work away from TAFE because graduate students were not meeting industry expectations (NCVER, 2009) and opened up the market place for other RTOs. Minister Dawkins had attempted to get TAFE to train within industry to reduce the amount of Government funding being spent on equipment updating. I was working in his Department at that time and remember this seemed a great approach to my fellow colleagues and me — industry has a need to keep updating their own equipment to remain competitive. In Adelaide, Elizabeth TAFE and General Motors Holden (GMH) conducted a trial to deliver training programs in the GMH workplace but this national approach was short-lived. One story circulating at the time was the TAFE Board would not agree to moving TAFE institutes from their premises. A long-running partnership did develop at GMH though. Locating a TAFE teacher onsite in GMH proved beneficial to both parties. It ensured the level of competence expected was explicitly and regularly discussed.

For fifty years, the CES was Australia's central location for all things to do with employment. A one-stop-shop for career counselling, job vacancies, job preparation and interview assistance, psychological services and training, particularly 'labour market programs' to assist unemployed or under-employed people into full-time work. Between 1978 and 1998, I worked in the CES and conducted the annual end of year Apprenticeship Campaign for several of those years. Many bright young people, those who loved working with their hands more than studying, applied for three hundred or so vacancies advertised each year in Tasmania. These young people needed to achieve Credits and Higher Passes in Maths, English and Science at

Level 3, the highest level in Year 10, to secure a job in top trade areas. This meant these young people could either go onto university or become an apprentice.

CES doors closed. In an Adelaide office, I was amongst those escorted outside by security guards before the doors were locked. This happened around the country. The need for a high standard of education, one that would enable students to go on to university or gain an Apprenticeship, appears lost in that historical documentation. New buildings and new organisations were ready to take over in a *fait accompli*. Employment National became the Government's Job Network provider for employers and the unemployed. Career counselling was pushed by Government into compulsory schooling. This hastiness could have contributed to the concerns I express in my thesis about schools treating VET pathways as low level rather than alternative pathways into work careers. This pervasive viewpoint causes me personal sorrow as my life experience does not corroborate it. This pervasive viewpoint impacts on the value attributed to being highly competent in workplace skills.

Before Training Packages were introduced, each industry-prescribed set of standards formed the basis of the competency-based training conducted by workplace trainers. Workplace trainers measured these industry standards against the initial AQF format, shown in Table 2.1, on page 58, to identify the operational level to pitch their training programs at in the late 90s. A direct association existed between the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to perform tasks in work roles and the training each worker received. This direct relationship was acknowledged in the 80s and 90s as a major difference between VET teachers, most likely in TAFE, and VET trainers in workplaces. By want of documentation, other researchers might have missed some differences in approaches practiced by TAFE teachers and those of workplace trainers in developing learning programs. In Chapter 4, I emphasise and explore differences in approaches adopted for training and assessment and suggest that ongoing confusion about expected training outcomes might be attributed to these differences.

Access to trainer assessor discussions regarding how other people saw levels of competence was an important part of establishing consistency across industry

sectors. Following **BSZ98's** introduction, networks of trainers and assessors were established around Australia to foster these discussions.

Table 3.1   Developing a 'Construct' Sheet

Job or Task (write in what it is) …………………………………………………… My construct from interpreting the standard and speaking with other assessors	
Dimension of competence	Description of someone performing to the standard
*Underpinning knowledge How knowledgeable is this person? How confidently do they respond when asked questions about the subject? What is their level of knowledge: recall, recognition, understanding, evaluation analysis or synthesis?	
Task skills How skillful is the person at doing the individual tasks or activities? Do they perform skills without having to think about them?	
Managing skills How do they perform when they have to combine skills? What specific examples of them combining skills?	
Contingency skills How do they deal with problems? What are some examples?	
Transfer ability How well do they apply their learning to new situations? What are some examples of them doing this?	
Job role/environment behaviour How well do they perform in the real world? What's their attitude to the task? What do you see to from this opinion? Do they accept responsibilities, keep it up when unsupervised, deal well with customers, manage distractions?	
*Note: underpinning knowledge is not usually included as a dimension of competence. Usually knowledge is assumed if someone can do the job. Don't assume.	

Original Source: Document entitled "Getting your head around Plan, Conduct and Review Assessment published by DI Consultancy, Hobart in 2000 (Date Unknown) re-typed by L Hazelwood 2010

At both a national and State level, it was understood that without such discussions trainer assessors all work in isolation, within our own perceptions, and one view

might be completely different to another view of competency. Table 3.1 on the previous page displays a tool to develop a worker 'construct.' This tool, designed by Driver Improvement (DI) Consultancy after the introduction of Training Packages, was regularly used by Tasmanian Assessor and Workplace Trainer (TAWT) Network in 'validation and moderation' exercises conducted. Close examination of this 'construct' tool reveals dimensions of competency questions that use *Bloom's Taxonomy*, a compilation of action verbs the Committee of College and University Examiners chose to classify "…the intended behaviour of students – the ways in which individuals are to act, think and feel as a result of participating in some unit of instruction" (Bloom et al, 1956, p.12) to provide clarity between the levels of knowledge and skills required.

When Training Packages were first developed I was working for Training Services Australia, the Federal Government agency that trained industry trainers and an active member of TAWT – the Tasmanian Assessor and Workplace Trainer network. I remember how big a surprise it was to all those trainers and assessors that I interacted with when Blooms' Taxonomy was not used in Training Packages because it was in common usage to define learning outcomes, in both workplace training and TAFE environs, during that period. TAFE teachers, and workplace trainers alike, understood that 'to recall' is a higher cognitive function than 'to label' for instance. The strangeness of this decision was particularly distressing at the time as the distinctions the levels provided were seen as important by both camps of trainer assessors — industry and TAFE.

Regular network discussions, held by national and State bodies charged with performing overarching roles in VET, facilitated an airing of particular perceptions that enabled industries and RTOs to align levels of competency. This tool provides a series of questions that allow a trainer assessor to examine the level of performance that they are looking for when they consider someone is 'competent.' Small groups in each industry sector met to discuss the different 'constructs' in an industry group and agree on an appropriate level for that industry sector. Attendance at these meetings clearly demonstrated to me that many variations in understanding of competency can easily and quickly occur, even within the same RTO, if individual views are not constantly correlated.

High achieving trainers and assessors regularly converse with workers and industry management personnel, as well as colleague assessors from their own and other industries for this reason of course. These trainers gain up-to-date information and advice as a way to ensure the validity of their own perceptions regarding competency. The national focus on bringing together of people from different industry sectors for assessment validation and moderation processes appears to have stopped when National ITABs and ANTA were dissolved. I am unsure why this occurred as places for common discussion are considered important in many fields of employment. Whatever the reasoning the negative impact on trainer assessors' personal development, and the subsequent loss of grass root feedback to *VET administration*, is of concern.

AQF influences post ANTA

ANTA was pushing Training Packages and then ANTA was gone. Robin Ryan (2011) notes in his research that the ANTA 'era' — the period when industry was being moved into a formalised worker development process — had seen both highs and lows, when it ended in 2005. Ryan highlights an early report commissioned by ANTA to review their training reform progress had found ANTA, as an organisation, was

> …at the crossroads, primarily because of lack of industry commitment,
> insufficient focus on the demand side especially in widening the use of
> market-like machinery, limited progress on the use of competency standards
> and generally slow pace of reform because: 'change needs to be laboriously
> negotiated and as a nation we have demonstrated a preference for incremental
> change'. (Fitzgerald, 1994, p.49 cited in Ryan, 2011, p.13)

It is interesting to contemplate for a moment why the Fitzgerald Report, referred to above, considered industry commitment was lacking when the national training system was being introduced. Why would this be the case when Australian industry was portrayed as the big winner from the Government implementation of a competency-based training system? Industry was to gain workers trained to the levels industry required, were they not? As discussions held are not part of public record, I can only mull over if those leading this major change management process did not 'sell' the new system to industry in a way that resulted in an immediate and

continuing 'buy-in' from industry. Perhaps industry people involved at this early stage could already see flaws in the structure being proposed — we will never know the answer.

In truth, how Australian industry actually sees VET and 'VET programs' is hard to fathom today too. Industry continues to be part of VET development and to review VET processes. General statements on VET websites and formal reports purport industry is backing the national training system but when individuals are questioned by trainers like me they report problems with performance levels and the length of change processes. Check any weekly list of job advertisements, and you will notice there is an incongruence in how industry views the *VET qualifications* they are said to support. Few employers advertise they require potential staff to have the *VET qualifications* that their industry has assisted in developing. Surely industry, in the main, would be demanding people with relevant *VET qualifications* by now in an 'industry-led' VET system. Perhaps the Taylor Review (2005), another independent evaluation of ANTA shows what the Government's VET focus was on.

> …a wide range of programs and [making] substantial progress on foundational objectives of a competency-based system, greater use of quasi-market mechanisms, and a formalised qualifications and recognition framework. It introduced a number of productive programs in equity and diversity, professional development, research and VET in Schools. (Ryan, 2011, p.14)

The AQF is the "formalised qualifications and framework' mentioned above and this framework appears to play a significant part in how competency levels are viewed today. I consider the differences between how the original AQF operated, shown in Table 2.1 on page 52, and how the AQF officially launched in 2012 operates, shown on next two pages, show a change in the interrelationship of Qualifications and Levels that has occurred. Up until around 2000, a fully qualified apprentice completed their indentured three year training period with a Certificate III qualification which correlated to an AQF3 level work role across all industry sectors involved in *VET qualifications* at that time.

Table 3.2   AQF First Edition July 2011

Qualification Type	Certificate I	Certificate II	Certificate III
Level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Purpose	The Certificate I qualifies individuals with basic functional knowledge and skills to undertake work, further learning and community involvement	The Certificate II qualifies individuals to undertake mainly routine work and as a pathway for further learning	The Certificate III qualifies individuals who apply a broad range of knowledge and skills in varied contexts to undertake skilled work and as a pathway for further learning
Knowledge	Graduates of a Certificate I will have basic fundamental knowledge and understanding in a narrow area of work and learning	Graduates of a Certificate II will have factual, technical and procedural knowledge in a defined area of work and learning	Graduates of a Certificate III will have factual, technical, procedural and theoretical knowledge in a defined area of work and learning
Skills	Graduates of Certificate I will have: • basic skills to participate in everyday life and further learning • cognitive and communication skills to receive, pass on and recall information in a narrow range of areas • technical skills involving the use of tools appropriate to the activity and use of basic communication technologies	Graduates of a Certificate II will have: • cognitive skills to access, record and act on a defined range of information from a range of sources • cognitive and communication skills to apply and communicate known solutions to a limited range of predictable problems • technical skills to use a limited range of equipment to complete tasks involving known routines and procedures with a limited range of options	Graduates of a Certificate III will have: • cognitive, technical and communication skills to interpret and act on available information • cognitive and communication skills to apply and communicate known solutions to a variety of predictable problems and to deal with unforeseen contingencies using known solutions • technical and communication skills to provide technical information to a variety of specialist and non-specialist audiences • technical skills to undertake routine and some non-routine tasks in a range of skilled operations
Application of knowledge and skills	Graduates of a Certificate I will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills: • with some autonomy in defined contexts and within established parameters • in contexts that may include preparation for further learning, life activities and/or a variety of initial routine and predictable work-related activities including participation in a team or work group	Graduates of a Certificate II will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills: • with some accountability for the quality of own outcomes and some responsibility for own outputs in work and learning • with limited autonomy and judgement in the completion of own defined and routine tasks in known and stable contexts • with limited autonomy and judgement to complete routine but variable tasks in collaboration with others in a team environment	Graduates of a Certificate III will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills: • with discretion and judgement in the selection of equipment, services or contingency measures • to adapt and transfer skills and knowledge within known routines, methods, procedures and time constraints • in contexts that include taking responsibility for own outputs in work and learning including participation in teams and taking limited responsibility for the output of others within established parameters

Qualification Type	Certificate IV	Diploma	Advanced Diploma
Level	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Purpose	The Certificate IV qualifies individuals who apply a broad range of specialised knowledge and skills in varied contexts to undertake skilled work and as a pathway for further learning	The Diploma qualifies individuals who apply a integrates technical and theoretical concepts in a broad range of contexts to undertake advanced skilled or paraprofessional work and as a pathway for further learning	The Advanced Diploma qualifies individuals who apply specialised knowledge in a range of contexts to undertake advanced skilled or paraprofessional work and as a pathway for further learning
Knowledge	Graduates of a Certificate IV will have broad factual, technical and theoretical knowledge in a specialised field of work and learning	Graduates of a Diploma will have technical and theoretical knowledge and concepts, with depth in some areas within a field of work and learning	Graduates of an Advanced Diploma will have specialised and integrated technical and theoretical knowledge with depth within one or more fields of work and learning
Skills	Graduates of a Certificate IV will have: • cognitive skills to identify, analyse, compare and act on information from a range of sources • cognitive, technical and communication skills to apply and communicate technical solutions of a non-routine or contingency nature to a defined range of predictable problems • specialist technical skills to complete routine and non-routine tasks and functions • communication skills to guide activities and provide technical advice in the area of work and leaning	Graduates of a Diploma will have: • cognitive and communication skills to identify, analyse, synthesis and act on information from a range of sources • cognitive, technical and communication skills to analyse, plan, design and evaluate approaches to unpredictable problems and/or management requirements • specialist technical and creative skills to express ideas and perspectives • communication skills to transfer knowledge and specialised skills to others and demonstrate understanding of knowledge	Graduates of an Advanced Diploma will have: • cognitive and communication skills to identify, analyse, synthesise and act on information from a range of sources • cognitive and communication skills to transfer knowledge and skills to others and to demonstrate understanding of specialised knowledge with dept in some areas • cognitive and communication skills to formulate responses to complex problems • wide-ranging specialised technical, creative or conceptual skills to express ideas and perspectives
Application of knowledge and skills	Graduates of a Certificate IV will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills: • to specialised tasks or functions in known or changing contexts • with responsibility for own functions and outputs, and may have limited responsibility for organisation of others • with limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others in a team within limited parameters	Graduates of a Diploma will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills: • with depth in some areas of specialisation, in known or changing contexts • to transfer and apply theoretical concepts and/or technical and/or creative skills in a range of situations • with personal responsibility and autonomy in performing complex technical operations with responsibility for own outputs in relation to broad parameters for quantity and quality • with initiative and judgement to organise the work of self and others and plan, coordinate and evaluate the work of teams within broad but generally well-defined parameters	Graduates of an Advanced Diploma will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills: • with depth in areas of specialisation, in contexts subject to change • with initiative and judgement in planning, design, technical or management functions with some direction • to adapt a range of fundamental principles and complex techniques to known and unknown solutions • across a broad range of technical or management functions with accountability for personal outputs and personal and team outcomes within broad parameters

Original Source: *Australian Qualification Framework First Edition.* Published by Australian Qualification Framework Council in 2011. Re-typed by L Hazelwood 2012. In January 2013 a Second Edition was published and the First Edition removed from website. Second Edition wording is similar and simpler again.

General industry expectation for this newly qualified person was that they would take several years to become an experienced tradesperson or a 'leading hand' — an AQF4 level worker.

To explain the process further, when watching a skilled worker in an RPL assessment process during Award Restructuring, a workplace trainer interpreted the original AQF levels in the following way: A participant was operating an AQF2 level when they could consistently do their small group of allocated work tasks to the level expected, without assistance. A Certificate II qualification could then be awarded. When a participant had acquired responsibility for a broader range of tasks, possibly including responsibility for a subordinate's work, and understood how to do those same tasks well enough to train others to do tasks, that person was then deemed to have moved to a AQF3 level of workplace competence. They could then be awarded a Certificate III qualification. A similar development process continued at each worker competence and certification level up to the Advanced Diploma.

Not long after the introduction of New Apprenticeships into industry sectors without an Apprenticeship tradition, I recall discussions about a disparity that had begun to occur between the levels of responsibility of workers who were operating at the same AQF level. It is possible this inconsistency led to misunderstanding the previous VET connection between worker levels of competence and qualifications, leading to the connection between AQF and workplaces appearing to be reversed — we have also gone from the specific to the general attributes of work role levels. As had to happen sometime with such an impractical name, New Apprenticeships were eventually changed to Australian Traineeships, removing the confusion this name had caused for many years. Australian Traineeships are now a subset of Australian Apprenticeships. The continuing disparity between qualification levels was mentioned in Chapter 2.

In addition, sometime later — through one of the AQF changes made along the way to its 2012 launch — the wording order and capitalisation of the 'AQF3 level' term, used in my explanation above, was changed to 'AQF Level 3.' While AQF3 level was attributed to a worker's level of competence, the AQF Level 3 became attributed to the qualification Certificate III. I may be conciliatory in imputing that the change of attributing 3 level to competence and Level 3 to qualification might have inadvertently led to changes of emphases for the purpose of VET. No matter

why, it is indisputable that VET in Australia changed focus from competence to qualification incrementally with each AQF re-formation. Without the once clear *performance standard* divisions in our current AQF structure, I must query how RTO staff can isolate differences between AQF level expectations and to assure themselves an RTO's VET system processes are compliant with the AQF, as they are now required to do by Law.

Loss of links between labour force requirements and the VET system

Not only have these direct links to required *performance standards* been lost from current VET processes as mentioned earlier, it seems other links between training workers and workplace strategies appear to have also been severed. Companies' Human Resource Development (HRD) teams still use Training Needs Analysis'(TNAs) to identify areas that require improvement to maximise individual performance and evaluate training conducted to ensure workplace training remains specifically focused to meet expected outcomes. Workplace training provision continues to be linked to a business' HR strategies but it is not essential to the success of the company to link workplace training to a Training Package. Historical searching has not identified why HRD processes ceased being important or were not included in the original **BSZ98**. It is difficult for one to believe that excluding HRD processes from Training Package development is defendable. To believe that would be naïve.

Dawe (2002), in her research on fostering generic skills, comments on the speed with which original Training Packages were developed when they were urgently needed to support newly announced New Apprenticeship areas (Mathers & Saunders, 1995, p.14 cited in Dawe, 2002). Six documents were developed to cater for three broad industry streams — sales/clerical, manufacturing and services. A Training Package structure emerged. This Training Package structure was more than likely developed by seconded, readily available TAFE staff because of the short timeframes imposed. Reassigning Government-paid employees for this task could have contributed to the separation of VET training from normal workplace operations, a point of enquiry in this thesis. My memories of working as a TAFE employee, around this same time, are that my TAFE supervisors did not provide me with training related to my workplace duties or to their HR processes in the same way my

experiences as a Federal Government employee and from training staff in large international companies such as Comalco, a heavy metal manufacturer, had led me to expect.

I query, each time a pertinent article appears in *Training & Development*, the Australian Institute of Training and Development (AITD) journal, why HRD skill and knowledge areas have never been restored within the national training system. Paul Rasmussen article on training conversations between businesses and consultants (AITD, December 2012) provides insight into my understanding of the relationship between industry, Training Packages and *VET qualifications*. Rasmussen's experience reveals that businesses rarely speak to consultants about a qualification level they wish their staff to obtain, rather they provide consultant trainers with the particulars of the level of performance or competence they believe their staff need. Rasmussen's questions, shown in Figure 3.2 below, relate to capturing information on specified training needs to inform the training he delivers.

- Who is the target population for training?

- List the critical job tasks performed by the target population which relate to the training being developed.

- List key skills and knowledge required to perform associated critical job tasks.

- Determine key business results or drivers for development and delivery of training.

- Determine strategic goals to which the training relates.

- Determine the measurement of success. What are the relevant metrics associated with the training?

Original source: Article titled: *Can I have that as half a day?* by Paul Rasmussen. Published in *Training & Development*, December 2012, Volume 39 No 6, Australian Institute of Training and Development.

Figure 3.2   **Rasmussen Key Questions to Businesses**

My experience of speaking to employers about nationally-recognised qualifications is that these options are better mentioned when the conversation up to that point has already demonstrated to the employer that their employees, or any who

chose to be assessed, could also gain a **Unit** of accredited training at the same time as they are undertaking the training the employer has requested.

Dawe's research (2002) highlights that industry provided support for the "integration of generic and technical skill development because it was felt to be closer to the real experience of the workplace and provided easier transfer of generic skills to this context" (p.6). No doubt, large company enterprises supported the introduction of Training Packages to enhance their own training efforts and thought they could customise Training Packages to their requirements. It is interesting though that some of Australia's largest companies chose to develop their own Training Packages and retain their copyright. Dawe makes mention on what, in 2002, was seen as critical to 'VET program' success, in stating,

> …Enterprises, selected for 'good practice', tended to have structures in place
> to promote a learning culture, and a commitment to training by managers.
> This ensured that training/learning and assessment were promoted as normal
> workplace activities to reflect and improve actual workplace performances.
> All managers and supervisors were also involved in training and assessment.
> (Dawe, 2002, p.6)

Over a decade has passed since Dawe reported the need for having structures promoting 'a learning culture' through manager and supervisors. Yet wording that connects *VET programs* to 'normal workplace activities' is still often absent from Training Packages. Is this because my experiences working in an STA, in DEEWR and with other VET stakeholders, would have me question again whether people working in *VET administration* roles comprehend that they are not only managing part of a VET training system but that they should be adopting similar training practices in their own workplaces. Contact made through phone and email by me, and colleagues, over many years appears to confirm this view.

A blurred divide seems to have occurred between those delivering 'training and development' within industry — outside of Training Packages, and those delivering 'skills and knowledge' — from Training Packages. While this situation remains, is the national training system delivering training according to VET's original purpose?

Are we providing the training that all industry sectors requires for their workers? My enquiry provides evidence that we are no longer requiring 'VET programs' to be provided in the most direct way for industry to gain immediate benefit from learners gaining skills and knowledge. A competent worker is a complete package — skills, knowledge, attitude, behaviours and so on. When you visit offices, shops, restaurants, government offices and schools you enter a workplace. Problems, similar to the hospitality situation discussed in my Introduction chapter, exist in many workplaces across Australia. After so many years of *VET qualifications* would such problems be occurring if the person considered competent was meeting the actual industry standards required to perform their workplace role rather than the assessment requirement documented in a Training Package?

Through the 90s, there was an emphasis on the notion of learning organisations. Peter Senge's, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (1990) was amongst the most popular of books on the topic. Senge strongly advocated that workers and management learn to ask the question "Why?" when something was working within an organisation and when it was not. This approach was acknowledged at the time as significantly important to conducting VET training. To ask the question "Why?" might be a powerful way to deal with what seems to be a problem within the national training system — separating training **for** work from training **to do** work competently.

It is not a surprise to me that people find the VET system a very complicated one — the system takes many forms, is provided in an array of contexts and has multiple influencing factors. My research process was laborious every time something changed as I needed to find what that particular 'thread' had changed to in order to move forward. To date, in this chapter on the impact of Government changes on competency, I have suggested some reasons for the 'lack of integration between VET and labour market policy' identified in Dumbrell's research, and with industry's expectation. In the rest of this chapter, I consider the impact of moving VET training out of workplaces and the formation of an Australian National Training Framework, although we speak of Australia having a national training system, a system which changes in definition depending on the information being read.

