Common discourses within Vocational Excellence: Building tomorrow’s superheroes

**Abstract**

Since 1950 WorldSkills International has been assessing the skills of competitors from around the globe in traditional vocational sectors from the construction industry to mechanical and the beauty business. Every member country has an expert in each industry area, and the countries convene every two years to test the skills of their trained young people against each other to find the very best young carpenters, hairstylists, plumbers, CAD designers, aeronautical engineers and automobile technologists in the world. In fact the list of vocational skills has grown immensely in the last 66 years and in October 2017 the first demonstration of 3D Digital Game Art as an international skill will occur in the Abu Dhabi WorldSkills International event. It is relatively easy to build a workforce of adaptable employees, but the WorldSkills competition has to build tomorrow’s superheroes to lead an ever changing economy reliant on skills excellence.

This new skill, 3D Digital Game Art, representing a rapidly expanding global industry, will bring with it some innovative methods and approach to training, testing and assessment which will hopefully give pause to some long established competitions. The conventional discourses in competition may not have to make way for newly introduced vocations – yet innovative discourse is inevitable and the conventional must use the opportunity to review process, language and approach based on the new. The new, therefore, should be as experimental as possible but with relevant deference to tradition to result in a new discourse that changes accepted ideas and pulls out-dated methods into a current and future forward thinking economy.

The skills we give to our young generation should not be what worked in the past, nor what is relevant now, but to readily prepare the next industry leaders for what the world will be in the next 30 years. The vocational sector will need to create new discourses that mediate between the old and the new and one way forward is to explore the needs and experiences of the students. The longer-term goal of this study is to study case material, standards, marking schemes and criteria to produce a clear narrative for each sector, before scrutinising the data for differences and commonalities that could be used to determine a common starting point for discussing the education sector’s approach to excellence in these fields and, I assert, any field. However, in this paper, the focus will be on the case study material, the autobiographic accounts of the students who seek practical careers, particularly those within the 3D Digital Game Art, Plumbing, CAD and Beauty Therapy sectors. Their stories are of interest as individual accounts and collectively for the commonalities that can be found among them. Taken together these accounts will enable the development of new learning discourses appropriate for 21st century living.