Effects of moving VET training for work out of workplaces

Training for work while at school is supported by a Government decision to fund and implement 'VET in Schools' programs around Australia made in the late 90s. The task of VET in School teachers must be to prepare students for a career in any workplace, as well as a particular industry. It is therefore an imperative that VET in Schools' teachers assist students to establish personal and proper workplace habits and put poor attitudes right early, before poor habits can become entrenched and become a problem for employers.

A heated discussion with an Automotive teacher in 2010 regarding his view that he was assessing college students only on their skills comes to mind here. He had a young man who had the best technical skills in the class but continually displayed disregard for safety and other workshop rules. We disagreed about whether he was to be assessed as competent or not at this stage? Whereas the teacher thought he should be assessed as 'Competent,' I was adamant the student should be assessed as 'Not Yet Competent' and the student needed to be told why if he was going to successfully gain and keep employment as a Mechanic. As a likely Apprenticeship candidate, from both of our viewpoints, his poor attitude now to safety could create a higher risk of an accident occurring to himself or others later. If this attitude was not corrected, he would become a 'challenge' for any industry sector he entered. The teacher considered that was not his concern. As the VET in Schools approach was introduced to move well trained students into workplaces earlier than if they completed Years 11 and 12, their future development is likely to be hindered if these students develop poor work practices because of learning in their normal 'school' environment rather than a simulated workplace' context.

Another teacher, a builder who had been training Apprentices in TAFE for many years, commented that it did not matter what students learned in those two college years, as all Apprentices are required to start at the beginning when they are signed into a contract. If this sentiment is typical, perhaps this explains why Apprenticeships have taken so long to change from being time-bound when many Apprenticeships pass down through family structures. Learning something the right way establishes good workplace practice and saves the Government money and the learners time, and possibly angst. Might it be because of repetition leading to

boredom that many young Australians do not complete their Apprenticeships and Traineeships?

VET in School teachers train students for work, for the most part, outside of work and perhaps even without direct assistance from worksite supervisors — as this is hard to achieve in a regulated, time tabled school environment. Eight Home Economics teachers in my TTC, found teaching in VET in Schools program was particularly hard for university-qualified teachers, especially without workplace experience. During their RPL assessment for a Certificate I in Hospitality, these Home Economics teachers were deemed 'Not Yet Competent' in using knives because the way they held the knives would cause muscular strain if they were to work in a commercial kitchen for a lengthy time. Angry at first for not receiving this 'industry' knowledge in their university studies, these teachers quickly adapted their hand positions and, after a week of practice, were found 'Competent.' In planning university courses for these teachers, might it have been considered not necessary to learn the skills of using knives in a commercial kitchen for a lengthy time in the ways industry requires? Might it have been assumed that they would know this already and therefore similarly might it have been assumed that they could teach these skills? It would have seemed sensible for the university course to ensure that Home Economic teachers would be competent in using knives in commercial, not school or home kitchens. We might adjust and apply these questions about validity and relevance of university teaching to other areas in VET such as Woodwork and Metalwork. Do university designed courses assume too much from their teachers in training and therefore exclude some essential, practical knowledge and skills training required by industry? The number of universities to contact has prohibited me finding out to date.

I believe it is reasonable to question in this thesis why successive Governments continue to fund non-work based *VET qualifications* — that is, learning which is not part of a person's normal workplace activities and often not linked to their continuing development as a worker within a particular industry later on. The impact of this decision must be known by Governments as educators have asserted for many years

that separating learning from workplaces is poor educational practice. David Boud, Ruth Cohen and David Walker, in *Using Experience for Learning* (1993), for example, contributed information on points considered missing in other research and published literature on learning from experience. Boud et al. acknowledged the importance of "recognition of the role and relevance of learning from experience no matter where it occurs" (p.1).

These writers understood, as I do from my on-the-job and in-classroom training experience, the importance of identifying, acknowledging and including the personal experiences of learners. I found that linking past, present and future experiences must occur for complete understanding and transferability of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Without this crucial step, an individual's learning may be left at a superficial level, making it hard for them to later fully integrate their learning into thinking, doing and being. Boud et al. comment on why this is happening.

> …when we are dealing with learning in the context of formal courses, as many of our contributors are doing, then taking a view of learning from experience is a significant challenge to the *status quo*. What we and they are saying is that even in the context of externally defined knowledge, we must take account of, and build on, the unique perceptions and experiences of those involved, for without this we are dealing with only the superficial aspects of learning. (Boud, 1993, p.7)

From my viewpoint, it appears the 'status quo' remains unchanged today for many VET providers. This is interesting to me as, no matter whether I am learner or trainer, my lived experience is that VET training is more effective when learning is made to directly associate with my own, and others, 'previously experienced workplace scenarios. It seems an andragogical, practical, applied learning approach — learning and doing at the same time — makes it easier for everyone to 'connect the dots.' If this approach is more effective, what effect has Government funding of VET courses that are not intimately associated with direct employment had on workplace understanding and work *ethos* in this country? It is possible that requiring no mandatory link to a particular workplace to undertake a *VET qualification* is restricting worker flexibility and potential competency when they gain work at some later date.

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The effect of assumptions along Australia's VET journey

Guthrie's (2010) intermingling of terms like 'vocational educators' and 'VET providers' may provide a clue to the current level of skills and experience expected of those providing VET training. Guthrie's use of this split terminology is not a lone occurrence — a similar approach is taken in other NCVER research papers listed in my References. If VET researchers' academic background is limited in industry training experience, this might account for some of the operational and outcome differences between teaching and training I have noted. It was not surprising to me that ASQA found in their Report into *Training for the White Card for Australia's Construction Industry* (2013) that at least one group of employers have 'their own on-site induction for new employees and most considered the White Card training to be largely superfluous.' (ASQA, p. 16). How could we be effective in reducing the high death and disability rate within the building and construction sector each year, the primary reason for introducing this training, with a poorly written Unit and no time requirements?

Whatever the cause, the approaches to, and expectations for, achieving competency between the grass root workplace operators or VET providers and those teaching in colleges and universities — vocational educators appear different. There is a third party whose activities might further confuse the nature of any identified gap in adult learning practices — trainer assessors who pay regular short visits to people undertaking Australian Apprenticeships in their workplaces to assess against the Training Plan filed as part of the funded training process.

When did this split in terminology and practice I refer to above occur? If this split occurred in the first few years of Training Packages, it would have continued unchallenged until Schofield and McDonald tabled their review of the national training system in 2004. Unfortunately, this important document was delivered to ANTA at the very time ANTA was being subsumed into DEST, a new Department, meant to bring many different facets of government into one entity. With my interpretation of events, during a change in economic climate, it is logical that, as Ryan comments, the new DEST department, having inherited ANTA's responsibilities,
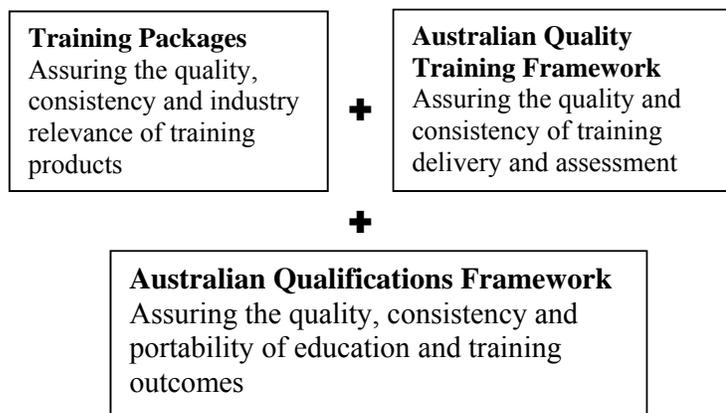
> …began with the assumption that: 'training packages are the pillars of the
> National Training Framework' (2006, p.12) and set out priorities influenced
> by the new awareness of skills shortages, including the up-skilling of mature-

age workers and encouraging greater workforce participation. (Ryan, 2011, p.15)

Such a tumultuous occasion is unlikely to have been considered a good time to change any system—even if a flaw had been found and noted.

DEST's metaphor — 'training packages are the pillars of the National Training Framework' — is helpful in further addressing my puzzlement with what has happened to VET. Maybe the focus on Training Packages unwittingly caused the split? The idea of Training Packages as 'pillars' suggests that, in spite of several waves of altered formatting of Training Packages, and the strong challenges of later reviews to the assumptions the metaphor allows, the foundational construction of Training Packages does not change. I look at Training Packages and the effect of the language used within other VET documentation on competency levels in Chapter 5.

Have we made other assumptions too? I think so. Commonly used words that become part of the vernacular are not often clarified as it seems most people are already clear about their meaning. For instance, we have a 'national training framework' — a system of administration and governance — shown below in Figure 3.3.

Training Packages Assuring the quality, consistency and industry relevance of training products	**+**	**Australian Quality Training Framework** Assuring the quality and consistency of training delivery and assessment

+

Australian Qualifications Framework
Assuring the quality, consistency and portability of education and training outcomes

Original Source: ANTA, Australian Quality Training Framework Overview, 2005 retrieved from National Training Commission website in October 2007.

Figure 3.3   Australian National Training Framework

This Australian National Training Framework was originally developed by ANTA in 2005 (cited by National Training Commission, 2007) as a quality assurance measure for the VET system. Within this Framework we also have the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) — a set of standards assuring nationally consistent, high-quality training and assessment services, and the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF). Does the wording "the national training system" subsume, ANTF, AQTF, AQF and more?

The organogram above that depicts the Australian National Training Framework avoids showing ANTF as a system for ensuring the *performance standards* industry requires will be provided through VET. Training Packages is the only component which mentions industry and then only in regard to the relevance of training products to industry. The wording shows how tenuous are the links of Training Packages, AQTF and AQF to industry *performance standards* in 2005. Training Packages, in their 2013 form, continue to omit crucial information required for both the quality and consistency industry expects of workers doing tasks — information such as relevant, accurate, specific, measured, time-bound *performance standards*. The words 'performance standards,' also referred to in industry settings as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or Key Result Areas (KRAs), are not used in current Training Packages.

Both the other ANTF components compromise the definition of quality of the VET system to some extent. Why only look for 'quality and consistency' between an RTO's training delivery and assessment strategies and their procedures? Perhaps a better check that RTO outcomes are meeting workplace productivity requirements would be to check 'quality and consistency' across the people being 'qualified' by RTOs, and across all RTOs delivering the same qualification to be at the highest level. Assuring the 'portability of education and training outcomes,' a goal of the AQF sounds like 'mutual recognition' of qualifications — pieces of paper — rather than assuring the portability of workplace skills. I had expected to find a 'performance' focus in an industry-led system that is constantly said to be developing competent workers. Instead, I find an 'education' focus. For me, the missing words from the ANTF are 'training' and 'competence.'

I must make a further point in this chapter with regard to the release of the *Australian Qualification Framework First Edition* (AQFC, 2011), which I find a fundamentally different document from the structure I have used since the concept's introduction in 1995. Originally, a set of qualifications — Certificate I to Advanced Diploma qualifications — were named as *VET qualifications*. Later Vocational Graduate Certificates and Vocational Graduate Diplomas were also included in the named *VET qualifications* set. The later version of this Framework raises for me two questions. Do we have any *VET qualifications* now, or even a separate VET sector? Is our VET system now considered to be one delivering academic programs with some practical elements? In what ways might those in VET governance roles expect to produce competent workers through people undertaking *VET qualifications* awarded by academically oriented institutions? Like so many other queries in my writing, these questions leave me puzzled still. The AQF might have been an imperative for clarity and mediation amongst education and training providers. With such an imperative, in what ways has the ideal and practical, productive workplace benefits of worker competence been compromised or even "watered down"?

Positioning of VET in Australia today

What constitutes the significance of the Australian VET situation today? I personally know many people who have gained high level *VET qualifications* without ever working in that particular industry area. Perhaps I am the only one who finds it strange to hear of someone awarded a Diploma of Marketing without working in **any** industry sector, or a Diploma of Business Management without having managed either **people** or a **business**. I have no problem with deeming an academic award for such learning. Whether the training is funded or not, why would Australian Governments not insist that demonstrated workplace expertise is intrinsic in the award of *VET qualifications*?

Annual Government budgets deploy large amounts of monies to VET training. The obvious justification would come from considering how the number of people gaining *VET qualifications* aligns with the number working in industry sectors with those qualifications. Can we accurately calculate an over or undersupply of VET qualified workers in an industry sector for instance? The OECD 2008 review team thought that using "planning arrangements based on an analysis of current and future

skills requirements raise a number of issues" such as "the skills forecasts they are based on may be unreliable, the skills shortages identified in the process of skills forecasting may be due to unpopular or low-wage jobs as well as to the VET system's failure to supply relevant skills and planned provision, based on an analysis of skills needs, leaves little scope for students and employers to fashion the supply of training according to their needs or their expressed demand" (Hoeckel et al., 2008, p.25). Recently, I met a discouraged self-funded migrant family from Egypt who may have fallen foul of our unreliable skills forecasting. The father was unable to find work for nearly a year in either of his areas of expertise in Adelaide when they had chosen to relocate to that particular city because the Immigration website had shown a high level of undersupply of Production Engineers and Project Managers.

Gaining recognition for your workplace competence was once the point of difference between gaining a *VET qualification* rather than gaining an academic one. The VET pathway choice also provided income and invaluable work experience while learning. Now, due to the broad range of educational institutes delivering VET training outside workplaces, I am unsure if this point of difference exists any longer. Even so, I believe the general community still expects *VET qualifications* to be linked to genuine workplace performance. I found that TTC parents and students were amazed a school student could be awarded a Statement of Attainment for a **Unit** in a *VET qualification* before that student had effectively performed the required task in an actual job in a workplace.

In reviewing VET system outcomes for Certificate II in Business qualifications, I have found it is possible that a school student who has spent maybe three hours a week in a classroom during school terms, and undertaken two weeks work experience over one year is being considered to have the same level of experience, skill and knowledge as a person who has worked full time in an office for one year or, in some States, maybe more years. Close cross-examination of Apprenticeship and Traineeship qualification structures might likely demonstrate that confusing differences in recognition of learning levels attained still abound in this country. Factors such as the length of contracted training time, number of times learners are contacted by an Australian Apprenticeship Centre (AAC) and training approach taken by RTOs, are likely to affect the level of competency a learner can attain.

An email that the Department of Education in Tasmania received in 2001, soon after Training Packages were introduced, began with the short poem below:

An RTO who'll remain nameless,

On reading the standard became speechless.

When seeking out others of the same scope,

They found many contemplating the rope;

Favouring a life from the brine,

They rewrote the thing just in time.

In the playfulness of the poem, the sender's anguish is genuine enough and I believe such anguish continues today amongst many of my colleagues, and me. The poet continued:

Now the real story: When it first appeared, we thought the Assessment and Workplace Training Package looked reasonable. After reading it *closely* we changed our minds. To help us understand and communicate what we thought the authors were trying to communicate, we decided to annotate the assessment Units. We checked our understanding with some RTOs whose opinion we value. It seemed their understanding matched ours. Others saw our annotated standard and 'wanted one'. We thought you might too.

I offer this email as evidence of the journey through 'VET land' that I began in the 80s. It confirms how I, and other VET personnel were feeling before and after Training Package introduction. I can only guess how relevant these words are to the current situation for the thousands working at the grass roots level of Australian VET in 2013. I do know how relevant they still are to the situations I, and my colleagues, find ourselves regularly discussing.

After the Carmichael Report in 2000, there was Government recognition that Australia needed to develop a competitive workforce to assist us to enter the global market. This need still continues as does the need for VET community 'validation' and 'moderation' exercises once held regularly to discuss and agree on Training Package requirements. This need has not gone away — the funding for it to occur has though. In 2013, when I attended ISC run training and other Government supported VET training and RTO meetings, the rhetoric, or the 'spin,' espoused to

show favourable bias in my opinion, was that Training Packages and *VET programs* are in good shape.

My ultimate concern is whether we know we are achieving the best results we can for those involved, with the dollars spent. My background investigation of factors I see as affecting the understanding and interpretation of competence continues in the next chapter. In my attempt at an objective, critical analysis of what is being expected of those with qualifications to deliver VET training, I survey VET training and assessing qualifications and attempt to detect small changes or clues that could be affecting learners' achievement of the industry expected competency levels and, thus, individual worker possible contributions to workplace productivity.

Chapter 4   Are VET training qualifications appropriate?

> We trained hard but it seemed every time we were beginning
> to form teams we would be reorganised. I was to learn later
> in life that we tend to meet every situation by reorganising,
> and a wonderful method it can be for creating illusion of
> progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and
> demoralisation.
>
> Attributed to Gaius Petronius Arbiter

In 1998, the BSZ98 Training Package was launched to formally instigate trainer training qualifications for the envisaged national training system. In the Foreword of BSZ98, Brian Kerwood, Chairman of the Development Board for the National Assessors and Workplace Trainers Body, confirms the history of training and assessment and how important vocational education and training was seen to be for our economy, and our workforce development.

> The first version of the competency standards for assessment and workplace
> training was endorsed in February 1993, followed by a second version in
> 1995. This new Training Package brings together outcomes of an extensive
> industry-led consultation and the latest research available.
>
> We [NAWTB] believe that it represents a significant evolution of the
> provision of quality assessment and on the job training…Few people would
> dispute the importance of these skills to our national economic and industrial
> wellbeing. Assessment and workplace training are integral functions, not only
> to skill development and recognition, but also to recruitment, to performance
> management, to supervision and team leadership. There are few organisations
> that can afford to ignore these products. (BSZ98, 1999, p.3)

Kerwood's endorsements align *VET qualifications* with workplace performance. It could be expected that a workplace trainer would be a highly skilled educator — someone able to teach, train, facilitate, coach, mentor, develop and counsel workers at all levels within organisations and whose vocational competence would be education, training, development and assessment. This chapter identifies changes over time to VET trainer assessor requirements. Changes that match the Roman satirist quote above that 'we meet every situation by reorganising' and thereby creating only an 'illusion of progress.', In particular, it looks at TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment qualifications, or equivalents, in order to verify that this Certificate awards trainer assessors with levels of skill, knowledge and personal attributes required to train workers to meet industry sector needs.

When training for apprentices was formally introduced through TAFE institutes in 1975, trades people were employed as VET teachers for these apprentices. Although these trades people were meant to be skilled as they were required to have had five years' industry experience, they may have taken on teaching as they were not attracting the highest earnings possible in their trade roles. Training was learned in workshops and theory taught in classrooms. Workplace trainers and assessors became necessary when the specific need for continual education, training and development of the workforce was acknowledged in the 80s. When workplace trainer assessors were introduced, it was widely acknowledged that they needed to operate in a different way than VET teachers in TAFE institutes. Guthrie (2010) reports TAFE teachers undertook their own teacher training programs within each state — programs like the *South Australian New Entry Lecturers' Methodology and Induction Course*, commonly called NELMIC. Although these were highly regarded programs, my memory is that workplace trainers and assessors found it easier to work in a scheduled, TAFE college environment than TAFE teachers transferring to a constantly changing industrial setting.

Effect of combining vocational education and VET training programs

Before the *National Competition Policy* was introduced, TAFE teachers and community-type educators conducted 'vocational education' programs that were not considered the same as a VET industry qualification. Although ANTA 'formalised' the training of people in workplaces, researchers still why, two decades on, "the great majority — about 75% — of delivery still takes place in traditional institutional settings (Knight & Mlotkowski, 2009; Skills Australia, 2010) rather than in workplaces? (Guthrie, 2010, p.6)." One reason maybe that, whether intentional or not, VET training has become 'big business' in Australia. Where once industry directed the training they required, it appears Government funding, through its many arms, now leads the way in VET. This change in approach has increased the number of people in organisations working in VET associated areas such as research, Training Package development and RTO compliance.

In the late 80s, both the Government provider of workplace training for industry, Training Services (Australia), and NELMIC, trained people to use three teaching

approaches — skill sessions, information sessions and experiential learning sessions. Built on Defence Force training, this approach provided the range of training skills thought important and necessary to cover all employee training needs within companies. Prior to Training Package introduction, each business already had a prescribed 'set of performance standards' or 'competence requirements' for tasks and workplace trainers used these to form the basis of their 'competency-based training' programs. These p*erformance standards* usually comprised three part learning outcomes. For a simple skill, the identified *performance standards* might be:

Quantity—how many were required within a time frame. For example, "build six boxes in five minutes" or "type 25 words per minute."

Quality—the standard—a description of how well an end product is to be finished or of what level of knowledge or attitude is required. For example, "all sides of equal length and smooth" or "with no errors (100 percent accuracy)."

Conditions—under what conditions the work needed to be performed. For example, "using pre-treated 50 mm thick pine" or "when using a Asus 7800 laptop."

For higher level training outcomes, the quality and conditional factors of a learner's actions or performance, such as their mindset, became more important than the quantity.

This simple approach to industry training soon became more complex, and less clear, when trial Training Packages described a task as a 'Unit of work' which quickly changed to a 'Unit of competency.' This one word change shifted the meaning and context of competency in VET. A **Unit of Competency** within a Training Package no longer contained '*performance standards,*' similar to those above, but instead contained **Elements of Competency** and **Performance Criteria** for those **Elements**. Could the direct association between VET training and work task performance in earlier documents have been lost at this point? Could something as simple as a wording change have created ensuing VET community misunderstandings about VET **Units**, and the VET system in general as Schofield and McDonald reported in 2004, and the OECD Report identified again in 2008.

I comprehend that a *performance standard* is a clear description of the level of skill, knowledge, attitude, behaviour and aptitude industry expects of a person considered competent at a task. The **Performance Criteria**, **Required Knowledge**, **Required Skills** and **Critical Aspects of Evidence** parts of a Training Package are

general impressions or representations to my mind — they are not clearly stated *performance standards* for tasks. None of these factors can be easily and consistently measured as **Performance Criteria** were never meant to be *performance standards*. I recognise and agree with the general understanding that when Training Packages were introduced industry bodies developed competencies; these were agreed to by ITABs and endorsed by the relevant Government body. However, my memory is that, at that time, RTOs were expected to set *performance standards* as part of their own business strategy.

You might ask, "Why would RTOs determine *performance standards* for considered competence?" When you realise that each business chooses the level they expect their staff to operate at, from a range of possibilities along a continuum, this makes sense. Business owners choose to operate somewhere between the David Jones' approach to customer service at one end and the $2 shop approach on the other end for instance. Each industry sets acceptable, minimum points as their industry competency levels for tasks. RTOs choose where in the 'training market continuum' they want to operate too—be it the top, the middle or the bottom end. Some RTOs expect a little more than that level, as do some employers, while others barely reach that minimum. The understanding that the market decides what it wants to buy has underpinned the Government's approach to market regulation since the National Competition Policy was introduced in the early 90s.

From Cat 1 and 2 to TAE qualifications

An *Industrial Award* and the *Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards*, mentioned in Chapter 2, were developed for workplace trainers and assessors to underpin the new workplace training system approach adopted by ANTA. Two Certificates in Workplace Training and Assessment, a Category 1 and a Category 2 qualification, were endorsed as Australia's first national 'vocational training' qualifications and quickly became known as 'Cat 1' and 'Cat 2'. Cat 1 was the qualification for workplace task experts who trained others in their company through skill demonstration and observation, usually on-the-job and one-on-one. A Cat 2 qualification was for people involved in developing and conducting more formal training with assessments against specified industry standards; these people

usually worked in HR Departments or as Training Consultants to particular industry sectors.

Like me, most of my UniSA class peers in the 90s were employed as full time trainers in industry sectors — police, social support agencies, Government Departments and large manufacturing companies. We 'HR trainers' were not machine operators who trained people to use a machine, when required to do so. Our work role was to develop and conduct workplace training in accord with company strategic planning requirements. The fact that the two different levels of workplace trainers were inadvertently collapsed into one Certificate IV qualification in the **BSZ98** training package may be the cause of some of the confusion around VET trainer performance requirements and the continuing lack of professional recognition we had expected to occur by the 90s. The Cat 1 workplace level appears to have been chosen as the Certificate IV level. Unfortunately, that was the one more aligned to teaching approaches that do not directly relate to workplace HR strategies and issues *per se*. This particular **BSZ98** decision may have led to universities being seen as the most likely providers of higher HR strategic level training by *VET administration* when conducting an on-the-job applied learning approach would seem more likely to have an immediate impact on the learner and the business.

The two levels of workplace trainer assessors in the 80s are still reflected in industry today. HR professionals, people I refer to as 'workplace trainers,' educate, train and facilitate the development of others across whole organisations, including the training of staff to train other workers. Staff, with 'expert level' competence in doing a particular task or area, train other workers to do those tasks to a particular standard using structured but informal sessions. Smaller organisations only have the lower 'expert level' trainer. Besides TAFEs, Australia's VET workforce now includes people working in universities, adult and community education, RTOs and VET in School teachers.

Similarities and differences between workplace and TAFE sessions were openly discussed at the turn of the century. Learners in both HR workplace training sessions, and those in TAFE settings, were given session outlines at the beginning of sessions and told about their assessment requirements in a similar way. This

'learner-inclusive' approach, a spin-off of the andragogical thinking in VET at that time, made it easier to discuss what was missing when competence was not reached. Methodology differences existed though in session development. My management gave HR trainer assessors two to three weeks to design and develop a new training program that was expected to address an identified gap, in either an individual's performance or that of a particular group of people. After the learning was provided, it was thoroughly evaluated against the company's 'Learning and Development Objectives.' A TAFE teacher was handed a generic curriculum resource developed by someone else and asked to follow the format outlined.

Different expected outcomes meant different assessment requirements. My workplace trainer learning objectives were specific statements — how many, in how much time, to how many people, under what conditions — that showed what performance level a learner must reach in the assessment to be considered competent. My TAFE teacher learning objectives were not as reflective of workplace practices and were frequently worded "achieve 8 out of 10 on written test" or "complete Case Study 2 satisfactorily as per checking sheet." HR trainers in industry settings could assess learners at different times — at the end of a training session or back in a workplace role after an amount of practice time whereas, except for Apprentice and Trainee classes, most TAFE teachers had a certain number of sessions — typically in one semester or over a year — in which their students were required to learn and then be assessed. Rarely was a chance for extra student practice, or more than one re-assessment on offer. This meant, in workplace-based learning programs, there was time to move from an initial 'Not Yet Competent' finding to a 'Competent' one. In classroom-based learning end of term dates are often used as assessment deadlines even if that means time for practice is only short.

Over the next decades, our approach to training VET trainers and assessors has changed several times. The first national shift moved the qualification from a training focus to an assessment one. I suspect the change to an assessment focus occurred because workplace trainers develop training by starting with what level needs to be reached in assessment and then design and deliver a program to meet that result. Training Packages without written, measurable performance standards for actual tasks inhibit this previous process as a 'a map is not the territory.'

Dr Phil Rutherford from 3GPM company, a well-known VET and AITD figure, like me and my other long term colleagues has been heard to say that requirements were lower to gain a BSZ98 Certificate IV than the Cat 2 qualification it replaced. A broad training and assessment focus was narrowed by the newer qualification; possibly as the Australian Recognition Framework (ARF) emphasis was on the three assessment units required to work as an assessor in the new RTO requirement. Guthrie's (2010) report on the history of VET training advises that BSZ98 Certificate IV was designed as a qualification for workplace trainers only (p.28). He states this Training Package was "being asked to do a job for which it was not primarily designed; that is, to be the initial teacher training qualification for institution-based VET teaching staff" (p.10). Add this information to my point about two, not one, levels of workplace training were operating and the possibility is apparent that leading VET research and people may have been speaking at cross purposes about expected levels of training and assessing for two different job requirements at some time along the journey to **TAE10**.

These different expectation levels between "VET teaching staff" and workplace-based training and development personnel are explained in Figures 4.1 and 4.2. Industry needs workers with ingrained habits, and the ability to adapt and transform. Current competence and future adaptability is only possible after full integration of the whole learning gained within a person's body. Figure 4.1 shows step one is to identify the level of expertise needed. Training individuals to become expert workers requires a different, broader set of skills, knowledge, attitude and support mechanism than teaching people basic knowledge and skill levels in another context. In workplaces, you need to be able to detect what is missing in the learner's whole of body process to complete a task. This view of the relationship between where classroom training ceases and what industry wants is also explained clearly in Dewey's statement of so long ago "...there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education" (John Dewey, 1938, p.20).
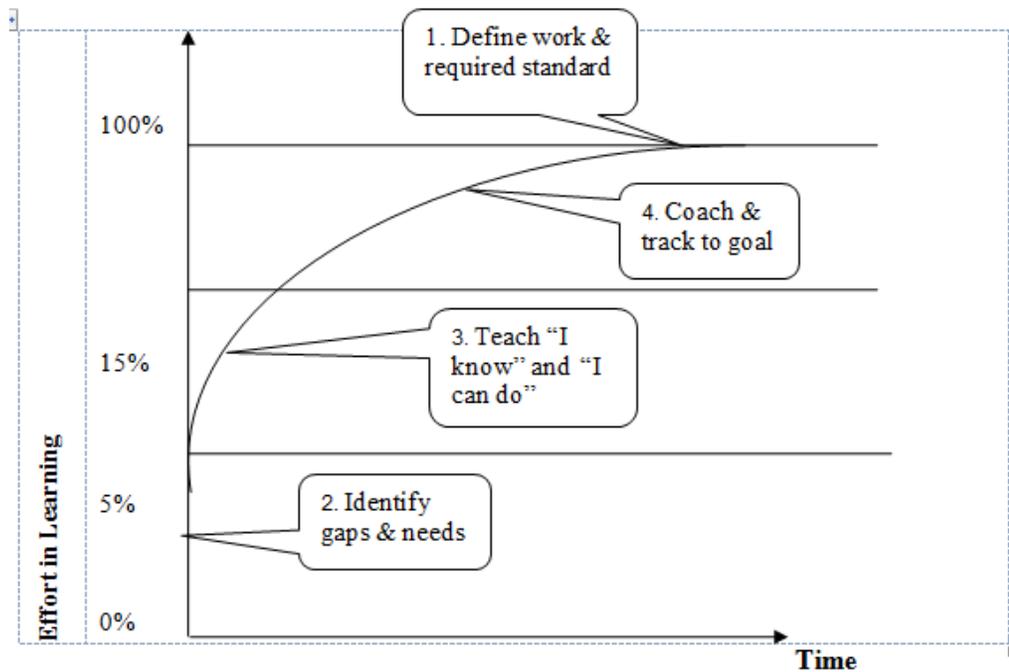
Original Source: Adapted from Power point slides from S. Moore (2003) *eLearn Expo* Conference, Budapest, Retrieved from internet and re-created by L Hazelwood in 2009

Figure 4.1   VET as Workplace Learning

An example of only reaching the "I know" level in Figure 4.2 below, is to use a taped square on carpeted floor and simulate washing and towelling dry an older person without water or touching private body parts, as many RTOs currently do to teach Aged Care qualifications. How could a person taught this way gain an understanding of the complexity, sensitivity and flexibility involved no matter how often they practised in this scenario? Learning and assessing situations like this one caused the BSZ40198 Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Learning to become seen as a joke.
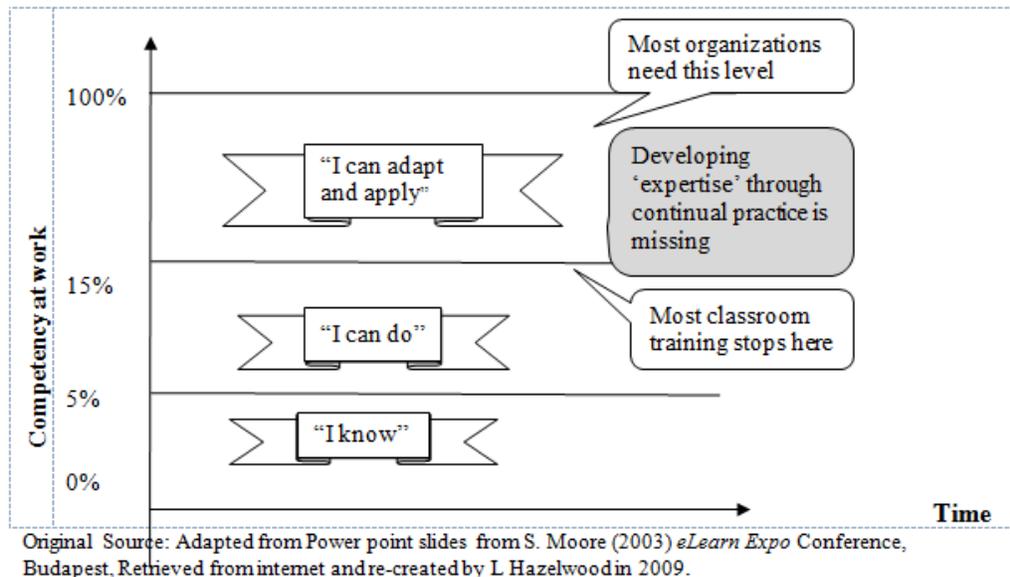
Original Source: Adapted from Power point slides from S. Moore (2003) *eLearn Expo* Conference, Budapest, Retrieved from internet and re-created by L Hazelwood in 2009.

Figure 4.2   VET conducted in classrooms

It was openly accepted by the early 2000s by the *VET administration* that the BSZ40198 qualification had been abused — people were gaining a Certificate IV qualification in a weekend. To correct this problem, a lengthy review of VET training and assessment requirements was led by Jane Carnegie, the ex CEO of the National Assessors and Workplace Trainers Body which had been subsumed into Business Skills Australia. The TAA04 Training Package was the result. Regrettably, although several grass root operator consultations were held around Australia, the recommendations we made did not appear in endorsed documentation. I recall being told in a TAFE Queensland workshop a couple of days before the TAA04 was endorsed that these ideas had been recommended — instead an academic approach gained the upper hand. As a result, a markedly more complex TAA40104, Certificate IV in Training and Assessment qualification, was released in 2004. TAA40104 allowed learners to choose their **Elective Units** from eight 'Competency Fields' — Learning Environment, Learning Design, Delivery and Facilitation, Assessment, Training Advisory Services, Coordination, Management and Quality of Training and Assessment Services, Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practices and Imported Units from other Training Packages. Several **Core Units,** introduced to cover Training Package usage and broader VET learning environments, appear to have moved the TAA40104 qualification from a high level educational

concept focus required to train well at all levels within workplaces to an RTO compliance and administrative factors focus instead.

VET trainer assessor qualifications no longer primarily related to training of cross-sector industry workers. Separation of the assessment function into three **Units** in TAA40104, tampered with the work flow and this allowed academic-type assessment of competency to occur. Expected training skill levels were downgraded as only one direct instruction **Unit**, at a **Certificate III** level, was included. This decision caused consternation, even anger, for those workplace trainer assessors operating at a higher level in industry as they considered they were being forced to regain a lesser qualification to continue their employment. An 'Assessment-only Pathway' for trainer assessor qualifications continued to be used to allow people with academic teaching qualifications to gain *VET qualifications*. Qualification was gained without the differences in methodology required in VET learning environments, and in training adults in workplaces, being assessed — meaning the 'academic' focus of many continued. It is possible this misinterpretation created mediocrity in expected competency levels in both VET trainer assessor and industry sector qualifications.

Having experienced the TAA04 Training Package decline from a workplace focus, it was not surprising to those 'at the coalface' when the current training qualification, TAE40110, Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, from the latest TAE10 Training Package continued to move VET in an academic and administrative direction rather than back to an industry-specific focus. Many grass root operators I meet are genuinely shocked when they read the beginning pages in this training package and realise that the workplace linkages have been removed altogether from the wording of what is still spoken of as a *VET qualification*. This shift needs enquiry and explanation.

Do IBSA see their **TAE10** qualifications as leading the way for industry training for instance? On first read, it is hard to fathom if IBSA's statement below is stating what is expected of VET trainers or that they believe their new qualifications adequate to achieve success in training our workforce.

The challenges for education that workforce demands pose come at a time
when the importance of the education sector to Australia's future prosperity is
extremely high. Higher-level skills are increasingly required by industry; and
VET plays an important role in providing opportunities to people who
otherwise would not be engaged in education and training. The skill,
capability and capacity of the VET sector to deliver high quality provision and
to adapt to changing needs in the economy will increase as the competitive
demand in the economy grows. (TAE10, p.36)

I draw your attention to how the statement "Higher-level skills are increasingly
required by industry" is separated by a semicolon from VET's other important role
that of "providing opportunities to people who would otherwise not be engaged in
education and training." It may make clearer the move of these particular
qualifications from VET to universities or equivalents following Denise Bradley's
Review of Australian Higher Education (2008). Or, provide a clue to the repeated
downplaying of the higher levels of VET training as a workplace learning possibility.
Robin Shreeve (2009), shows concern for taking up this higher education approach in
commenting,

Although the Bradley Review might recommend a more integrated tertiary
sector, sectoral dignity and sectoral jealousies have a long history…Surely it
should be possible to design a VET sector foundation degree with articulation
to a university course as a core component? (Shreeve, 2009, p.12)

Effect of different VET administration bodies and their functions

Perhaps, the question "Why would high level workers not learn by applying the
required skills and knowledge in their own workplaces when these VET programs,
would upgrade workers' skills and improve industry practices at the same time?" has
not been asked because we have spread *VET administration* functions across a large
number of Government Departments and independent bodies. This question is
particularly pertinent as NCVER (2005) research entitled "What *value do employers
give to qualifications?*" by Lee Ridoutt, Chris Selby Smith, Kevin Hummel and
Christina Cheang found **Qualifications** were not what employers wanted. These
researchers found,

> Conventional wisdom presumes that substantial enterprise innovation and
> change would be associated with broad human capital investment (and high
> proportions of appropriately qualified staff)...high levels of enterprise change
> and innovation were associated with lower support from enterprises for the
> value of qualifications among their employees. Perhaps these conditions
> translate into a demand for more 'just in time' type skills development,
> whereas the pursuit of qualifications is more long-term and strategic.
> (Ridoutt et al., 2005 p 8)

It would appear, to me, no more difficult to have a learning pathway of practical
and conceptual programs, developed around an individual's workplace needs, and
articulated to University qualifications than the other way around. My suggested
pathway, although sometimes an 'unrecognised' one, is not an uncommon pathway.
This usually broken education of career pathway is followed by many people,
including me.

In the 80s we understood the importance of workplace context for the best VET
results. Australian VET history had demonstrated that, whenever we need workers
to be trained to a particular standard as quickly as possible, a direct, on-the-job
training approach is successful for workers at all levels. Yet, *VET administration*
appears to have lapses of memory regarding this understanding about VET learning
even though some research papers state this point. Sandra Kerka proposes in her
article titled *Constructivism, Workplace Learning and Vocational Education (1997)*
that encouraging learners to encompass any new learning in academic environments
might require a different approach by VET teachers. Kerka suggests that
"knowledge is created and made meaningful by the context in which it is acquired"
(Farmer, Buckmaster, and LeGrand 1992, p.46 as cited in Kerka, 1997), therefore,
when teachers are using a constructivist approach, they need to,

> …facilitate learning by encouraging active inquiry, guiding learners to
> question their tacit assumptions, and coaching them in the construction
> process. This contrasts with the behavioural approach that has dominated
> education, in which the teacher disseminates selected knowledge, measures
> learner's passive reception of facts, and focuses on behaviour control and task
> completion. (ERIC website, 1997)

Dr Gavin Moodie argues in *The Future of VET: A medley of views* (2012) that attempting to broaden Training Packages by including general competencies such as **Employability Skills** is 'illusory' because,

> Competence is context-dependent (trialogical learning). Thus its assessment is linked to the prevailing valuations and the operating environment. The common terms in which general competences are expressed mask the differences they are trying to surmount. Consequently, general competences either become so rooted in their immediate context that they are not transferable to other contexts or become so general that they lose their direct relevance to the workplace. (2010 cited in Beddie & Curtin, 2012, p.50)

These research findings fit with my lived experience and with adult learning principles. Context appears decisive for people when it comes to attributing meaning.

The 'just in time skills development' Ridoutt et al believed industry requires is impossible to achieve if we allow people to gain **TAE10 Qualifications** without appropriate industry workplace understanding to train others. My personal dilemma regarding Australian VET's current qualification-centric approach is that skilled workplace performance is no longer the primary focus. Gaining VET qualifications, often a secondary focus for Australian employers, current workers, and many trainer assessors appears to have been bolstered into first place by players other than industry bodies and businesses. Is it difficult for *VET administration* to see our national training system does not work well for competency levels when it operates this other way?

A current NCVER paper entitled *Workplace change and skill needs: workers' perceptions* (2013), part of a larger research project by Griffith University researchers, Darryl Dymock and Mark Tyler, highlights "the context-specific nature of the way that change influences work practices" (p.6). I am unsure if this finding is a revelation or a confirmation to the researchers. I dare to suggest this elucidation supports my finding that VET may have been lead off track by a misplaced academic focus on the 'vocational education' part of VET rather than the 'training' and 'development' elements. With researchers continual use of terms like "workplace curriculum" (p.7), *VET administration* could easily be misled again and again.

A reality check on what is conceived as being a competent VET trainer and assessor seems crucial at this point. No training and assessing qualification, since the original Cat 2, has required participants to gain the broad expertise needed to develop training, conduct training and assess participants in the learning domains at play within workplaces — the Cognitive (knowledge), Psychomotor (skills) and Affective (attitudes) domains. We have continued to expect competence in only two of these three domains. Community members though quickly see that competent performance in any work role combines all three elements. The impact of this omission on the 'true' value of any VET program outcomes and data is not discussed and remains unknown.

Safety is a paramount consideration in choosing the level of training required to ensure a person has the skills, knowledge and attitude required to work safely in any role on the job. VET practices and associated worker documentation once clearly stated that VET trainers and assessors had been given personal responsibility to competently train people for work — this appears to no longer be the case. When I began as a workplace trainer, if an accident occurred, I expected to be questioned in the State Government's workplace safety review process if an accident occurred to someone I had trained. Part 3.2, Division 1 of the Work Health and Safety Rules introduced in 2011 emphasised this point in Point 39 - Provision of information, training and instruction stating:

(1)   This regulation applies for section 19 of the Act to a person conducting a business or undertaking.

(2)   The person must ensure that information, training and instruction provided to a worker is suitable and adequate having regard to:

(a) the nature of the work carried out by the worker; and

(b) the nature of the risks associated with the work at the time the information, training or instruction is provided; and

(c) the control measures implemented.

Penalty:

(a) In the case of an individual— $6000.

(b) In the case of a body corporate— $30000 (ComLaw, 2012).

It should be noted that the penalties for being found culpable increased substantially in the Work Health and Safety Rules 2011, and the further amendments up to Act No. 54 compiled in 2013. This fact leads me to query if the writers of **Training Packages** are aware of this important point. It seems strange that there is no mention of this point in any trainer assessor Training Package developed since 1998. These Rules relate directly to the carrying of a White Card on a building site.

This situation raises many questions for me, and colleagues such as:

"What is the legal standing of a VET in Schools teacher, for instance, if a student, signed off as 'Competent' to carry a 'White Card' had an accident on the first day of their employment on a construction site?" or

"Should there be a legal difference between those undergoing project management training on a building site and those learning how to operate as a project manager in institutes when they later get employed on a building site if both have been issued the same qualification?"

> Guthrie, in his *Professional development in the vocational education and training workforce* (2010) paper, speaks of a large body of research being conducted around the needs of a 'VET workforce' and the suitability of the TAA40104 qualification at the time of his own research (Clayton, 2009; Wheelehan, 2010; TVET, 2010 and others). Guthrie's paper lists fifteen issues that affect the development of "the VET workforce." I provide another view on his first two issues around VET workforce size and nature as it is possible that the use of a single term such as 'the VET workforce,' or my own 'VET training,' is too simple an approach to a complicated system and either this simplifying or combining of differences creates its own problems.

With regard to the effect of a "lack basic information about the size and nature of the VET workforce both nationally and by states" Guthrie acknowledges,

> Even the most basic data on the workforce in private and enterprise registered training organisations is lacking, while that for the public VET sector is difficult to collect and consolidate on a whole-of-year basis. This is a consequence of a number of issues, including levels of casual employment and the possibility of such staff being employed by multiple providers…TAFE's workforce is long serving. Around 33% of TAFE's workforce have been

employed for ten years or more, with about 10% having 20 or more years of service (Nechvoglod, Mlotkowski & Guthrie, 2010). Little information is available about the qualifications held by VET staff. What there is suggests that TAFE staff are generally more highly qualified than those from other VET providers (Mlotkowski & Guthrie, 2010). (p.10)

What appears as obvious to me, from the above, is the lack of definition of what is included and what is missed out when the term 'VET workforce' is used.

Like other researchers, Guthrie's second issue heading, "VET is a substantial and diverse 'industry' in its own right," provides only clues, and not definition, of his view of the 'industry' he is describing.

It has a substantial workforce when conceptualised at its broadest. However, many of its 'members' are hidden, but are trainers within other industries. VET is also a component of delivery in the adult and community education, schools and the higher education sectors. Vocational education and training embraces a large number of people working in a very wide range of contexts and circumstances. It is a diverse sector, and consequently meeting its diverse workforce development needs is challenging. (p.11)

Are those administering our national training system no longer seeing they are there to support Australia's authentic industry sectors? What effect does speaking of Australian VET being an industry sector have on its standing?

That Guthrie found VET is not treated as an industry and does not treat itself as one (p.11) is hardly surprising as the *Australian and New Zealand Standard Industry Classification* (ANZIC) (2006), part of an international industry classification system does not classify VET in this way. Without a clear and consistent delineation in the documentation showing what is VET in Australia, and what VET is not, it remains impossible to stabilise interpretations made by *VET administration*, researchers, the VET community and other stakeholders. Providing clarity on this type is crucial for competency level consistency and VET training qualification appropriateness. Statements made by high-profile VET stakeholders appear to be impacting on VET understanding from *VET administration* through to grass root operators. Relationships around the host organism, VET, must be symbiotic ones, like pilot fish moving along with sharks, rather than parasitic ones where the host eventually dies.

I am alarmed how close to extinction VET, as I am my colleagues remember it, is in 2013.

Is it this type of confused thinking that does not see teaching workers could be considered in the same way as teaching school or university students? That is, as a profession that requires specific and high level abilities. Those other teachers' vocational competence is seen as their teaching ability. Our VET training qualifications are approached with the view that you need another area of vocational competence to even be interested in completing a **Certificate IV** level qualification if **TAE10**'s final 'Introduction' statement is indicative of IBSA's view. First written into the **TAA04** Training Package, the statement appears to prove this Training Package no longer seeks to develop highly skilled trainers and assessors for all our industry sectors.

> TAE10 candidates generally undertake this Training Package because they possess vocational competence in a specific industry, subject or technical area and they need to develop or extend competence in training and assessment to teach, train or facilitate the learning of other individuals in their area of vocational expertise. In some instances the TAE10 candidate may be acquiring vocational competence concurrently with their TAE10 Training and Education Training Package competencies. (p.55)

Acquiring vocational competence concurrently with your **TAE10** competencies is a telling statement about the standards of training and assessing performance expected by IBSA, and other ISCs, past 2004. I have always considered my vocational competence is my ability to train and develop highly skilled and knowledgeable trainers and assessors — this is why I also gained a Degree in this field. The view espoused above is repugnant to me, and to those many other highly skilled industry trainers and assessors who have worked hard to develop their craft. Why would *VET administration* choose to have such a low expectation for those who educate, train and develop our current and future workforce?

My research shows we need an answer to another pertinent question first. What is VET? Robin Ryan from Flinders University, in his contribution to *The future of VET: A medley of views,* explains that confusion continues to exist around "What is

VET and what is it for?" and adds his own uncertainty in using both 'VET' and 'vocational education.'

> Defining VET is a topic that prudent commentators avoid…Hart more courageously offers a dictionary definition: that vocational education is 'instruction or guidance in an occupation or profession chosen for a career'. The problem is, that sounds as much like the modern university as VET — or the mediaeval university for that matter.
>
> Everyone seems to agree that VET is that part of the education continuum which has employability as a principal goal and that its centre of gravity is in sub-professional careers, although not limited thereto, now or in the past…This suggests that perhaps the first place to look at the future of VET should be a consideration of what it is for…Although disputes between industry and educational representatives are often couched in ideological terms, the simple fact seems to be that they are frequently talking about entirely different groups of people.
> (Ryan cited in Beddie and Curtin, 2010, p.9)

I agree 'employability' is 'a principal goal' but is the ability to gain a job or to keep a job, or both? This suggests he sees those whose learning is undertaken before they enter workplaces as VET and those who learn while at work as something different. This is a common division but a wrong one in my view as Advanced Diplomas were included in *VET qualifications* for those operating at a strategic level. For example, a school Principal who needs training in effective governance and financial management decisions can engage in a direct learning program by enrolling in the appropriate Units while undertaking these work tasks.

Ryan's contribution cites an earlier NCVER study, "*Is VET vocational?*" (Karmel, Mlotkowski & Awodeyi 2008) is crucial to understanding what VET is for. Student Outcomes Survey data shows mismatches occur between what people study and the jobs gained due to the "generic aspect of vocational education and training" (p.9). Ryan's "simple fact" that VET representatives are "frequently talking about different groups of people" may explain some of my unaligned findings. It seems sensible to call learning undertaken within workplaces to do work roles 'VET programs.' Everything else is mainly academic and, therefore, vocational education of some form and termed *Vocational programs* in this thesis.

Training and development continually happens within all workplaces. Depending on your job, you may need a great deal of theory before beginning to work — university studies perhaps for a profession. The skill, knowledge and attitudes you need to be considered competent in a job, or a profession, are usually learned through your on-the-job practice as one must 'do the work' to truly comprehend the complexities and subtleties of a task in its many forms and to combine mind-body functionality for consistent outputs in different environments. If there is no one to effectively train you to do your job then you will, of course, learn how to do it but learning this way, without facilitation or some sort, can be time wasting and not provide the best outcome. This was the situation in workplaces before ANTA was introduced as I remember it.

One problem for those trying to understand VET training is many people automatically consider building sites and factory-type settings — even though they know when they consider the idea further that airplanes, court houses and our local parks are workplaces too. My experience is that the teachers and Government employees I have worked with tended not to associate learning undertaken in their workplaces with VET sector or accredited training — they often speak of their 'professional development.' Is this confused thinking why our AQF no longer identifies distinct *VET qualifications?* From an industry operational perspective, this new approach seems something of a folly.

A wider approach to the role of VET trainer

Simons and Smith's (2008) suggestion, cited by Guthrie in his review of trainer assessor qualifications, that "…Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training [from TAA04] showed a lack of attention to the unique demands of learning within particular industries and to ways of embracing the diversity of learners in VET" (Simons and Smith, 2008, cited in Guthrie, 2010, p.10, my bracket) is important. This suggestion concurs with my personal understanding that providing learning about job tasks, and work in general, requires educational theory, training and facilitation skills, a supportive attitude and industry knowledge. Unions originally wanted a higher qualification than **Certificate IV** for a workplace trainer. Guthrie reports that this idea of instigating a higher education qualification "was swallowed up in the move to training packages and the debate over the emerging workplace

trainer training programs, subsequently to become the de facto minimum qualification requirement for VET teaching staff (Guthrie, 2009, pp.9-10)." IBSA is currently pushing for the base level to be upgraded to a Diploma (NCVER, 2010). Why not higher? Perhaps the answer lies in what skills and knowledge comprise the current qualifications.

In my, and my colleagues, view, the **TAE10** trainer assessor qualifications do not include the best learning methodologies to move individuals, industries and workplaces quickly forward as, and when, required. Certificate IV and Diploma qualifications are not written for trainer assessors to achieve success over the differences in learner expectations of the generational makeup of current workplaces described by Pamela Thorne in her article published in *Training and Development in Australia* magazine *(AITD, 2011)*. Thorne writes, that, whereas baby boomers find change hard to cope with, younger people expect to learn continuously. Her advice to VET trainers is to expect to be challenged by these new workers while realising such challenges "are a way of assimilating the information" (Dec 2011, p.16). Dealing with assertive, confident adults is not even specifically addressed in facilitation-based **Units**.

Knowles' Adult Learning assumptions are only mentioned in **TAE10**. Other published research on important education-associated areas, human psychology findings and learning technologies such as Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), 4Mat, Accelerated Learning and Emotional Intelligence — although now mainstream human development processes — are yet to be incorporated into any level of VET training qualification in Australia. A contemporary, Dr Phil Rutherford, contributed his view on current VET trainer and assessor qualifications to a recent AITD web forum in answer to a question posed on competency-based training. Rutherford wrote,

> …in Australia we sweat tears of joy over the Cert IV and Dip for TAE and profess it is a program which is going to save us from death and despair in the economy and jobs market, but since it was introduced in the mid-1990s our productivity has actually gone backwards. Moreover there were better 'train the trainer' courses in the 1970/80s than there are now - much better. (In fact

it could be argued that industrial training was far better in the 1920s than it is today, but that is another topic.). (Rutherford, May 2013)

Specialised **TAE10 Qualifications** and 'skill sets' have been developed. We speak of 'flexible packaging arrangements' for qualifications but we appear to have forgotten the real aim of VET trainer assessors is to increase productivity and worker skill levels. The relationship Rutherford describes between training and business below identifies one reason for our lapse in memory. He says,

> …read any literature about workplace training (i.e., VET) and you will find very little mention of the 'workplace'. It is all about inputs and nothing about outputs or effects. On the other hand, read any business literature and you will also find very little written about training. Somehow the two are seen as separate when in reality they are intertwined and interdependent. One cannot exist without the other, but where is this highlighted? (Rutherford, May 2013)

This may be why, in making the following statement, **TAE10** developers appear to have become confused about which 'workers' their own Training Package targets:

> …while a significant proportion of VET-acquired skills covered by this Training Package are used in the VET component of education, they are also used in other areas, such as higher education and schools. In addition, there is also a significant number of workplace assessors and qualified trainers spread throughout industry. (p.36.)

This was a Training Package associated with training and assessing requirements in the VET sector and not an Education industry-specific one. I query what is meant by 'VET-acquired skills.' If they mean VET training skills, why have 'higher education and schools' been considered as 'other areas' — outside the 'VET component of education.' Have the developers lost their way here?

In my view, the **Units** in TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment are not appropriate to award trainer assessors with the levels of skill, knowledge and personal attributes required to train workers to meet specific industry sector needs. This is partly because IBSA has changed the qualification's focus from being a workplace-specific one and partly because the adult learning focus has been lost in VET. Turner (1988) considered the deep learning needed to operate in a world of change — as all those operating within any industry do — is a product of four

principal ingredients: experiences, reflectiveness, knowledge and action. Turner explains these as:

> Experience is systematic training, interests, hobbies, games interrelationships with others, schooling, interactions of all sorts — the experiential part of learning.

> Reflectiveness is thinking about the experiences in group-sharing and contemplative ways to process experiences to reach understanding and a shared knowledge — the profound and meditative part of learning which brings together all our human virtues: spirit, mind and body.

> Knowledge is the result of reflection: the becoming aware that as a result of my actions I both know something and can communicate it and share it with others. Knowledge guides expectations, intentions, actions; feelings, values, relationships. Knowledge helps us to organise our further experiences into further knowledge. Knowledge is constantly subject to revision and up-dating. It is that part of us which permits change and revision.

> Action is the learning which begins to consolidate in our personality when we act on it. It is through acting that we begin to change. In a purely pragmatic sense [by which I mean that the truth of "x" is that "x" works], our knowledge and intentions are tested and shaped through action. (p.3)

My lived experience complements Turner's view. These four ingredients, seen by Turner as "phases in a development sequence which, when experienced satisfactorily are repeated with increasing self confidence" (Turner, 1976, p.3) would appear to better form the basis of any "effective program of learning" for VET students. Any learning providers who do not achieve this type of learning continuum fall short of developing within people the self confidence they need to willingly continue to learn throughout their working lives. My experiences working with unemployed people demonstrate that, without self confidence, learning of any type is difficult. This lack of confidence as a learner is often a result of teaching that did not suit the person's particular type of intelligence. School learning is generally based on the top two intelligences on Dr Howard Gardner's list of 'multiple intelligences' below:

> Linguistic intelligence ("word smart")

> Logical-mathematical intelligence ("number/reasoning smart")

> Spatial intelligence ("picture smart")

Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence ("body smart")

Musical intelligence ("music smart")

Interpersonal intelligence ("people smart")

Intrapersonal intelligence ("self smart")

Naturalist intelligence ("nature smart")

(Dr Armstrong website, 2011)

Because of this, Gardner suggests that standard IQ only testing is far too limited to understand what any individual's intelligence can allow them to achieve. This is an important concept for the VET sector I believe. Experienced VET workplace trainers understand this to be true as many self-confessed under-achievers in school environments attain great results by development of one or more of their other intelligences through workplace learning. Shown in Figure 4.3 below, the Turner concept of a 'Development triad' is an important one in developing competent workers, and learners.

D = The "JOB" scene in terms of enlightenment and understanding
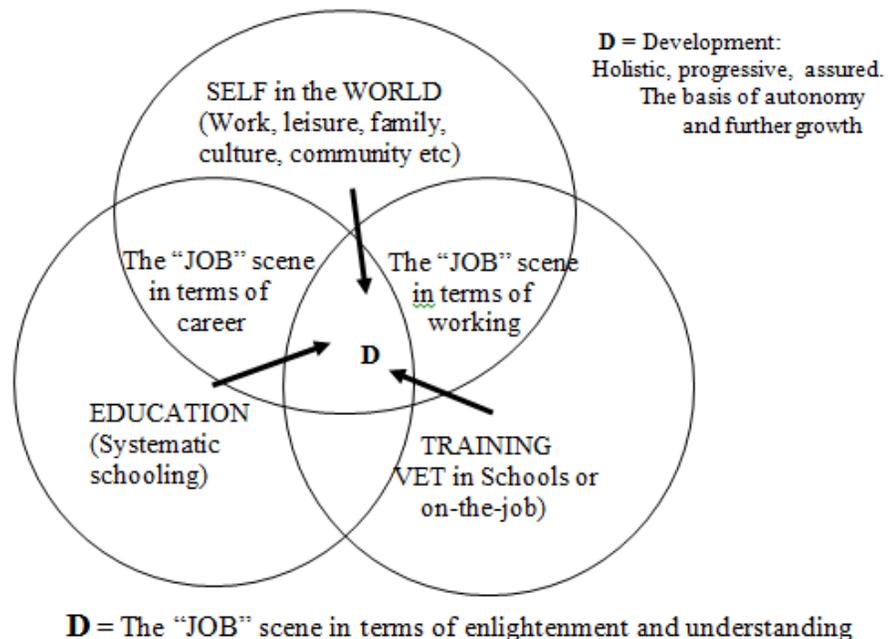
Original Source "Leaders, Learners and ABL" (1998) James L Turner re-developed by L Hazelwood in 2013

Figure 4.3   The Development Triad

Australian VET appears to have lost the skill levels needed by our VET trainers and assessors through a drop in *performance standards* with each Training and Assessing Training Package rewrite. All workers need to be trained and retrained in our changing workplaces. Learning conducted primarily within workplaces is the perfect place to achieve positive changes for individuals and, at the same time, build our overall workforce skills and knowledge base. *VET administration* and industry representatives on Boards and ISCs, seem to have veered Australian workforce development from this original course — the ANTA way forward. The attraction of Australian Training Packages being used internationally may have been a cause.

Synergy occurs when all pieces of learning combine to become a whole — a competent person. I cannot explain the effect any other way. This competent person operates at a consistently, high output level, they can train others to do what they do because they understand how they think and how their body works — the context and texture of the task. This competent person not only has initiative, they are also innovative. I can only hope to in some way assist in getting us back on track to develop highly skilled Australian workers of this calibre by the observations in my final chapter, Chapter 6. Before then, as VET language has always been problematic in my day-to-day work as a VET system operator, in Chapter 5 I look at VET language—an unnoticed but always present and possible 'suspect' in the case of the missing competence.

Chapter 5   Is language important to competence?

> I don't like obscurity because I consider obscurity to be a form of despotism. One must expose oneself to pronouncing errors. One must expose oneself to possibly saying things which are probably going to be difficult to express, and which obviously are going to make one fumble for words.

> Michel Foucault, 1978

Originally, a *VET program* was a simple concept — a worker learned alongside an expert by being shown what to do, then actually doing the work involved and being corrected as they progressed. Australia's VET system is now massive and, therefore, its effectiveness and efficiency relies on a common understanding of the language used. As the number of Government Departments and Agencies involved grows, new players 'infiltrate' VET community information sources with their particular spin on VET terms. Each organisation's associated information and their understanding of VET common terms impacts on the broader VET context. For example, when I heard a NCVER researchers use the term 'skills' when discussing 'qualifications' at a recent conference (Karmel, 2013) he created obscurity for me as my thinking did not correlate with the term being used.

Many times in my thesis I have intimated problems that arise because of a lack of clarity around interpretation. In this chapter, I attempt to identify specific problems with VET documentation from the base operator level and a broader community perspective, an important view, and one often missing from other VET system reviews. I feel it is time to 'ignite' this area of constant consternation for me, and for my peers. Poor and inconsistent language usage creates obscurity which, in turn, creates everyday operational problems for those working in workplaces and RTOs. My hope is this 'spotlight' on some problem language areas, viewed in a more encompassing way, displays the impact that words used, or not used, can have on understanding and, therefore, on interpretations of competency levels expected.

VET had its own language

Historically, use of particular language — many acronyms for instance — has always been a part of the VET sector. Language needing to be different to other education sectors, as an important and distinguishing feature to set VET apart, was particularly important when ANTA was formed. With the prominence of

'andragogical' language, in the 80s and 90s, terms like 'self-directed learning' and 'goal-oriented learning' were introduced to VET to reinforce a need for relevancy and motivation when training adults and workers (Knowles, 1990, p.54). This policy meant our initial Training Packages used wording that was understandable to the VET learners — in the more recent Training Package Development Guidelines this requirement seems to have changed.

Arguably, all VET training is adult learning. When Knowles' studies showed adults have different learning needs from those of children — especially the need to show recognition and respect for each person's life learning, these practices became considered important for VET in Australia. Instead of keeping the international term for adult learning, 'Andragogy', Australia quickly moved to the term 'VET Pedagogy' instead — a combined and confusing mixed metaphor — a term that seems, in some way, to continue to cement an association between VET and academic teaching. Knowles' own words below are helpful in understanding how these two approaches differ.

> The andragogical model, as I see it, is *not* an ideology; it is a system of alternative sets of assumptions. And this leads us to the critical difference between the two models. The pedagogical model is an ideological model which excludes the andragogical assumptions. The andragogical model is a system of assumptions which includes the pedagogical assumptions.
> (Knowles, 1990, p.64)

Although VET trainer assessor practices are expected to use Knowles' 'adult learning principles,' current Training Packages state these words without definition. Knowles 'andragogical assumptions,' as he referred to them, are summarised in Appendix 3 as originally these were the basis of VET program design and development.

The previous deliberate separation of VET terminology from terms used in other Education sectors appears to have lost its initial importance as similar language is now being used. For example, 'competencies' is used by school teaching staff with a different meaning to the meaning in VET and 'practicum', a university term, made a sudden entrance to VET to describe a particular assessment arrangement in the **TAE10**. It is reasonable to assume this type of term-switching between different

education sectors would cause communication problems, particularly when VET training is being conducted in other Education sectors.

We expect consistent language in a national training system. Similar interpretation of the national requirements by different audiences is necessary in VET. Whenever poorly selected language is used in VET documents, the result is perplexity, confusion or, at the very least, discussion. Productive time is lost in attempting to decipher what is meant wherever this occurs. Having both common use of language and language in common usage would seem obligatory. Although Training Package language is my principle concern, and the same for the fifty or so other trainer assessors I have worked with nationally and internationally, use of inconsistent and incorrect language on websites, and in VET associated publications, tends to complicate the broader community understanding of VET's multilayered presence. My daily use of **Units** from different Training Packages in my work has revealed distortions in the documenting of work processes that may not be noticed by people operating in only one industry sector; using one Training Package. Use of loose or inaccurate language anywhere in VET can easily lead to work processes becoming imprecise as well. Unfortunately, there has been no genuine resolution to this endemic problem making it important to raise the matter again in relation to competency level consistency in this thesis.

Use of a Communication Model to identify problem areas

I considered many communication models to identify one that would enhance my discussion on VET language usage. My attention was quickly funnelled into a range of business communication models with a marketing focus as Training Packages are marketed to many end users and VET career paths constantly compete for students against academic pathways into employment. I chose to use Scott Cutlip and Allen Center's *7C's of Communication* Model as it provides a range of clear communication benchmarks relevant to VET contexts. Although this model has been in use since 1952, Dr Marilyn Easter, a Professor at San Jose State University, considers the 7C's factors are as important today in getting your marketing message across to a broad audience as when they were first introduced. The 7C's in the model stand for Credibility, Context, Content, Clarity, Continuity and Consistency, Channels and Capability of audience (Cutlip & Center, 1952) cited by Easter, San

Jose State University website, 2011). As unclear, incorrect or inconsistent communication is the focus of this chapter only examples of poor communication are included. There are, of course, clear communication examples within our VET system.

The Credibility Factor

Credibility, the first benchmark of the 7Cs model is described as

Communication begins in a climate of belief. This climate is built by the performance of the sender who should reflect an earnest desire to serve the receiver. The receiver will then have high regard for the competency of the sender. (Cutlip & Center, 1952, cited in Easter, 2011)

Shreeve (2009) explains Australia's VET system was founded on an English model and adopted a similar competency-based approach. It is a given that this system, often lauded both here and internationally, has changed over time. Like me, VET colleagues of mine who operate in sectors as diverse as Emergency Management, Business, Sport and Recreation, Public Service Administration, Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) and Agriculture, have found Training Package wording appears credible until you try to use **Units** to train and assess people to the particular, stated standard. We colleagues consider it is only then that a true judgement can be made about each **Unit's** credibility to do the task required of it—to provide a clear description of the competency level expected.

Wording used to describe Units of competency should not have two meanings or be able to be used in two different ways. Appendix 4 shows the complete Unit TAEASS403B: Participate in an Assessment Validation, one of the seven **Core Units** in TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. I dissect this **Unit** a little here to demonstrate how when words are omitted from a **Unit** the credibility of that **Unit** and any **Qualification** containing that **Unit** is undermined. This Unit once described an assessment validation task that RTOs require all their staff to participate in at least once a year, now it has been broadened to cover any assessment validation, it has lost context for both workplace and RTO standards — the context of VET qualifications. My first credibility problem occurs right up front in this **Unit's** documentation, as the **Application of the Unit** section wording only says,

> This unit typically applies to those participating in assessment validation. It does not address leading the validation process. (TAE10, 2010, p.124)

Where is the VET relevance in this statement? I am concerned a broader education focus has affected competency outcomes within a VET environment. I query why this **Unit**, a **Core Unit** in a *VET qualification,* would not state it is about the process an RTO is required to conduct to comply with their accreditation requirements. This lack of specifically relating to the RTO task undermines the **Unit's** VET credibility. A more credible statement would have been: "This unit relates to a trainer and assessor work requirement when operating in an RTO. Trainers, assessors and other RTO staff must participate in assessment validation at least once a year. This unit does not address leading the validation process."

Each **Unit** has a **Range Statement**, the term used for listing a range of interpretations for the *italicised* words in its **Performance Criteria**. These **Range Statements** lose credibility when uncommon terms are used without definition and common terms are not given a specific VET meaning. Fifteen options are provided in the example below. How does a reader tell if any are more important to understand than others to be able to competently participate in an assessment validation with the wording "may include" used.

Assessment system policies and procedures	may include:
	• candidate selection
	• rationale and purpose of competency-based assessment
	• assessment records, and data and information management
	• recognition of current competency, recognition of prior learning and credit arrangements
	• assessment reporting procedures
	• assessment appeals
	• candidate grievances and complaints

- validation

- evaluation and internal audit

- costs and resourcing

- access and equity, and reasonable adjustment

- partnership arrangements

- links with human resource or industrial relations system

- links with overall quality management system   (Unit TAEASS403B, TAE10, 2012, p.157)

Credibility would seem better served by some 'must include' items being identified in such lists, or only using lists of 'must include' items.

The most recent credibility concern in relation to competency is the Unit Template change to the **Employability Skills** section within a **Unit.** This section now states: "This unit contains employability skills." **Employability Skills** were previously included within each **Unit's** documentation, when employers complained qualified people were not employable. Placing an 'Employability Skills Qualification Summary' in the **Qualification** section of a Training Package to decrease the size of Training Packages, will eventually mean these underpinning competency requirements lose importance for trainers and assessors assigning competency. Changes of staff within *VET administration* do seem to shorten historical memories. Employability Skills were included to attain the competency levels industry expected. What has changed for NSSC to consider their removal will not affect those same competency level expectations now?

The Context Factor

7C's second communication point, Context, is described as "An advertising/communications program must square with the realities of its environment…daily business activities must confirm, not contradict, the message"

(Cutlip & Center, 1952, cited in Easter, 2011). I have spoken of context as being a decisive component of understanding in VET and, as language informs context, Training Package language is of particular importance. In *Vocational programs*, the primary focus is learning **about** work processes. VET's focus is to train a person to a competent level — a much longer learning **to do** work process, a process that once meant practising until you reached the expected workplace *performance standard*. A colleague explains this difference to his learners as, "We all want our fifteen year old daughters to learn about sex education at school but we don't want them to learn how to do it."

In workplaces, the knowledge component, often referred to as 'underpinning knowledge,' requires application in order for complete task understanding and transfer-ability into other scenarios encountered. Knowledge is best provided at the right time for optimum learning of where it fits into the work process. Knowledge is, therefore, not always provided at the beginning of a learning process or in one block. More often, knowledge is provided in stages to match the context of skills being trained or attitudes shown requiring particular attention.

Two concepts, VET and Vocational Education, were working simultaneously in different learning contexts for many years as 'post-compulsory education' — for the most part, VET was in workplaces and Vocational Education in institute-type environments. I purport that, somewhere along the Australian VET journey, learning conducted in these two separate contexts seems to have been considered synonymous, or even duplication as, in recent years, the term "VET programs" appears to be perceived by *VET administration* as 'VET,' when considering lower AQF levels, and as 'vocational education' in higher AQF level discussions. This amalgamation of two clearly different contexts in different ways seems to have resulted in dissimilar competency outcomes being acceptable, even if this is not acknowledged.

Another difference in context that results in different expected levels of competency exists between workplace-trained and institute-trained people. Close examination of a Service Skills ISC learning resource for Unit SISXCCS201A: Provide Customer Service in the Sport, Fitness and Recreation Training Package

(SIS10), demonstrates the effect different contexts have on outcomes. A 'Right Way' logo signifies this resource is considered to be a good product — a worrisome result as only two 'written' answers are required to prove competence in providing customer service. Even at this low AQF Level 2, a Retail Trainee in a workplace learning context would learn and practice many techniques to resolve a variety of customer complaints during their daily encounters with different customers. This human interaction is the only way to learn for themselves which technique works best when. The difference in expected competency level is apparent.

How has this occurred? A focus on worker ability to actually do a task in an 'on-the-job' context has also gradually diminished in the **Critical Aspects of Evidence** component of **Units**. In this 'Provide Customer Service' unit, for instance, there is no requirement to work with any real 'customers' or real 'organisational requirements' to be considered competent. Instead the wording reads:

> Evidence of the following is essential:
>
> - receives and responds to client requests and complaints according to organisational requirements and develops a rapport with clients by using communication strategies in the provision of customer service
>
> - interacts with clients professionally and in a non-discriminatory manner to provide quality customer service and resolve complaints within an appropriate timeframe. (Training.gov.au, 2012)

Would employers agree people with no work experience had reached a high enough *performance standard* to interact with their customers?

Many similar learning resources exist. This leads me to question if the 'training' context has been forgotten through our constant use of the acronym 'VET.' 'Training' implies practising until producing a consistent output — an ingrained behaviour or a habit. Past the initial learning phase, further practise leads to 'unconscious competence' or 'reflective competence' (Gordon Training International, 1970: Baume, D, 2004, cited on business.balls.com, 2011). This level of required practice was once understood to be the context of VET competence. You first need to repeatedly perform a task to fully learn that task. This step must occur prior to practising a task until you consistently produce high performance levels,

under different conditions, without assistance. Providing training in proper contexts is a costly exercise for RTOs. If the Government wants the number of *VET qualifications* held to reflect a country with a highly competent worker level, these higher costs of training in the right context must be considered.

The Content Factor

Content, the third 7C's communication model point, is described as "The message must have meaning and relevance for the receiver. Content determines the audience and vice versa" (Cutlip & Center, 1952, cited in Easter, 2011).

In reading VET documentation of different types, for this research and for my work, I remain unconvinced that creating VET content to communicate to the full VET audience is always a primary consideration when developing VET products. A check of VET content in Australia's individual State websites shows each State undertakes, and combines, national focuses to match their own particular State needs and some states are better than others at writing simple, clear explanations of policy and processes — with NSW seeming to do this best. When I compared individual State website detail in 2010, the different State groupings made it difficult to identify similar national content from within each State's departmental structure. It is these different structures that have made national data collection of our Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS) data, and any comparison between States, difficult for NCVER (Choy, VETNetwork, 2009). After a decade of incomplete data comparison, this dysfunction was addressed in 2013.

My own experience in conducting Training Package review processes for National ITABs has shown changes in content are needed when industry-based 'task' experts do not review **Units** before publishing. A case in point occurred with Unit PUAEME003C: Administer Oxygen in an Emergency Situation (SIS10, 2010). **Elements** and **Performance Criteria** appeared too scant in a recent meeting, leading to a check of the complexity level of two **Elements** with local industry experts. Apparently, these tasks are not as simple as stated in the Training Package and Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1   Unit PUAEME003C - Administer oxygen in an emergency situation

Element	Performance criteria	
4. Resuscitate casualty	4.1	Where appropriate, face masks and other *barriers* are used according to ARC standards
5. Use oxygen to provide therapy	5.1	Where indicated, oxygen therapy is used in the ventilation of casualty

Original source: Sport, Fitness and Recreation Training Package, 2010 and compiled in 2011 by L Hazelwood.

   Several more **Performance Criteria** are needed to adequately cover the complexity of these two steps. This particular omission of content has occurred in "an important process for peoples' survival" (Unnamed source, 2012). How did such an error occur when it makes rational sense that more **Performance Criteria** are needed here? Resuscitating a casualty using oxygen must involve dealing with both equipment and people at the very least. Only one **Performance Criteria** for any **Element** should have flagged a documenting problem and prompted further questions by the ISC developers well before implementation in my experience.

   What is the effect of incomplete content in Training Packages? Assuming, for a moment, more content is needed in example above, this particular omission means new emergency workers will not be given a complete understanding until a correction is made. How does a Training Package error get corrected and how soon? Unfortunately, a correction may take several years as correction of any **Unit** in a **Training Package** is normally a four stage process. Step One is someone must document the need for this change on the owner ISC's website, ringing up will not do. Step Two sees these details slotted into that ISCs already timetabled continuous review process. Step Three is consideration of this matter at scheduled time and Step 4 the rewrite then endorsement in a new Training Package version. Meanwhile, possibly thousands of community-spirited people around Australia could have gained a Statement of Attainment for this **Unit** as it is written now. Their lack of correct information may never be corrected. Getting the information correct to a high level industry standard in the first place appears a more cost effective approach to me.

The Clarity Factor

Clarity in communication is the next point in the 7 C's model. This is described as

> The message must be put in simple terms. Words used must have exactly the same meaning to the sender as they do to the receiver. Complex messages must be distilled into simpler terms, and the farther a message must travel, the simpler it should be. (Cutlip & Center, 1952, cited in Easter, 2011)

Australian VET messages have many different senders and receivers, and a long way to travel. NSSC's continual evolving of Training Package format, without improving clarity for trainers, assessors and RTOs, annoys me and many colleagues. Precious human resources were being utilised in checking what had changed in huge numbers of Training Package amendments made by ISCs when spelling and grammar is of little importance to RTOs. That some Training Packages are not searchable on the government's training.gov.au site is an incredulous situation to me. Old Training Packages and Government policy documents need to be accessible in archives in this digital age rather than being updated and the record lost to the wider public.

Training Package template changes appear illogical at the grass roots level. For example, changing a **Unit Code** rather than changing the **Alpha Code**. Previously, only the **Alpha Code** on the end of the original **Unit Code** was changed, a logical process—BSBCMN107A became BSBCMN107B and so on. I am unsure who was consulted about the decision to change the entire **Unit Code** when a significant change is made within a **Unit** rather than just the **Alpha Code**. This new approach provides no link between the old and new **Unit Code**. Any **Unit Code** format change involves considerable costs for an RTO to remain compliant. RTOs I work with would have preferred the process to be ISCs only change an **Alpha Code** letter on an existing Unit Code **when** a **significant** change occurs — one that has competency level significance.

I point out too that continuous changing of Training Package templates results in an array of formats in use across different industry sectors at any time. As this cannot be avoided, Training Package formats would be less confusing for trainers and assessors working with differently formatted Training Package **Units**, if one Training Package was clearly identified as the 'lead' Training Package — the

Training Package containing the latest format. All Training Packages could then use that same format until the 'lead' package is again released as format changes are rarely important to content. It would seem sensible for **TAE10** to resume being the 'lead training package' — particularly as, when that Training Package has any other role, VET clarity overall appears to be impeded.

When the **TAE10** Training Package makes statements like the following one, any previous clarity in VET training and assessment circles wanes:

> Like Employability Skills, the dimensions of competency are not separate
> components but are written into the content. You need to be able to interpret
> the unit content to identify the dimensions of competency as they relate to
> both the unit and the context in which it may be applied. (TAE10, 2010, p.38)

Treating **Employability Skills** and dimensions of competency in the same way is a mistake and this new approach displays a lack of understanding of the purpose of each of these components. Lists of **Employability Skills** are generic in nature. Dimensions of competency are specific requirements which outline the level of competence expected. The BSZ98 says "to ensure assessment is not narrowly based on tasks but embraces all aspects of workplace performance an integrated, holistic approach to assessment is recommended (1998, p.14). Referring to dimensions of competency as "written into the content" is likely to create confusion and differing competency level outcomes as where these components are located within the content is not obvious and, therefore, is open to individual RTO interpretation.

We appear to have lost an original VET idea in this latest Training Package format change. This administration- rather than industry-driven approach is likely to lead to the eventual loss of two crucial components in both the training and assessment phases of delivering *VET programs* to the competency level required. Does this approach confirm we are back to where we were in 1975 — having only academic learning for industry? Reaching this point in my research, I felt engulfed by similar feelings to Winston Smith, the rewriter of history in the Records Department of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four.*

> It was rather more of a shock to him she did not remember that Oceania, four
> years ago, had been at war with East Asia and at peace with Eurasia. It is true

that she regarded the whole war as a sham: but apparently she had not even
noticed the name of the enemy had changed….The issue still struck her as
unimportant. (Orwell, 1987 Edition, p.161)

If VET information is unclear for the VET community, how clear is VET
information for the wider VET audiences such as schools, parents, students,
community bodies, employers, Job Services Australia (JSA) providers and
Government Department workers assisting the unemployed and underemployed?
The sheer volume of information on VET-related Government websites, and their
poor search engines, makes finding specific information extremely difficult.
Locating the type of information required would seem impossible without assistance
due to constant changes to website pages, formats and broken links. The
interrelationships between newer Departments are not clearly identified on websites,
and Departmental web pages usually lack dates, which makes finding correct, and
current, web-based information a continuous challenge for experienced VET sector
users. Are Departmental staff aware that inexperienced people may want to find
information to successfully enter the national training system? It is difficult enough
to locate one of many VET training options available.

Very little Government information is available in printed form — we are
constantly advised to "check the website." Another factor which seems forgotten in
this online, often jumbled approach to information dissemination is that a person
needs to be able to read, use technology and have research skills to access
information made available in this way. Recent surveys (Australian Bureau of
Statistics, 2010) show many Australians do not have adequate skills in **all** these three
areas. Worryingly, many of these under-achievers' are between 15 and 24 years of
age — our future workforce. Practical application in *VET programs* would likely
assist their learning ability in these areas but access to a broad choice of VET
training options available is listed on websites that they, their immediate family and
friends are unlikely to be able to access.

The Continuity and Consistency Factor

All aspects of the Australian VET system are constantly changing, including VET
organisational structures and governing bodies. Continuity and Consistency, the next

7C's factor, is defined as: Communication is an unending process. It requires repetition to achieve understanding. Repetition, with variation, contributes to learning both facts and attitudes." (Cutlip & Center, 1952, cited in Easter, 2011). This crucial factor has been missing in Australian VET training for some time.

When 'dimensions of competency' were front and centre in the VET system, this aspect made VET training truly 'learner-focussed' for a time. If my memory is accurate on this point, these dimensions were one of the reasons why VET became a separate Education sector — VET learners could be told exactly what *performance standard* was expected of them. When this learner-focus was an integral part of the competency-based VET training system there was time for individuals to practice until they could operate at the industry level expected. Perhaps Ryan's (2011) account below of how strategic Government leadership has treated VET provides a clue to when our previous learner-focus was lost.

> Often neglected, frequently overlooked in favour of school and university education, the system has shown remarkable resilience once resources and policy attention have been directed to it…Despite these times of neglect, VET has also experienced periods of intense policy and product innovation, especially since 1975. Not all innovation in public policy succeeds, or follows its intended trajectory, in VET or elsewhere; but in VET there has been a tendency to let the policy flow drain quietly into the sands rather than to learn from a systematic appraisal of experience.[1] (Ryan, 2011, p.6)
>
> [1] *Training Guarantee: its impact and legacy 1990–1994* (Fraser, 1996) is an exception, as in part is the 1996 Taylor Review of the first three years of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Agreement.

Maybe these different periods in Australia's VET history, and constant changes to the governing bodies, are somehow responsible for other continuity and consistency losses in the VET sector described in this thesis.

For instance, the State Government Authorities (STAs), the Departments endorsed to administer VET funding in each State and Territory, continue to work towards "intergovernmental" agreements such as the *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development* (COAG, 2009) could be one such area. Many of the original signatory bodies have changed, and so have their functions. In 2008, the

Learning for Jobs OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training Australia 2008 questioned whether the Australian Government had the correct information on which to base future worker direction and strategies. All work environments operate with change every day. What is the effect though on a National Agreement if more than half of the nine original organisations given the initial documented responsibilities have changed and now have different purposes and revised functions to match each new organisation's makeup and direction? Efficient and effective knowledge management is crucial in the VET system for continuity and consistency.

It is possible the writers of the original *Training Package Development Guidelines* inadvertently changed the focus of VET when these Guidelines were instigated soon after Training Packages were introduced. Whereas **BSZ98** Glossary stated Competency as "The specification of knowledge and skill and the application of that skill to the standards of performance required in the workplace." (1998, p.135) the Guidelines used the new and different definition below:

> Competency standards define the competencies required for effective performance in the workplace. Standards are expressed in outcome terms and have a standard format comprising of Unit title, Unit descriptor, Elements of Competency, Performance Criteria, Range of Variable and Evidence Guide. (NQC, date unknown)

This new definition seems to have changed the VET approach from the meeting of a workplace *performance standard,* in place before Training Packages, to a more academic assessment of skills and knowledge against a set of words written in a Training Package. I question if we switched to having the horse before the cart with this particular change.

Such changes in language, and therefore context and application, have regularly occurred ever since. For instance, the definitions for three important VET terms — **Unit of Competency**, **Elements** and **Performance Criteria** — have constantly changed in each version of 'current' documentation. Some of these changes are shown at Appendix 5. VET definitions have moved further from their direct workplace connection over time. It could be contended that this change makes it easier to use Training Package documentation as the prescribed 'curriculum' they were never meant to be and, with this, RTOs can become less concerned with

meeting industry-required standards and more concerned with giving out qualifications to gain Government funding. This change in focus can result in an RTO representative having trouble recognising that people can be trained to the higher standards being sought by an industry, and assessed at the lower prescribed level to still attract funding for the project. I experienced this first hand when there was great concern expressed by many in a training event I attended in Adelaide in 2013 because the **Unit** linkages identified in the funding request were at the lower level than what the industry members present were requiring.

Changes in other VET terminology that effect competency levels across the VET sector occur on a regular basis too. Qualification associated terms 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL), 'Credit Transfer' and 'Mutual Recognition' have each had several definition changes between 1994 and 2007. Enough, in fact, for me to be provided with the three page document, recreated at Appendix 6, in a Tasmanian RPL Network training session in 2009. Given there has been this number of changes to the meaning of RPL, it belies reason that **TAE10** would have 39 references to RPL but no definition of the term. In one particular **TAE10 Unit** there is also a reference to "RCC/RPL" — a term VET practitioners were adamantly told not to use several years ago. Using this old term again, in an endorsed Training Package, leaves trainer assessors unsure if this term has been resurrected or is a mistake. Without easy answers available, each person or RTO is forced to make their own decision.

Regular changes in Government bodies and documentation is one problem, consistent data collection is another. A Hobart seminar held to educate RTO staff on increasing RPL outcomes, was stumped when our discussion identified RPL processes were being used by Tasmanian RTOs at a higher rate than nationally recorded. Further discussion located the problem was AVETMISS data collection definitions were different from the AQTF definitions RTOs were required to use for compliance. This difference meant Tasmanian RTOs had been putting their data in the 'wrong' box. Aligning the definitions then re-submitting data may have shown a specific area of low RPL usage needed addressing rather than the blanket approach taken which cost considerable time, money and effort for all.

I doubt that this is a lone case as the VET system is built on continually changing players. To overcome this factor, two-way, specific conversations with those directly involved in VET, the RTOs and trainer assessors previously occurred through an Australia-wide, partially-funded, grass root network of trainer assessors. This network disseminated information down from *VET administration* and funnelled lower level operator concerns back to VET leaders. A few of these original organisations still exist today to service the ongoing communication, moderation and validation needs of VET operators. In the main though, other possibly more political bodies now influence Government thinking. Without this grass root network arrangement, the 'cementing' of VET language definitions is necessary for continuity and consistency. Always creating new terms appears a better option to me than recycling old terms with new definitions.

My research has led me to question too why some VET contexts constantly change while others remain the same — even though many other possibilities avail. Australia appears to have a consistent, and small, number of contracted organisations that have been developing formal VET information, processes and publications. The same individual and company names have been contracted over long periods as Training Package Developers, and previously Toolbox Developers or other major VET project consultants, for example. My comment in no way disputes the knowledge and skills of these people and organisations. Rather, I am simply making an observation that any quality system reviewer would make. Continuity is an arguably good approach for parts of VET, however, fresh eyes are important too as new outlooks will notice inconsistencies, change a status quo or stop 'group think' before it occurs.

The Channel of Communication Factor

The point made above provides segue into the next 7C's communication factor to explore, the many channels of communication available within VET. Channels is defined as "…Use established channels of communication—channels the receiver uses and respects. Creating new channels is difficult" (Cutlip & Center, 1952, cited in Easter, 2011). Further compounding the changes to definitions I have exposed, is the pure number of channels available to obtain VET information. ASQA, DEEWR,

DIICCSRTE and other Australian Government websites, State and Territory Education websites, Training Packages, NSSC Communiqués, COAG Bulletins, training.gov.au, ISC websites and AWPA — to name just a few. VET information channels are siloed, hard to find, inconsistent and duplicated many times and, as already mentioned, students, parents and other interested parties would need assistance to find general information through any channel, which leads to considerable time for searching being required.

This fact means trainers and assessors tend to only use Training Packages they work with each day and rely on their RTO administration to tell them about any broader changes to VET such as changes to ASQA requirements. As there is not **one** source of information proclaimed as the official reference point for VET, people read and interpret any information they find as being correct, and as all the information that is necessary for their complete understanding. It appears logical then that Training Packages would be the best place to provide all relevant information to trainer assessors to have any chance of competency consistency. Yet, a search of SIR07 Retail Services Training Package, Version 1.3 (Volume 1) revealed important assessment terms, 'Rules of Evidence' and 'Principles of Assessment', are not used within this particular Training Package's 'Assessment Guidelines' section. This is because NSSC's *Standards for Training Packages* (2012), the latest guidelines for Training Package development, do not any longer stipulate that these two important parts should be included. In fact, a Training Package's 'Assessment Guidelines' section only needs to meet the two *Standards* below:

> **Standard 6:** Assessment requirements specify the evidence and required conditions for assessment.

> **Standard 7:** Every unit of competency has associated assessment requirements. The structure of assessment requirements complies with the assessment requirements template. (NSSC, 2012)

This seems a strange situation when an Assessment Fact Sheet No 11 from NSSC's predecessor NQC, entitled *Improving Assessment Practice*, confirms the risk associated with not having these factors easily accessible to a business with a high staff turnover. This sheet requires RTOs to take the action detailed below.

> Prepare a risk management matrix for the integrated learning and assessment strategy. This includes a listing of the Principles of Assessment and Rules of

Evidence, the potential risks to the achievement of these quality criteria and the risk management measures embodied in the strategy to overcome or minimise these risks. (NQC, 2011)

This finding led me to check **TAE10** as such an omission here could affect competence across all industry sectors. By way of example, the term 'Principles of Assessment' was mentioned fifteen times in Version 1.0 of **TAE10** but the only time a meaning is given to this term is in the **Range Statement** of one **Unit**: TAAASS501B Lead and Coordinate Assessment Systems and Services (TAE10, p.675). This Unit reference names the four Principles but does not provide any meaning. Similarly, the term 'Rules of Evidence' is mentioned twenty one times in this same version of **TAE10** but the four Rules are only listed once — in the **Range Statement** of a different Unit, Unit TAEASS401A: Plan Assessment Activities, and then incorrectly. If these two assessment concepts are still fundamentals, as shown by the legislated *Standards,* why would the NSSC consider that the removal of this information, from 'Assessment Guidelines' in Training Packages, will not have a negative effect on the quality of VET communication and on competency levels.

It is a reasonable for a VET practitioner to assume that documentation provided through each and every acknowledged VET channel is consistent, complete and correct. With the number of different wording and interpretations located in various channels, it is not surprising that I found definitions in the legislated *Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2011* to not be consistent with the wording used in current Training Packages. For example, the component 'Reliability' listed under the Rules of Assessment has changed considerably from other VET documents — and is possibly now indecipherable for many. My thesis research has only skimmed over what appears to be a much bigger problem. Unhappily, a small but niggling doubt about the understanding of how VET systems operate at ground level by those carrying out *VET administration*-associated roles has begun to form in the back of this researcher's mind.

The Capability of Audience Factor

The effect of the final 7C's communication factor, the **'**capability of audiences', is also significant for those charged with communicating in any way about VET. Cutlip and Center's definition is "Capability of audience: Communication must take

into account the capability of the audience. Communications are most effective when they require the least effort on the part of the recipient (Cutlip & Center, 1952, cited in Easter, 2011)." Understanding what is being communicated through the various layers of VET has proven tough, even for an experienced player like me. Many VET audiences, however, have a much lower capability, and as most VET participants only have a limited exposure to the VET system during the short period of their training our complicated VET system must be made as easy as possible for potential VET students to navigate their way in, and through. For instance, State Education websites could provide an actual web link to a complete list of RTOs providing **Qualifications** in that State or Territory not only to the public provider to provide a greater choice of timing options.

I need to draw attention to 'audiences' within VET administration for a moment as their understanding of possible impacts from their own decisions is critical for VET's success. COAG is the 'audience' at the top of VET. COAG members' capability to perform an overarching role is most important. In my view, a decision made by the April 2009 COAG meeting to again change the roles and responsibilities of the many bodies directing Education in Australia appears to have added further disorder to "who's who in the zoo." — I use this colloquial expression to emphasise how these constant changes feel from my VET operator perspective. Decisions made at this level to change the structure of those providing advice to COAG must have an effect on VET's position relative to other education sectors. The sequence of decisions in question is the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE) was replaced by the Ministerial Council of Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE). At a later meeting, MCTEE was replaced by the Standing Council for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE) with a stated purpose to "…ensure that Australia's current and future workforce needs are met through increased participation, educational attainment, skills development and skills use to achieve greater productivity" (SCOTESE website, 2011).

To VET audiences further down in the VET 'stream', such changes are of little interest. This particular high level decision should be of interest though for it appears that VET has almost been 'consumed' by a growing, and different, bureaucracy structure. VET has disappeared from the COAG advising body title.

Up until now, VET has been considered part of Governments' 'employment' focus. It took considerable research to elucidate that 'tertiary education' no longer means university studies, as most of Australia's general public would expect. According to SCOTESE's website, 'Tertiary Education' is the new name given to the combination of Higher Education, Vocational Education and Training, International Education and Adult and Community Education. Such a change would surely cause confusion on many fronts — and this combination is possibly the reason for a stronger education focus of late in VET. Is it a move like this that has caused the previously acknowledged need for a different VET sector for Australia to achieve workplace competence to now be misunderstood or even forgotten at the highest level of *VET administration?* Meanwhile, our VET system continues to expect the same outcomes as if nothing has changed. SCOTESE became the COAG Industry and Skills Council in December 2013 and only time will tell if the more practical approach to learning that the VET sector once had returns.

A totally different VET audience exists in schools, universities and for school leavers and the unemployed in their homes. One of the major reasons for this VET audience engagement is to gain or update work-related knowledge and skills. It is critical that sound career advice is linked to students' potential from as early as Year 8. The Ministerial Council of Education, Early Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA) had responsibility for "cross-sectoral matters including transitions and careers" (MCEEDYA, 2009) and this responsibility was moved to the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) when this Council replaced MCEEDYA in 2012. Since that time a lot of SCSEEC's focus appeared to have been on the *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2011*. In December 2013, the new Government changed SCSEEC to the Education Council.

It is necessary that **all** possible school to work transition options are understood by **all** parties concerned — school teachers, Career Guidance officers, Centrelink, Job Services Australia providers, RTOs, Australian Apprenticeship Centres (AACs), Group Training Organisations (GTOs), industry representatives and ISCs. Checking Government portfolios did not provide any clarity on where the responsibility for other people needing career advice to access appropriate training options presently sits. I can only wonder if what I see as an important connection to our current and

future productivity has been forgotten. This disconnection is unlikely to be noticed by a COAG Council that has a stated interest in outcomes and not processes (COAG website, 2014).

Audience capability within *VET administration* is critical too. When any area of *VET administration* has a louder 'voice' than those representing industry, it seems parts of the VET system can easily be side-tracked. For example, early in 2010, a Manufacturing Skills Australia ISC (MSAISC) representative advised me their Industry sector had endorsed its own set of 14 Industry Standards, outlined in an *MEM Competency standards Implementation Guide* (1999) for use in conjunction with the Metal, Engineering and Associated Industries Award, 1998," which I could purchase from their website. As I had not heard of these 'Industry Standards' I enquired further and was told these Industry Standards were not included in the Metal and Engineering Training Package (MEM05) as the endorsement body had ruled inclusion of this information breached the Training Package Development Guidelines.

That this critical information regarding industry requirements, RTOs and Government training efforts was not available in the Training Package documentation greatly concerned me—the effect of this decision on the actual industry went further still as, although the industry states in this 'official guide the wording below,

C13	Engineering/Production Employee Level II	Up to 3 months in-house training
C14	Engineering/Production Employee Level I	Up to 38 Hours induction training

(MEM, 1999, p.93)

When I stumbled onto this anomaly in 2010, there were 246 RTOs registered to deliver the Certificate I in Engineering (MEM10105) qualification, and most of these were school and college RTOs and TAFEs (NTIS website, 2010). This Level I qualification was also listed in the Skills in Demand Schedules used in the Government's TTC Task Force funding processes at that time. This example shows

how it is possible for *VET administration* staff — those working in ISCs, NSSC, and Training Package developers for instance, to effect the achieving of responsive, congruent VET processes when VET's overall role within Government Department policies not considered. I question if, in a true best practice business model, people developing guidelines for documentation would have the power to overrule managements stated requirements.

The culminated effect of using poor communication throughout VET

My experiences documented in this thesis — plus many others not documented — confirm Schofield and McDonald's finding that:

> The Training Package model will only be effective if it is clear about what it
> is, and what it is not. This may seem self-evident, but we have come across a
> raft of misconceptions about the Training Package model and the Packages
> themselves, which has convinced us that there is not currently the necessary
> shared understanding. (Schofield & McDonald, 2004, p.14)

The shift in the language associated with Training Packages, these researchers believed was required, that is a change from discussion about 'rules' to discussion around 'design' and placing more emphasis on working to design criteria and improving the design of Training Packages than adjusting the rules (Schofield & McDonald, 2004, p.18), has not occurred to date. Instead *VET administration* has since introduced legislation to ensure RTOs are adhering to the Training Package documentation — a move that could be interpreted as taking the focus from meeting industry standards. I wonder if this decision is based on an assumption that Training Package documentation clearly displays the industry standards needing to be met — the opposite of the Review findings, and my research. Introducing a type of *VET qualification* that is only available to people when they are working is an option to consider as this would at least ensure people did understand workplace requirements before they are awarded the current less work associated *VET Qualifications*.

Although I feel I have been intense in my investigation into VET language, I acknowledge there are many areas I have briefly brushed over. Even so, or possibly as a result of these investigations, I am left with unanswered questions:

Does *VET administration* consider that current Training Package 'competency standards' reflect the *performance standard* industry is looking for in workplace tasks*?*

Is the easiest way to ensure a person with a *VET qualification* can do the workplace tasks to the ongoing level expected by an industry to return to funding both *Vocational programs* and *VET programs*, as separate, distinct entities?

I believe I have shown in this chapter, VET language usage needs to undergo independent, cross-industry, constant review to ensure it VET training provides the most benefit for all its audiences. Although I am unsure which current entity would best carry out such a review process, I am clear it cannot be ASQA or NSSC as their documentation should form part of this constant review. Perhaps this finding shows it is time to authorise one 'leading' body in Australia again. This body should be apolitical, not associated with Trade Unions and be given a tenure that cannot be removed by subsequent Governments this time, in my view. Without this action, I suggest VET will remain piecemeal and less effective in real terms than is possibly appropriate for the amount of Government monies spent each year in this area.

In my final chapter, I convey my observations with regard to competency from my research, and whether I found the term competency, as I know it, is missing from VET today. I have taken a broad approach to this question as VET's effects on the Australian community are much broader than a Training Package system.

Chapter 6   Observations on competency—clues and a suspect

> …there is an argument that needs to be understood and articulated. It's an argument about *dominance* and what falls into shadow under such dominance, what has been lost, forgotten… Not only does a dominant discourse get to speak, and to get funded, to act and to be in positions of power and judgment which marginalize other forms of work, other ways of speaking and thinking and researching. A dominant discourse displays the depth of its dominance in its ability to define and shape the nature and limits of any *resistance to that dominance*. Its dominance is had in its unquestioned ability to characterize and speak on behalf of that which it is not.

David W. Jardine, 2007

I chose this particular quote for my final chapter as one form of dominance seems to have often replaced — substituted without much resistance — another form throughout this thesis on competency. I used a 'patchwork quilt' metaphor to describe the way I, and colleagues, saw the VET sector, its training programs and all the other threads within our communities that combined to form a workforce 'fabric' during the ANTA era in Australia. This 'fabric' had been especially, and specifically, designed by Government to ensure well-trained, productive and competent workers would develop our population, create further jobs and strengthen our economy but this fabric was competing against the dominant education discourse at that time and this struggle still exists.

My observations and insights, detailed in this final chapter, are in answer to my original question: How is competency understood in VET in Australia?   It is hoped my documenting of an interpretive grass root view of the current position, and my broad interpretation of what constitutes VET, will widen current research and *VET administration* thinking. To have a clear, focussed pathway for both trainer and worker expertise, and to widen appreciation by influential parties that the high level of acumen gained and utilised by workers within a successful business could be of equivalent value to, and not less value than, a University education, is still my dream.

I began my enquiry with three questions about the ways our current VET sector links to workforce competence today. What constitutes the national training system? Where does the leadership of VET lie? and What are the effects of changes to VET practitioner training and assessing practices? I wondered why Australia continues to

proclaim to have a separate VET sector when we speak of VET training being conducted in all the other 'Education sectors.' I hoped that this approach would lead to a clear understanding of what VET is today.

To be honest, I end my enquiry without a firm answer to these questions. My investigations into competency have taken me on many tangents into other associated areas. What I have discovered is a likelihood that, without the strong and specifically focussed leading body, Australian VET has been lead 'off track,' from its 1992 workplace focus back towards the academic, 'technical and further education' focus we had in 1975. As a result, Australia appears, to me, to be experiencing a possibly unrecognised dilemma at present. VET seems to be sitting 'uncomfortably.' Like a person who is not sure if they are in the wrong room, or if others are, and who is waiting for something to occur to provide a clear answer.

When I realised VET's uncomfortable position, it became necessary to create clear distinction in my writing between training primarily in workplaces and other learning in institutions of one kind or another. Over the course of my research, I found my simple division was sometimes compromised by my references because writers interchangeably use the terms VET and vocational education. As reported by Ryan (2011) what VET is, and what VET is for, is confused and, therefore, confusing. This has meant I have not included papers that I found added to the confusion. For my readers' clarity, and my own sanity, I attempted to overcome this confusion by referring in this thesis to training conducted in workplaces as *VET programs* and any other learning as *Vocational programs*.

Like all good detective novels, solving the case of the missing workplace competence is easier with hindsight. I have identified several suspects and one in particular, looks promising as the culprit; language as this defines the context. Throughout my thesis there are many evidences of language — terms or sets of terms — that have been interpreted and reinterpreted to the point where their meanings, originally subtle or complex, have become less subtle and less complex. John Herman Randall Jr. (1973) claimed in *The Art of Language and the Linguistic Situation: A Naturalistic Analysis*,

Language is fundamentally a natural process or operation, involved in what can be distinguished among encountered human situations as "the linguistic situation," or "the situation functioning linguistically": the process that is language is encountered functioning as an instrument in a broader context of other processes. It is this one natural process involved in a whole complex of natural processes interacting and cooperating with each other. (p. 29)

Words used in the VET sector have, in linguistic terms, become "vulgarised" or debased. Normative meanings, that is meanings most people use in similar contexts or contingencies, have become attributed to VET terms. This results in terms no longer being questioned or problematised. They become like concrete pillars. Once 'cemented', many different people use these 'pillars' to make judgements. Such judgement might then no longer be based on interpretations that are subtle and related to the complex contexts, contingencies and scenarios that make up a workplace within an industry. Flexibility of understanding, in human terms, is thus greatly reduced at all levels of involvement. Different interpretations in assessment of competence can be made by either VET teachers or workplace trainer assessors, and from evaluation of report findings by *VET administration*.

The VET Education sector was created to run 'competency-based' programs and, current documentation implies, this has not changed. In my view, VET training is about precision in completing tasks in workplaces. Precision in task completion is critical to Australia's productivity and international standing, whether we are speaking about operating at a high strategic level or serving food in a restaurant. There is a precise, specific way that each task should be carried out. There is a way that is effective, efficient and creates no negative after effect on an individual or an organisation. This is the level of competence I believe industry and the general public once expected from a person holding a VET qualification. I have found this level of competency to be missing on many fronts. Training and assessing on only Skills and Knowledge criteria is a fundamental one.

The competency-based training that I am speaking of in this thesis does not end with diners in restaurants being inappropriately interrupted as I recounted in my Introduction, or with many other examples I could have mentioned later on. In a global market, it seems crucial for continuing Australia's economic prosperity, and

associated lifestyle, that we reward worker expertise and gain the relevant *VET qualification* only when you attain this level. To have this sort of worker precision, VET training and assessment practices need to be high level and expert too. The observations and comments I make are reflective of this view.

Clarity of expectation is missing

Many times in this thesis I have used words like 'uncertain,' 'inconsistent,' 'unexpected,' and even 'incredulous,' to describe a situation I found. When I examined these situations further, it is 'common sense' that appears to be missing in these areas. What is common sense? Is it reasonable to expect common sense in a country's vocational education and training system? Nicholas Rescher, in his book *Common-Sense: A New Look at an Old Philosophical Tradition* (2005) comments,

> To be sure, the claims of common sense do not have the backing of some sort
> of necessitation that guarantees their irrefragable certainty. But what they do
> have in their favor is a powerful presumption. Only under very unusual
> conditions and only in the face of the most potent counter-indications should
> the claims of common sense be set aside. The claims of common sense
> encompass what a rational and reasonable individual would abandon only in
> exponentially extreme circumstances and conditions. In sum, common-sense
> contentions are not categorical certitudes but powerful presumptions. (p. 57)

The nature of common sense leads me to believe this is a reasonable approach to take in this thesis, as common sense is, and has always been, a 'powerful presumption' in VET. From a common sense perspective, I can draw together my research findings to see how they align with the DEEWR's intention for the national training system when they were the leading Department in 2011, shown below, which became the Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education's (DIICCSRTE) objective when formed in 2013.

> The key roles of the national training system are to drive economic growth
> and address areas of skills needs. Through strong industry leadership, the
> national training system provides Australians with the skills needed to enter
> the workforce for the first time, to re-enter the workforce, to retrain for a new
> job, to upgrade skills for an existing job, and to learn throughout their lives.
> The national training system includes both publicly and privately funded

training providers. Training may take place in classrooms, in the workplace, off-the-job, online and through other flexible delivery methods. The VET sector provides training for Australians of all ages and backgrounds, for small and large businesses, across all industries and in many communities.
(DEEWR, 2011: DIICCSRTE, 2013)

An absolute answer to what components make up the 'national training system' spoken of here and where within that system this 'strong industry leadership' lies was not found.

Direct links to workplace precision and labour force development are missing

The VET sector appears to not be as directly linked to actual workforce *performance standards* as it was when workplace trainers and assessors were introduced. It seems as though much of our VET training, maybe even the majority if you include VET in Schools, universities, institutes and on-line RTO courses, is currently meeting Training Package competency standards rather than being directly linked to workplace competence levels and industry human resource management. As a result of ongoing tension between institutional and workplace learning, a distortion of purpose appears to have been brought about through many structural changes. Limited research, and research allotted on a basis that demonstrates paucity of commitment by Governments, has not assisted consistency of efforts. In considering why and how we have arrived at this place, an image, a depiction, a hypothesis has developed by way of explanation that I will outline below for investigation by others, in a better position than me, for dismissal or concurrence.

At some point in my research, I realised that the picture of vocational education and training I had was more extensive than just our national training system. For me, with my CES and 'labour market' background, Australia's VET system takes on a broader outlook. Just like the *Australia reconstructed*, which I worked towards for many years while in the CES, my view of VET includes career planning for young people to enter our workforce, the education and training of unemployed people to re-enter the work force and learning programs to assist migrants to speak English, understand Australian culture then become skilled workers and business owners in our communities for instance. All these associated areas were part of the 'VET system' I remember. These different parts were articulated and integrated to produce

the employment results we needed to engage people in training when unemployment was high. Recognition of the need to have integration, of the type I am speaking of, is no longer as obvious in VET governance documentation and VET practices, in my view.

When looking at the VET system from this broader viewpoint, a clear structure in which all these parts are connected appears to me to be now missing. All the pieces of my 'patchwork quilt' VET system continue to operate but the pieces do not appear to be 'stitched' to one another any longer as they are within several Government departments, and many different non-government funded organisations. These separate parts of the previous CES services — leads me to perceive a current position of entanglement rather than the clear inter-connections I had once operated within. A drawing together, in a systematic way, of all the Government efforts to skill potential workers is a necessary requirement to ensure we have a simple process for all in a community to gain appropriate employment. I see re-establishing a well-landmarked, concentrated focal point for dissemination of information on all careers, possible courses and training options as the first step.

A clear understanding of what being competent entails is missing

My research highlighted there are many views on what 'competency' is. Explanation of my view is necessary for understanding my view point compared with other viewpoints expressed. I am not speaking in this thesis of raising VET's profile but of possibly re-positioning the location of *VET programs* in an effort to increase productivity. In VET, competency is attached to task performance. Like S.M.A.R.T. goals, performance levels are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound. Competency is not attached to, nor does it come with gaining a qualification, or 'from thin air' with a particular level of authority.

Every working person does have a level of competency in completing each task in their current work role. Sometimes the competency level expected is openly acknowledged by management, sometimes it is not. Competency, in our competency-based training system, is the operational level set by an industry sector, or by an individual business. For example, a qualified carpenter may not be expected to be competent in using all possible pieces of machinery when working in a large building company but, if he/she changes to becoming a sole trader focusing on fine

timber furniture, high level skill in operating a bevelling machine will be a necessity. An office assistant though would probably be expected to be competent in using common computer software programs in any environment as the task is an industry-wide one for office workers. This situation means that although two people have the same *VET Qualification*, and both are generally referred to as being 'competent' they may not have the same skill, knowledge and experiences for an employer to draw upon.

For this reason alone, competency is not an academic concept — it is a practical one — and one that does not easily fit people into boxes unrelated to worker requirements. When you look at competency in this way, it is understandable that each industry sector can choose a specific level of expertise as the minimum level of competence that sector requires in each task. Once selected, this competent level cannot be 'graded' within the national training system. You can either reach that level or not at a given point in time. It is for this reason, when assessed you are either declared Competent or Not Yet Competent. The latter means that you need more practice to improve your skills, knowledge or attitude in some way.

The difficulty of defining competency in a couple of simple sentences was understood when the VET sector was established. Dimensions of competency were introduced to provide further explanation of the operational attributes expected of a competent person. Rules of Evidence, Principles of Assessment and a construct of what a competent person looks like, must all be applied in a similar way across any industry sector, and between all RTOs delivering *VET programs* in that sector. Such consistency comes after the *performance standard* necessary to be considered competent has been agreed upon by the industry sector. The words are then written into the training documentation that will ensure people will be trained to reach that level. It is a great pity, therefore, that the original wording of **BSZ98** has not been continued into current Training Package documentation to ensure understanding of this concept continued through the different generations of trainer assessors.

An interesting tension has always been at play between those pushing for the gaining of qualifications and those in industry who want competent workers first and qualifications second. When *VET qualifications* were introduced, an assessor

combined a number of **Units** that related to the tasks a worker competently carried out in their work role to see if they had enough **Units** to gain a **Qualification** — the Recognition of Prior Learning process. It was also not long before RTOs, particularly institutions, were marketing whole **Qualifications** with a set of predetermined **Units** to be covered, not because these particular **Units** were required by part of an industry but because this is the cheapest way for RTOs to operate. This approach by RTOs, including TAFEs, appears to have continually been influencing the ability of **Qualifications** to match work roles. As 'full' qualification packaging is not seen as necessary by industry, employers mooted the idea of introducing 'skill sets' instead — a group of one or more specific **Units**. This is what industry wanted but the idea was frowned upon for many years**.** Interestingly, Government funding still requires enrolling in, and completing a full nationally-recognised **Qualification**. A reasonable approach for Australia if we were assured *VET certification* aligns with the workplace competence level required by industry.

Somewhere, at some time, a shift in understanding appears to have happened at the top of the VET system. This move appears to have changed the focus of the VET sector from its industry requirement for skilled workers perspective back towards an educational one — a cascading effect through the layers of VET and Government, as a result of this shift, appears to have occurred. ANTA's subsuming, 'economic rationalisation' and a 'recession we had to have' have all played a part in the loss of critical HR knowledge regarding the education, training and development of workers in workplaces from both the Government sector and leading businesses. By the time industry and Government focus returned to skilling workers again, training was considered an 'outsourced' commodity by HR, in a similar way to procurement and maintenance. The change of Government in 2013 has seen AWPA and NSSC subsumed into the Department of Industry — and no doubt this will mean more changes to VET. We must use future changes to put the VET focus back on people being trained to meet industry current and known future requirements.

A focus on meeting industry's ever-changing needs is missing
Is our current national training system meeting industry needs? In 2012, my search of the official Government training website, training.gov.au, showed, in the

higher VET levels alone, 475 Certificate IVs, 364 Diplomas and 157 Advanced Diplomas were available. These figures lead me to question if all these qualifications are necessary and to ask how many of these qualifications are people acquiring. As I had seen very few Government vacancies requesting a VET qualification, except TAE40110s for training roles, I sampled another employer group. I searched Retail sector vacancies requiring a Certificate IV in Retail Management for a one month period on seek.com.au — as this sector employs large numbers of people Australia-wide. Although many hundreds of vacancies for Salespersons and Retail Store Managers were lodged, not one vacancy requested applicants to have a retail *VET qualification,* or any *VET qualification* at all. I realise this result may not be representative but, as statistics show many people gain Retail qualifications, it does raise further concern.

This result forces me to ask tougher questions. It makes good economic sense for a company to employ qualified people who operate at the level they require. If Retail *VET qualifications* give that sector the skills and knowledge businesses need in their staff, why would employers not request people with *VET qualifications*? The answer may be as simple as the average Retail employer does not know about these qualifications or what they entail. Whatever the reason, this discovery leads me to question if we are funding Training Packages ad infinitum, and to ask why we would continually be funding people to complete qualifications that industry is not requiring people to have to be employed.

Training Packages, and Australia's approach to VET training, have received at least two negative Reviews. Yet, we continue on with these 'pillars' of our national training system. "Fossilised behaviours", a term I discovered in my research, describes "unquestioned acceptance of what has been accepted practice." This term, attributed to Lev Vygotsky by Dr Robert Grandin, a University lecturer (Grandin, 2006, p.23) seems a good term to possibly explain why Training Packages, while acknowledged as too complex by industry, trainer assessors, and the NSSC, continue on in a central position. Instead of the concept of Training Packages, itself, being questioned, and maybe found wanting, the Package and Unit templates are continually re-formatted. Is it because of our human anathema to change, that the bigger question — why a square peg does not fit into a round hole? — is not being

asked. Such a challenge appears unlikely anyway in a world where it is easier to keep the status quo, and keep your job.

Another of these 'fossilised behaviours' appears to be that we still portray Australian VET as being 'industry-driven' in VET documentation — when influenced by industry is closer to the way I experienced the VET system from my Industry Training Advisory Board role in 2001. My view of the different roles of industry and of educators, at that time, was confirmed by Schofield and McDonald when they published their review of the VET system in 2004 and advocated a change in role conception at that time saying "Industry is indisputably responsible for specifying work performance outcomes, and providers for deciding how best to impart the necessary skills and competence, but there is also a 'middle ground' around the constituents of competence" (Schofield & McDonald, 2004, p.5).

Rather than addressing changes needed to these industry and educator roles, we appear to have continued on with an 'unquestioned acceptance' that our current mode of operating must be right. What is necessary for Australia to move industry into a place of being the leading influence in VET training is too big a question for this limited research to answer? In Appendix 7, I list a number of different observations from my research into missing competence which point to four areas that could be considered to begin this necessary move — development of workers and trainers, changes to Units and Training Packages, changes to our VET system and broader Government changes.

A clear defining of the level to which we are training is missing

I have been unable to unquestionably determine if 'expert' in a workplace task is the level that Training Package developers are aiming to document when they write **Units** — in itself an interesting finding. It appears that those teaching *Vocational programs* consider wording in Training Package to be the level to be reached to gain a *VET qualification*, while those training people working in an industry are also expected to also meet employer requirements which can be either higher or lower than the Training Package wording. Logically, industry sector requirements are at the higher end of a continuum even if some businesses operate at the lower end. Where correct operation is imperative because of associated risks, the level of competence required may reach as high as 'performance without error.' In some

other industries, they only require a person to recall the name of an Act or a Law for certain tasks. As it is industry that determined this level, I am always left questioning why trainer assessors need any other paperwork than the *performance standard* for each task. Complications with using my simplistic approach only seem to appear, in my view, when you remove the training and assessing from a workplace. Perhaps the problem with our current system I am identifying here was previously identified in the comment, "For many individuals and enterprises, learning is now an integral and continuous part of working, and workplace learning already encompasses both informal and formal learning and increasingly will reflect both individual and collective competence" (Schofield and McDonald, 2004, p 10).

Turner's Nathalia Project (1998) found, a person cannot achieve the level of understanding and precision that industries need from workers without there being a significant amount of practise in a workplace role. Each person needs to incorporate their mind and their body parts, integrate their understanding of how they need to act in their workplace role and combine this with all their other learning to be competent at a task. For this reason, it is irrational to say people are competent at tasks when they have not been in a workplace for the length of time needed to achieve this expected level of competence, particularly when not in a particular workplace role.

The 2004 suggestion that "education and training needs to be linked more systematically to wider human resource management strategies that promote new approaches to job design and work organisation and which explicitly support business strategies" is still missing. This factor could have been easily implemented by placing VET training firmly within industry — and only in industry. I agree that work is not always conducive to learning, but many organisations have successfully made learning "highly context-bound" and "driven by specific and immediate work requirements," in the way suggested at the time (Schofield & MacDonald, 2004, p 10). In fact, my years of training within industries show that this is how industry operates...a new piece of machinery arrives, someone learns to operate it and then trains others. All that is needed is highly skilled trainers as was previously envisaged when a Bachelor level qualification for VET trainer assessors was recommended in the 90s.

I am unsure why *VET administration* has not emphasised the necessity of this connection between VET training and human resource management strategies to be

in place before a learner can attain workplace competence. Instead, we have *Vocational programs* continuing to be common place in lower level *VET qualifications* and discussions held about moving higher level *VET qualifications* into the higher education sector instead of into the workplace. Good educators should be designing new 'training and development' products that are delivered in workplaces to give industry, the customer after all, what industry needs. Anything less seems time wasting and to be missing the point.

Distinction between pre-employment programs and worker programs is missing

I have been unable to locate documentation stating the reason for the Australian Government's combining of *Vocational programs* and *VET programs.* This decision was a crucial one as it has impacted on both RTO's delivery of the competencies industry requires and the JSA ability, as a feeder into the labour market, to provide training to upskill people with low levels of literacy and numeracy and work ethic to be ready to undertake basic work. This Government approach has the effect of increasing numbers gaining qualifications but creates other problems for industry and workers. The ACCI paper, *ACCI response to the Skills Australia Discussion Papers (2009)* comments that,

> At the heart of workforce development is the enterprise. If workforce development does not have meaning for enterprises, then it does not add value to employers or employees. It includes all aspects of the employment process including recruitment, flexible arrangements to support employment, management approaches to building capability, career planning and development, retention strategies and exit from the firm. (ACCI, 2009, p.4.)

My personal bias is that I consider this point alone is reason enough to insist on only workplace-based training being called *VET programs*.

Vocational programs do have a rightful place in the broader VET context I have expressed. These programs do educate people for work but the levels of precision expected in good workplace practice can only be achieved by adequate practise in workplaces. Open acknowledgement that there is a big difference between someone knowing about how to do something and doing it to the performance standard required to remain in paid employment, would seem an important step towards clarity in the national training system.

Clarity in Training Package system documentation is missing

Does 'competency-based training' have too much history for these types of changes to be possible? I consider the answer is most likely yes. Perhaps, Rutherford's 'capability-based training' could be introduced instead — a new term is likely to overcome any perceptible stigma. Such a change would also allow VET training to move closer to industry realities by including "required attitudes," or "required personal attributes" alongside "required knowledge and skills" in **Units**. Training Packages, in their current form, could be replaced with a more generic approach for consistency, and too avoid duplication of effort, with a specific section for an industry sector to cut development costs.

If not replaced, use of a consistent approach to verbs and descriptions in **Elements** would improve their clarity and context. For example, the word 'manage' has a different connotation at a Certificate I and II qualification level than it does in a Diploma or higher level **Unit**. Using a more explicit word to describe what is actually expected is likely to get a more consistent competency outcome. Blooms Taxonomy, or a similar more modern equivalent, is the sensible way forward as usable wording is already listed in three Learning Domains.

Ensuring each Unit has been checked by an actual worker before ISCs put forward Training Packages for endorsement, rather than by an industry sector representative, is definitely worthy of consideration as although the process of Training Package development might be slowed the **Unit** quality is likely to improve. I would also advocate a return to highlighting in all Training Packages the **BSZ98**-type of Assessment Guideline that stated the assessor practice requirements. Clear definitions and delineations are imperative if everyone is to be assessing to the same standard. This is the only way the national training system can be assured all stakeholders are operating from the same page.

Educational theory is missing from Trainer Assessor qualifications

Michele Simons, Roger Harris and Erica Smith comments in *Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training: Understanding learners and learning,* (2006), "Discussions need to examine ideas on how teaching and learning might embrace the learner-centred, work-centred and attribute-focussed now acknowledged as important for the future of the VET sector (Simons, Harris & Smith, 2006, p.7)" show other researchers agree that a bigger picture of VET learning is needed to realise workplace competency aspirations for different groups of learners. These same 'learner-centred, work-centred and attribute-focused approaches' referred to by

Simons, Harris and Smith are being lost by the decision to remove **Employability Skills** from **Unit** documentation and to remove all reference to 'workplaces' from the **TAE10** Training Package.

Competency is not attached to the normal level of intelligence and ability to perform well you find in classroom-type education. Whereas compulsory schooling sources only two of the intelligences Gardner documented — linguistic and logical-mathematical — competency in workplaces often comprises a combination of other specific intelligences such as the interpersonal, bodily-kinesthetic and spatial intelligences needed by a personal fitness coach, for example. VET trainers and assessors need to mould a person's particular types of intelligence to mentor and coach them to reach the *performance standard* required. Trainers must notice the words used by learners, the way they hold their bodies, the way they think and so on to develop their skills, knowledge and attitude to meet competency requirements as, in VET, people are treated as individuals not as a group. Assessors need to be able to make reasonable adjustments to their assessments to cater for learner differences.

For this reason, Andragogy, or a later incarnation like Heutagogy, "the study of self-determined learning" as discussed in Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon's *From Andragogy to Heutagogy* (2001) could be firmly re-established as the primary relationship in *VET programs* in recognition that current students do not enter classes with a blank slate. When you are developing individual and organisational capability levels as you are in workplaces, you do need people to think for themselves as there is a built in need for responsibility to make decisions and take action. The Choy and Delahaye (2002) finding that young people 17 – 24 wanted pedagogical as well as andragogical approaches identifies the need to transition learners to a more self-determining approach to learning, just like the Swedish found was necessary (Department of Trade et al., 1987, p. 108) if we want to produce responsible, thinking workers.

Emphasis on VET trainers and assessors gaining a wider range of learning methodologies to reconnect the three components — *VET programs*, industry requirements and HR activities, is a definite requirement in the next iteration of TAE10 is critical. Critical also is, ensuring all VET trainer assessors' have the

required knowledge and understanding of industry HR practices. Learning about 'action-based learning' of the type being promoted in Learning and Development research for the higher level VET qualifications is also necessary because when VET focus was squarely on industry needs I recall using this teaching approach, and other experiential learning methods, being included in workplace training programs I developed and conducted within companies. An organisation's management team often requested this type of program to directly address particular workplace issues or safety concerns in the 90s. Tasks like writing training manuals for new processes, developing change management programs and undertaking functional analysis' of employee's duties and skills, bear no relationship to current Certificate IV trainer assessor qualification **Units**, or higher Diploma level qualification **Units** for that matter. Industry obviously needs people with this skill level requiring developmental-type skills should be included in the TAE10-type Training Package. At the very least, we should return to expecting trainers and assessors to effectively operate in all three learning domains and to be proficient in using adult learning techniques — even those who conduct *Vocational programs.* All these areas must be included in the Certificate IV level trainer assessor requirements.

Skills such as teaching, coaching, facilitating and training are enough for classroom-based people and workplace experts who train in only one area or process. Recognising the additional set of skills, knowledge and attributes that are necessary to influence adults, to mentor and change behaviours and thinking and develop new work processes, and then inclusion of these skills, would greatly enhance VET outcomes for industry. Wording from an old overhead transparency, used when I trained trainers in TSA, shows how learning in workplaces was perceived to operate in the 90s:

> Training – Learning related to an individual reaching a particular *performance standard* in their current job.
>
> Education – Learning related to preparing an individual for a future but defined role within the organisation.
>
> Development – Learning related to the general growth of an individual, a team and/or the organisation. (Hazelwood, 2012)

Underpinning knowledge in human psychology and educational theory, plus experience in working with conflicting adult behaviours in workplaces, was required to operate in industry at the higher operational levels I operated at in the 90s. My only thought on why this understanding appears to have been lost from trainer assessor requirements in the current **TAE10** is a dearth of skills, knowledge and experience exists in regard to operating in a HR setting in businesses at some level by those engaged in writing this package.

Boldness is missing in the Australian VET system

Sweden showed this type of boldness when their manufacturing centres looked like closing in the 70s (Department of Trade, 1987, p.116). Requiring people to work in a role for a minimum period of one year before gaining a VET qualification is worth considering as this approach could have any number of other benefits. It would 'weed out' people, I think the colloquial term is, who can pass the theory and skills in simulated environments but cannot operate at the level required in workplaces. All companies could be encouraged to conduct regular formal Training Needs Analysis (TNAs) for each staff member against the current industry needs at that time, thereby, creating an opportunity for industry to write clear, regularly updated *performance standard*s for each task into specific rather than the generic Job Descriptions many seem to have adopted. A change to ISC processes that either saw **Units** continually and quickly altered to reflect latest developments in workplaces would undoubtedly make Training Packages more relevant to employers, learners, trainers and assessors. Or, providing opportunities for qualified Trainer Assessors to learn the latest new developments and train others before the **Units** are upgraded would also deliver the immediacy that industry leaders require.

Changes of this type would not only improve the level of worker performance in industries, they would require a higher level of development of trainers and assessors to manage the change processes. Workers who operate with this level of acknowledged expertise could again take pride in being able to meet the *performance standards* needed to retain recognition of their competence — encouraging others to also strive for excellence. Such a system has the potential to overcome any existing cultural bias against VET pathways too. However, for me, the most significant

benefit from this approach is the possibility to instil 'lifelong learning' as a reality for future Australians.

Compulsory work placement as a primary factor in worker development is a missing

Gaining work, and continuing to be employed and employable, is an expected outcome for successful individuals in our community. Providing experience of workplace requirements prior to you leaving school is undoubtedly the best approach. Even in the 80s, the European countries visited had educational programs that required all students to choose workplace training options of two, three or four years while they were still in compulsory schooling. If we are serious about providing the best options for people, whenever they leave, and after they have left, compulsory schooling, then our current systems must change. Dr Christine Johnston of Rowan University says "A successful student may be a competent learner; But a competent learner may not always be a successful student" (Johnston cited in Grandin, 2006, p.9). This statement is in keeping with my lived experience. Having students continue on with formalised education for as long as possible is widely accepted as a sensible approach but we must ensure what they are learning and how they are learning will assist each one to understand their possible career pathways.

I often hear teachers and the VET community speak of two pathways for students to continue on with their learning, the academic one and the VET pathway. When working in the TTC, I realised schools may not be utilising a third pathway choice to the best degree—the choice to continue on in compulsory education while working through a well-structured School-Based Apprenticeship or a part-time Traineeship timetable. However, I estimate that of approximately ten students in School-based Apprenticeships during my eighteen months working in a Senior Secondary College, only two continued coming to school for the rest of their first year due to poor student management. With a proper process and better marketing, a well-structured School-Based Apprenticeship option would appear the best way to assist those keen to leave school to gain work now and improve their literacy, numeracy and language for a better future.

Since 2009, the *Australian Curriculum* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2010) has been implemented by the Labor

Government in an effort to overcome the drop in national literacy, numeracy and language skills identified in the *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey 2006* released by ABS in 2008. VET in Schools is a critical starting point to a later VET pathway. A sensible approach for Australian Governments to guarantee competent future workers would be to ensure all students get the best start. Unfortunately, an article in a 2010 VETnetwork Newsletter, by the then Chairperson of VETnetwork Australia, Mike Frost, suggests that Government focus on this area has waned since the Keating and Howard Governments. Frost says "The Commonwealth Government does not yet seem to have clear guidance and direction in regards to school-based vocational education and training…renewed focus on literacy and numeracy is laudable...it seems that any consideration of school-based VET will not occur before 2014" (Frost, 2010). One Government policy does not support another — reverting to a broader view of VET associations is likely to overcome such oversights.

Frost's statement confirms my finding of a lack of collaboration between extraneous influences on the competence of Australian workers. It seems VET in Schools policy framework was drawn up in 2000 but the taskforce for leadership and direction in this area and resource support through Curriculum Corporation has since ceased. Frost cited O'Hanlon-Rose's (2010) research showing, in the main, students continue to enrol in only a few industry areas that "in no way match the current national skills demand" (Frost, 2011).

My conjecture is this situation continues unchanged due to broken VET fabric threads — perhaps our current unstated connection between skills in demand and career counselling is not adequate to ensure a match is made. My thesis comments on a cultural bias that appears to portray a VET pathway as a lesser rather than alternative career choice. Yes, many of the historical VET jobs — lower level manufacturing-type jobs — have now gone offshore, but there are many more positions available now at the upper levels within industry. This means both *Vocational* and *VET programs,* when correctly implemented and managed as active labour market policies, have a positive effect on peoples' lives, our communities and our productivity as a nation.

Consistency and constancy are missing in VET

My thesis highlights examples of how the Australian Government appears to be constantly changing VET associated policies and so their success or failure remains undetermined. Ryan (2011) agrees, commenting on a need to ensure that such changes meet their stated objectives and have "a means to measure their achievement and a system of audit and evaluation to determine degree of success" (p.21). Hoeckel et al., OECD researchers who visited Australia in 2008, also found a problem in our policy change without evaluation and stated "evaluations of new policies are not routinely conducted, or, if they are, the results are not necessarily used … on systemic innovation in VET" (Hoeckel et al., 2008, p.29). I suggest this problem has continued.

We appear to have created a self-fulfilling prophecy approach to governance in VET policy. For instance, a close examination of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's *Skills for all Australians* (2012) initiative shows that a lack of specific written objectives could be allowing us to gain results as glossy as media releases produced when announcements are made, for less than glossy results. Humans being human, objectives written without inclusion of both quality and quantity measurements make for possible achievement of one without the other. It is strange that the ability of successful candidates to work at the competency levels industry requires remains immaterial to the training providers being paid by the Government. Not achieving the optimum VET competency levels must contribute in some way to accidents in workplaces — thereby increasing the costs to the broader community.

Research entitled *Complex not Simple: The Vocational Education and Training Pathway from Welfare to Work,* by Kate Barnett and John Spoehr did identify another broken thread in the patchwork quilt approach to achieving competent workers. These researchers found "a number of Centrelink eligibility requirements that reflect a lack of understanding of how the VET system operates and which can have a negative impact on students" (2008, p.10). Money is no longer paid to unemployed people while they attend non-accredited work preparation courses that cover literacy, numeracy and work culture. It is no surprise then, that unemployed people are no longer taking these critically important courses, creating a situation

that can potentially undermine the *Skills for All Australians* training program outcomes. This approach could be construed as setting up people to fail again.

Despite Government-funded School-to-Work Transition research highlighting a need for additional support is needed for students leaving school early as they have no idea what level of education is required for any particular work they may be interested in attempting. This situation possibly arises because, as researchers Jennifer Bryce, Michelle Anderson, Tracey Frigo and Phillip McKenzie from Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) found, when conducting research into transition to work for the Smith Family, "Although there is quite an array of statistical data on student pathways, the body of research that explores the processes by which students make their decisions, and follows the students as they move through school and is relatively small" (Bryce et al., 2007, p.10),

Not offering opportunities for early school leavers to take up assisted workplace training programs appears farcical when we know "the most skilled jobs are falling outside the aspirations of [even] younger diploma holders" (Karmel, 2011, p.59). This is another example of why a broader view of the roles of parental education, career education and worker education and training is critical for enhancing the competence levels of our future workers.

A new metaphor for Australian VET has emerged

As a result of my enquiry, it is not possible to conceptualise VET in Australia as a patchwork quilt. A new image has emerged of a gigantic, multi-headed and multi-armed squid — a soft bodied creature with a capacity to grow new tentacles and re-generate old ones, has emerged for me. My new vision recognises, as Ryan's (2011) history of VET showed, that the VET system has an amazing ability for propulsion, adaption and generation, whenever needed, but also requires a word of caution. As it is not apparent where the leadership of this creature lies, fast movement, without consideration of route relevance to the large number of inputs into workplace competence, can move VET quickly in the wrong direction or see Australia use a lot of unnecessary energy going around in circles.

I suspect that the most important aspect of how VET operates in Australia has been missing since the 80s — clear, closely connected to industry VET sector leadership that is directly aligned to active labour economic policy. Industry must be allowed to take the lead in the VET sector. *VET administration* is just that—in both business and Government — its role is to govern and administer to achieve the outcome sought—in this case, what industry needs, and not to lead. My experience in one workplace showed how administrators, when given enough power, can detach an organisation's connection to its real purpose. I suggest it is for this reason, we appear to have lost distinguishable *VET qualifications* in the current AQF. Australia needs *VET qualifications,* and needs them to remain 'workplace competency-based,' to attain maximum competency levels for our workers — their original purpose.

From researching for this enquiry, I have renewed hope of, one day, seeing suitably skilled people being considered as VET professionals. Improving Australia's productivity and, thus, our community and lifestyle, is important work that requires professional practice of education and training skills and greater awareness of the individual development of each worker. My thesis journey has allowed me to contemplate whether it is important for the VET sector to remain as a different and separate Education sector. My answer is yes. However, like Rutherford (2013), I consider we must get our own profession right before we can influence other industries and academics to understand this view. Why? In the 80s, we understood the importance of workplace context for the best VET training results. A NCVER paper entitled *Workplace change and skill needs: workers' perceptions* (2013), part of a larger research project by Griffith University researchers, Darryl Dymock and Mark Tyler, highlights this importance has not changed due to "the context-specific nature of the way that change influences work practices" (p.6). I dare to suggest this supports my finding that VET may have been side-tracked by an overemphasised academic focus — vocational education rather than vocational training and development.

Changing the title and purpose of **TAE10**'s equivalent, at its next review, back to a name clearly identifying that this Training Package underpins all training for work — Industry Education, Training and Development perhaps—should be the first step to get Australian VET back on track. Clear distinction can be made between the

trainer assessor qualification levels needed to work in industry and those for classroom-based training about work. A change to asking for proof of currency through recent VET sector activities rather than requiring people to regain qualifications would be well received, particularly if it was approached as a VET professional development requirement.

Case of missing competence solved

Like most historical-detective endings, the real culprit was not revealed to the very end of my journey. The language problems I found do play a huge role in our loss of the connection in VET programs to truly assessable *performance standards,* or KPIs, as they are used within industry as part of human resource management. But this inconsistent, ever-changing language usage through the VET sector is hiding the real culprit for the loss of worker competence — the lack of recognition of the need for the 'development' aspect of a competent worker. It appears to be this fundamental oversight that has led to workers not being required to gain the skills, knowledge and attitudes or behaviours inherent in completing any work task to be considered 'competent.' When we replaced 'Competency-Based Training' (CBT) with competencies written into Training Packages and re-defined 'the worker' out of the AQF we lost the synergy that occurs when all that the worker needs to do, think and act comes together to complete the task — the magic. While this more complete understanding of what is necessary for a worker to perform at the highest level continues to be 'misplaced' within management of the VET sector, the significance of having this sector is lost. We are trying to score the wrong goal; Australia's rewards come from producing highly effective workers not qualification numbers.

This factor remains in the forefront of the minds of trainer assessors who operate as staff within workplaces and in industry thinking in general — it is an inherent factor of programs conducted, it is often the reason a program needs to be run. For this reason, might the detective-historian suggest that whole of body and mind human development can only occur when a person is working in a work role within an organisation. Workers do not need to learn the theory of working in a team. Individual staff must be working towards synergy with the particular group of people they have to interact with each shift for full productivity and worker satisfaction to occur.

Gaining recognition as competent without on-the-job experience in workplace tasks is, therefore, not a common sense approach — as many unemployed people can attest. If I can be permitted to be so bold on this last page of my thesis, a serious return to understanding what worker competence means in real life workplaces through research, reparation and applied right action might be a necessary step. For instance, can the VET system, once sentenced, be rehabilitated? Might the detective recommend such an approach to the court where the initial culprit, language, might be saved and become a truly informed, passionate resistance worker loyal to the integrity of the VET profession?

Some comedians use a risqué, hard hitting pugilistic yet companionable approach to humour. Although, they make people uncomfortable as their jokes ring true, they make us question our own suppositions. One of these comedians, Reginald Hunter was reported to say on stage, "The more honest we are, the closer we become to fearlessness" (Culpin, 2013 blog). Like these comedians, this thesis could be considered serious humour.

…A group of friends, colleagues and co-workers meet one Friday afternoon for a well-earned ale. A large man raising his glass, clearly smiling as he says "A Salutation: To the return of common sense, clear language in Training Packages and worker development being considered crucial in competency assessment again."

"Here, here!" loudly resounds from the merry throng.

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Appendix 1 Comparison between Principles of Assessment wording

Training Pack Glossary	Standards for NVR RTOs
"Validity: one of the principles of assessment and also one of the rules of evidence. Assessment is valid when the process is sound and assesses what it claims to assess. Validity requires that: (a) assessment against the units of competency must cover the broad range of skills and knowledge that are essential to component performance; (b) assessment of knowledge and skills must be integrated with their practical application; and (c) judgement of competence must be based on sufficient evidence."	*Validity*: There are five major types of validity: face, content, criterion (i.e. predictive and concurrent), construct and consequential. In general, validity is concerned with the appropriateness of the inferences, use and consequences that result from the assessment. In simple terms, it is concerned with the extent to which an assessment decision about a candidate (e.g. competent/not yet competent, a grade and/or a mark), based on the evidence of performance by the candidate, is justified. It requires determining conditions that weaken the truthfulness of the decision, exploring alternative explanations for good or poor performance, and feeding them back into the assessment process to reduce errors when making inferences about competence. Unlike reliability, validity is not simply a property of the assessment tool. As such, an assessment tool designed for a particular purpose and target group may not necessarily lead to valid interpretations of performance and assessment decisions if the tool was used for a different purpose and/or target group
"Reliability: one of the principles of assessment. Reliability refers to the degree to which evidence presented for assessment is consistently interpreted and results in consistent assessment outcomes. Reliability requires the assessor to have the required competencies in assessment and relevant vocational competencies (or to assess in conjunction with someone who has the vocational competencies). It can only be achieved when assessors share a common interpretation of the assessment requirements of the unit(s) being assessed."	*Reliability:* There are five types of reliability: internal consistency; parallel forms; split-half; inter-rater; and, intra-rater. In general, reliability is an estimate of how accurate or precise the task is as a measurement instrument. Reliability is concerned with how much error is included in the evidence.
"Fairness: one of the principles of assessment. Fairness in assessment requires consideration of the individual candidate's needs and	*Fairness***:** Fairness requires consideration of the individual candidate's needs and characteristics, and any reasonable

characteristics, and any reasonable adjustments that need to be applied to take account of them. It requires clear, communication between the assessor and the candidate to ensure that the candidate is fully informed about, understands and is able to participate in the assessment process, and agrees that the process is appropriate. It also includes an opportunity for the person being assessed to challenge the result of the assessment and to be released if necessary."	adjustments that need to be applied to take account of them. It requires clear communication between the assessor and the candidate to ensure that the candidate is fully informed about, understands, and is able to participate in, the assessment process, and agrees that the process is appropriate. It also includes an opportunity for the person being assessed to challenge the result of the assessment and to be reassessed if necessary.
"Flexibility (assessment): one of the principles of assessment. To be flexible, assessment should: reflect the candidate's needs; provide for recognition of competencies no matter how, where or when they have been acquired; draw on a range of methods appropriate to the context, competency and the candidate; and support continuous competency development."	*Flexible*: To be flexible, assessment should reflect the candidate's needs; provide for recognition of competencies no matter how, where or when they have been acquired; draw on a range of methods appropriate to the context, competency and the candidate; and, support continuous competency development.
"Sufficiency: one of the principles of assessment and also one of the rules of evidence. Sufficiency relates to the quality and quantity of evidence assessed. It requires collection of enough appropriate evidence to ensure that all aspects of competency have been satisfied and that competency can be demonstrated repeatedly. The specific evidence requirements of each unit of competency provide advice on sufficiency."	

Original Sources: Composed by L Hazelwood from NQC Training Pack Glossary, V2 170320 and Standards for Registered Training Organisations, 2012

Appendix 2 Comparison between Rules of Evidence wording

Training Package Assessment Materials Kit	TAA04	Standards for NVR RTOs
Validity • Does the evidence relate to the unit competency? • Does the evidence relate to the four dimensions of competency? • Does the evidence address the key competencies?	*Valid,* for example: − Address the elements and Performance Criteria − Reflect the skills and knowledge described in the relevant unis of competency − Show application in the context described in the Range Statement − Demonstrate that performance, skills and knowledge are applied in real/simulated workplace situations	*Validity*: see Principles of assessment.
Sufficiency • Does the evidence cover the full range of performance identified in the unit of competency? • Does the evidence show competency over a period of time? • Does the evidence show competency in different contexts?	*Sufficient*, for example: − Demonstrate competence over a period of time − Demonstrate repeatable competence − Not inflate the language, literacy and numeracy requirements beyond those required in performing the work task/function	Sufficiency: Sufficiency relates to the quality and quantity of evidence assessed. It requires collection of enough appropriate evidence to ensure that all aspects of competency have been satisfied and that competency can be demonstrated repeatedly. Supplementary sources of evidence may be necessary. The specific evidence requirements of each unit of competency provide advice on sufficiency.

Authentic	_Authentic_, for example:	Authenticity:
• Is the evidence the candidate's own work? • Are the qualifications, references and licences presented by the candidate authentic documents?	– Be the work of the candidate – Be corroborated/verified	To accept evidence as authentic, an assessor must be assured that the evidence presented for assessment is the candidate's own work.
Current	_Current_, for example:	Currency:
• Does the evidence show that the candidate can apply the competency to current work?	– Demonstrate the candidate's current skills and knowledge – Comply with current standards	Currency relates to the age of the evidence presented by candidates to demonstrate that they are still competent. Competency requires demonstration of current performance, so the evidence must be from either the present or the very recent past.

Original Sources: Composed by L Hazelwood from Training Package Assessment Materials Kit, TAA04 and Standards for Registered Training Organisations, 2012

Appendix 3 Summary of Knowles' Andragogical Model

"The andragogical model is based on several assumptions that are different from those of the pedagogical model."

1. *The need to know*. Adults need to know why they learn something before undertaking to learn it. Tough (1979) found that when adults undertake to learn something on their own they will invest considerable energy in probing into the benefits they will gain from learning it and the negative consequences of not learning it… I am sure that I would have learned more …if the teachers had shown me how I would be able to use the learning in real life.

2. *The learners' self concept*. Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives. Once they have arrived at that self-concept they develop a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction. They resent and resist situations in which they feel others are imposing their wills on them. But this presents a serious problem to us in adult education: the minute they walk into an activity labelled "education" or "training" …they hark back to their conditioning …and say, "Teach me"… As we become aware of this problem, adult educators… [create] learning experiences …to make the transition from dependent to self-directing learners.

3. *The role of the learners' experience*. Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from youths… This difference in quantity and quality of experience has several consequences in adult education …in any group of adults there will be a wide range of individual differences …for many kinds of learning the richest resources for learning reside in the adult learners …we accumulate experience …we tend to develop habits, biases …that tend to cause us to close our minds to new ideas.

4. *Readiness to learn*. Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations… There are always ways to induce readiness through exposure to models of superior performance …and other techniques.

5. *Orientation to learning*. …adults are life-centred (or task-centred or problem-centred in their orientation to learning… devote energy to learn something to the extent that they perceive that it will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations… when they are presented in the context of application to real-life situations.

6. *Motivation*. While adults are responsive to some external motivators (better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, and the like), the most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like). Tough (1979) found in his research that all normal adults are motivated to keep growing and developing, but that this motivation is frequently blocked by such barriers as negative self-concept as a student, inaccessibility of opportunities or resources, time constraints, and programs that violate principles of adult learning. (pp.57-63)

Original Source: Composed by L Hazelwood from Knowles, M. (1990). The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species. pp57-63.

Appendix 4 Unit TAEASS403B Participate in assessment validation

Unit TAEASS403B Participate in assessment validation
Modification History

Version	Comments
TAEASS403B	Released with *TAE10 Training and Education Training Package version 2.0*

Unit Descriptor

This unit describes the performance outcomes, skills and knowledge required to participate in an assessment validation process.

Application of the Unit

This unit typically applies to those participating in assessment validation. It does not address leading the validation process.

Licensing/Regulatory Information

Not applicable.

Pre-Requisites

Not applicable.

Employability Skills Information

This unit contains employability skills.

Elements and Performance Criteria Pre-Content

ELEMENT	PERFORMANCE CRITERIA
Elements describe the essential outcomes of a unit of competency.	*Performance criteria describe the performance needed to demonstrate achievement of the element. Where bold italicised text is used, further information is detailed in the required skills and knowledge section and the range statement. Assessment of performance is to be consistent with the evidence guide.*

Elements and Performance Criteria

1. Prepare for validation	1.1 Discuss and confirm the approach to validation according to defined purposes, context, and relevant *assessment system policies and procedures*
	1.2 Analyse relevant *benchmarks for assessment* and agree on the evidence needed to demonstrate competence
	1.3 Arrange *materials* for *validation activities*
2. Contribute to validation process	2.1 Demonstrate active *participation* in validation sessions and activities using appropriate communication skills
	2.2 Participate in validation sessions and activities by applying the principles of assessment and rules of evidence
	2.3 Check all documents used in the validation process for accuracy and version control
3. Contribute to validation outcomes	3.1 Collectively discuss validation findings to support improvements in the quality of assessment
	3.2 Discuss, agree and record recommendations to improve assessment practice
	3.3 Implement changes to own assessment practice, arising from validation

Required Skills and Knowledge

This section describes the skills and knowledge required for this unit.

Required skills
- planning skills to participate in validation activities within agreed timeframes
- problem-solving skills to identify information that is inconsistent, ambiguous or contradictory
- evaluation skills to:
    - determine evidence requirements from competency standards
    - review assessment process, tools and methods
    - review collected evidence
- communication skills to share information in validation meetings.

Required knowledge
- how to interpret competency standards and other related assessment information to determine the evidence needed to demonstrate competence, including:
    - criterion-referenced assessment as distinct from norm-referenced assessment
    - various reasons for carrying out validation and the different approaches to validation that may be appropriate before, during and after assessment
    - critical aspects of validation, including validation of assessment processes, methods and products
    - relevant OHS legislation, codes of practice, standards and guidelines, impacting on assessment
    - legal and ethical requirements of assessors, particularly in relation to validation activities
    - principles of assessment
    - rules of evidence.

Evidence Guide

The evidence guide provides advice on assessment and must be read in conjunction with the performance criteria, required skills and knowledge, range statement and the Assessment Guidelines for the Training Package.

Overview of assessment	
Critical aspects for assessment and evidence required to demonstrate competency in this unit	Evidence of the ability to: • actively participate in a minimum of two validation sessions or meetings which, in combination, address the critical aspects of validation using different validation approaches and activities • clearly explain purposes of validation and the legal and ethical responsibilities of assessors • collate documentation relating to validation process in a logical manner • demonstrate communication and liaison with relevant people • provide feedback and interpret documentation in validation sessions • record contribution to validation findings.
Context of and specific resources for assessment	Evidence must be gathered in the workplace wherever possible. Where no workplace is available, a simulated workplace must be provided. Assessment must ensure access to: • assessment reports and records • other documentation relevant to validation.

Method of assessment	
Guidance information for assessment	

Range Statement

The range statement relates to the unit of competency as a whole. It allows for different work environments and situations that may affect performance. Bold italicised wording, if used in the performance criteria, is detailed below. Essential operating conditions that may be present with training and assessment (depending on the work situation, needs of the candidate, accessibility of the item, and local industry and regional contexts) may also be included.

Assessment system policies	• candidate selection

and procedures **may include:**	• rationale and purpose of competency-based assessment • assessment records, and data and information management • recognition of current competency, recognition of prior learning and credit arrangements • assessment reporting procedures • assessment appeals • candidate grievances and complaints • validation • evaluation and internal audit • costs and resourcing • access and equity, and reasonable adjustment • partnership arrangements • links with human resource or industrial relations system • links with overall quality management system.
Benchmarks for assessment:	• refers to criterion against which the candidate is assessed • maybe one or more units of competency or assessment criteria of course curricula.
Materials **may include:**	• assessment tools • samples of collected evidence • documentation outlining the basis of assessment decisions • reports and records of assessment decisions • samples of benchmarks of appropriate evidence • Assessment Guidelines of the relevant training packages • information from the evidence guide of the relevant units of competency.
Validation activities may include:	• analysing and reviewing: • assessment tools • collected evidence • assessment decisions and records of assessment outcomes • other aspects of assessment policies, processes and outcomes • recording evidence of validation processes and outcomes.
Participation may include comparison and evaluation of:	• assessment practices • assessment plans • interpretation of units of competency • assessment methods and instruments • assessment decisions • collected evidence.

Unit Sector(s)
   Assessment

Custom Content Section
   Not applicable.

Appendix 5 Different Unit, Element and Performance Criteria Definitions being used in 2012

Training Packages @Work* 2010 Definitions	National Quality Council V2.1 170310 Definitions (likely 2010)	TAE10 Definitions
Unit of Competency: is the specification of knowledge and skill, and the application of that knowledge and skill, to the standard of performance expected in the workplace. A unit of competency is the smallest unit that can be assessed and recognised.	Unit of Competency: the specifications of knowledge and skill, and the application of that knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace (p.19).	Units of Competency: Each unit of competency identifies a discrete workplace requirement and includes the knowledge and skills that underpin competency as well as language, literacy and numeracy; and occupational health and safety requirements. The units of competency must be adhered to in training and assessment to ensure consistency of outcomes (p.28).
Elements within a unit of competency describe the skill outcomes that contribute to a unit or what skills are required to perform the work activity.	Elements of a unit of competency that describe actions or outcomes which are demonstrable and assessable (p.7).	Elements of Competency: The elements of competency are basic building blocks of the unit of competency. They describe in terms of outcomes the significant functions and tasks that make up the competency (p.101).
Performance Criteria specify the required level of performance or what level of skill is needed.	Performance Criteria specify the standard to which elements must be achieved and reflect the applied knowledge that enables competent performance (p.13).	Performance Criteria: The performance criteria specify the required performance in the relevant tasks, roles, skills and in the applied knowledge that enables competent performance. They are usually written in passive voice. Critical terms or phrases may be written in bold italics and then defined in range statement in the order of their appearance in the performance criteria. (p.101)

Original Sources: Training Packages@ Work website from Google Search in February 2010, National Quality Council Training Package Glossary, V2.1 170310, undated and TAE10 Training Package, IBSA, 2010 was combined by L Hazelwood in 2012.

Appendix 6   Changing AQF Definitions

Term and year	Definition
Recognition of prior learning (RPL) in 1994	Determination, on an individual basis, of the competencies obtained by a learner through previous training, work experience and/or life experience and the advanced standing the learner is entitled to as a result of these competencies.
Recognition of prior learning in 1997	The recognition of skills and knowledge against course outcomes ie learning outcomes. RPL also involves the recognition of competencies held against relevant competency standards.
Recognition of prior learning in 2001	Recognition of Prior Learning means recognition of competencies currently held, regardless of how, when or where the learning occurred. Under the AQTF, competencies may be attained in a number of ways. This includes through any combination of formal or informal training and education, work experience or general life experience. In order to grant RPL, the assessor must be confident that the candidate is currently competent against the endorsed industry or enterprise competency standards or outcomes specified in AQTF accredited courses. The evidence may take a variety of forms and could include certification, references from past employers, testimonials from clients and work samples. The assessor must ensure that the evidence is authentic, valid, reliable, current and sufficient.
Recognition of prior learning in 2005	Recognition of prior learning means recognition of currencies currently held, regardless of how, when or where the learning occurred. RPL assesses the individuals prior learning to determine the extent to which that individual is currently competent against the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification.
Recognition of prior learning in 2007	An assessment process that assesses an individual's non-formal and informal learning to determine the extent to which that individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification.
Credit transfer in 1994	Advances standing obtained on the basis of prior agreements between institutions or organisations of the credit value of specific courses and programs. It is available automatically to those who have documented evidence of achievement in the relevant courses and programs.
Credit transfer in 1997	Credit towards qualifications granted to participants in training on the basis of assessing competency or course outcomes. These assessments are based on prior agreement between organisations of the credit value of specific courses and programs. Under a training packages approach, credit transfer relates primarily to evidence of achievement of relevant competencies.
Credit transfer in 2002	Credit transfer means the advanced standing obtained from prior agreements between institutions or organisations on the credit value of specific courses, units of competency or modules.
Credit transfer in 2005	Credit transfer means the assessment of the initial course or subject that the individual is using to claim access to, or the award of credit in, the destination course to determine the extent to which it is equivalent to the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes or standards in a qualification. This may include credit transfer based on formal learning that is outside the AQF.

Credit transfer in 2007	Credit transfer assesses the initial course or subject that an individual is using to claim access to, or the award of credit in, a destination course. The assessment determines the extent to which the client's initial course or subject is equivalent to the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards in a qualification. This may include credit transfer based on formal learning that is outside the AQF.
Mutual recognition in 1998	Mutual Recognition of training organisations, qualifications and training products is at the core of the ARF. This means that AQF qualifications and Statements of Attainment issued by one RTO will be accepted and recognised by all other RTOs.
Mutual recognition in 2001	Mutual recognition applies nationally and means: The recognition and acceptance of a RTO, of AQTF qualifications and Statements of Attainment issued by other RTOs, enabling individuals to receive national recognition of qualifications and statements of attainment.
National recognition in 2005	National recognition means the recognition and acceptance by an RTO of AQF qualifications and statements of attainments issued by other RTOs, enabling individuals to receive national recognition of qualifications and statements of attainment.
National recognition in 2007	Recognition by an RTO of the AQF qualifications and statements of attainment issued by all other RTOs, thereby enabling national recognition of the qualifications and statements issued to any person.

Original Source: Document handed to L Hazelwood and others in 2009 Tasmanian RPL Network Training Session by convenor at Campbell Town – Undated and source unknown.

Appendix 7   Observations from my research into missing competence

Development of workers

1. Competency is about doing tasks to required industry *performance standard* not Training Package competency standard– this makes sense.

2. Do we have the best approach to get the competency results we want? Are we measuring the correct outputs—qualifications do not reflect industry-required competency level at present?

3. Use of VET training in workplaces should be maximised for those who fail academically. Formalised VET pathways could be designed from Year 9 to 12.

4. Adult Learning Principles, use of the term Andragogy instead of VET Pedagogy, Dimensions of competency and Assessment and Workplace Training Competency Standards, both Rules of Assessment and Principles of Assessment all need to revert to old format and be overtly included—as they are the difference in VET sector—they identify 'standards' in development.

5. Terms Competent and Not Yet Competent need more emphasis–these crucial part is being lost.

6. Overt recognition of all the factors at play in continually providing a competent workforce—the Human Capital Management functions (education, training and development) must be included in trainer assessor training as this is only way to assist Australians business structures to maximise productivity.

7. Re-alignment and promotion of match between AQF and workforce performance levels – the AQF = Australian worker levels to gain a *VET qualification* was a good, easy-to-understand model that worked for business as the focus was on workplace skills not qualifications.

Units and Training Packages

1. Wording 'competencies' should not be replaced by 'learning outcomes' for *VET qualifications.*

2. Units/Tasks must be developed from watching and talking to 'expert' workers.

3. Employability Skills must not be lost or contained in Qualifications—they must be overt and assessed as personal attribute part of competence.

4. Units reflecting industry *performance standards* would be able to be used as tools for Performance Management by businesses.

5. Language needs to be consistent, meet its purpose, clear, credible and contextual.

6. Careful use of language in Units is important to show level of competence expected—suggest Blooms Taxonomy is made use of in Units and taught in trainer assessor Qualifications.

7. Overall Unit word usage needs to reflect *performance standard* levels required for particular tasks—lower level tasks simpler words.

8. Training Package processes are inefficient, wording is inconsistent, they are too complex. Focus must move back to be industry-driven rather than academically-driven.

VET system

1. A definition of competency that states must have a lengthy time in a workplace role is required.

2. There is a lot of commissioned research being reported on to Government bodies but not many recommendations and findings appear to be implemented. Which Department or body is leading the implementation of such changes to the VET system? Who is checking the implementation results?

3. Is the current VET leadership body DEEWR or DIICCSRTE or Prime Minister and Cabinet or COAG or some other group maybe?

4. Conflicts of interest of bodies reporting well to poorly written performance measures—who is evaluating results gained? Cross-checking is required.

5. With continual changes at the top, have we effectively lost a focus on employment and youth. Are there bodies and individuals who have been consistently used too often?

6. Language use in research papers (without explanation) is likely to be causing confusion or assumptions to be made. Could be a problem when making decisions if understanding is not checked first.

7. What outcomes are VET administration really looking to achieve–are they looking for educational achievements or workplace acumen? Clarity needed as currently only focussed on qualification numbers which does not work for industry, and the nation.

8. Two different VETs at moment– two tiers, qualification institute/training and workplace learning and development (linked to HR strategy). Getting two competency levels. To fix we could go to having Vocational Education and VET as two separate parts of Workforce Education, Training and Development instead—to keep the sector on track and results worth something.

9. Need for a lead body to keep other administration and language on track. To keep from straying off workforce ability focus again.

10. Re introduction of BSZ-type Assessment Guidelines in all Training Packages– Dimensions of Competency, Principles of Assessment, Rules of Assessment, Assessor Standards and so on as new wording is incorrect.

11. Need for a separate lead training package that shows everything required of trainers and assessors and all RTOs must use this in developing their strategies [can be on-line and a fee charged for ease of everyone]

12. Requiring people to gain Cert IV to teach when they have academic qualifications is silly but requiring these same people to gain Cert IV as base level to train in industry setting makes sense. All that is needed is to reinstate 2 diff areas as per 8 above. Cert IV is minimum to teach vocational programs of any sort. Professionalism in this area is sought and recognised as significant and equal to teaching so higher level VET people in industry settings need a Degree.

13. Assessment only pathway has always caused confusion and igning off someone as competent without enough industry experience needs to be stopped as it goes against new Work Safe Legislation. Replacing with two pathways a Learning and Assessment one or an RPL and Assessment one is a clearer distinction

Broader changes needed

1. Historical VET data is not complete and is held on websites that are being updated rather than archived so information is there one day and gone the next. It needs to be kept in public view.
2. Cultural bias towards academic learning should be challenged and corrected.
3. Not sure there actually are VET qualifications still?
4. As many interpretations of 'VET' and 'competency' and other words, it is time for new Glossary and after this no changes to definitions but use new words instead.
5. Need for career planning to be a government focus again as workforce strategies losing relevance.
6. VET system needs grass root practitioner as reviewers (will need to be paid to go on Boards as majority work casually—this is a general problem too for VET). Previous Network system could be re-established so in local area.
7. School-based apprenticeship connections in non-trade based areas could be better used to keep young people at school.
8. University courses to teach in areas such as Deign and Technology, Home Economics and Information Technology do not necessarily provide the required industry knowledge to teach VET. Do we know why this is?
9. What is VET? What is in the VET sector? This questions needs clarification in Australia.
10. The suspected inequality in legal standing between workplace trainers and institute trainers in relation to new Workplace Safety Laws.