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People, Partnerships and Pedagogies

Can micro-credentials serve the needs of diverse people through deeper partnerships and digital pedagogy?

Caroline Steel[1], Dominique Parrish[2], Chris Campbell[3], and Claire Walters[4]
[1]Anthology, [2]Torrens University, [3]Charles Sturt University, [4]Auckland University

In recent years, we have seen the 'rise of the micro-credential movement' (Brown, McGreal & Peters, 2023) From a people perspective, they promise more flexible and wider access to learning that can be more easily interwoven through people's life and work demands. They can offer more choices around the duration, pace, focus and purpose of learning. Further, micro-credentials can be used as a pathway into or through a macro-credential and showcase employability skills gained in and beyond formal learning environments. Growing global narratives around micro-credentials suggest they can potentially solve a multitude of challenges that have long been constrained by traditional education models. This interactive symposium offers an opportunity to explore the emerging potential of micro-credentials with consideration to diverse people, deeper partnerships and digital pedagogies. Using these foci, this symposium will facilitate engaging discussion and examination of this new and evolving topic.

Keywords: Micro-credentials; tertiary education; digital pedagogies; lifelong learning

The Emerging Potential of Micro-Credentials

Micro-credential pathways can offer social inclusion and access to postsecondary education and to communities that have been underserved including low-income, disadvantaged learners, workers and older citizens (Kato & Gyorfi, 2023: Lindsey, Riley Bahr, Nguyen et al., 2023). From a career resilience, employability and lifelong learning perspective, people can potentially use micro-credentials to reskill, upskill and to validate prior learning and experiences. This focus on employability and lifelong learning is set in the combined contexts of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Schwab, 2017) and post pandemic, where immense changes to business models and societies, influenced by technology acceleration, have catalysed the emergence of new in-demand skills and capabilities. Partnerships are key to ensuring micro-credentials are valuable and fit-for-purpose. And whether micro-credentials are offered online, face-to-face or in hybrid modalities, there is a distinctly 'digital' influence to the pedagogical decisions that determine the experience, uptake and impact of these shorter forms of learning.

Diverse people: Rethinking our purpose and the learner in the context of micro-credentialing

To realise the promise of micro-credentials, it is critical that tertiary providers have an attuned sense of both their strategic purpose and the nature of their learner as they embark on innovating traditional education models. Under this pillar we seek to unpack the range of reasons why tertiary institutions may be motivated to offer micro-credentials and the diversity of learners they can serve in the process.

The opportunity to access new student markets and generate additional revenue streams has fueled many institutions' initial interest in micro-credential development. However, as Brown et al. (2023) posit, the range of potential strategic drivers is much broader, extending to employability, responsiveness to industry, equity and accessibility among others. As important precursors to becoming more learner-centric in our educational design and delivery, three key questions will be explored with panel participants.

Deeper partnerships: Explore, develop and transform

The importance of deeper partnerships is not to be under-valued. Given the expectation that the future world of work will be volatile and rapidly evolving, industry partnerships and collaborations that provide insights into the skills and knowledge graduates and employees will need to keep abreast of these rapid developments are critical in the design of micro-credentials (Reynoldson, 2022). While higher education providers are acknowledged as key players in the delivery of quality micro-credentials, partnerships with stakeholders such as industry are critical for determining appropriate content that should be delivered by micro-credential learning (Moodie & Wheelahan, 2022). Underpinning this role of partners is the premise that micro-credentials have the potential to augment formal learning and offer individuals a means of elevating among other things their employability prospects.

Digital Pedagogies: Designing as fit-for-purpose for all

While the just in time nature of learning when completing a micro-credential appeals to many students, this means that they are often taught online, in either a synchronous or asynchronous way. However, it might be that some learners benefit from face-to-face interactions during the subject. Thus, micro-credentials that are hybrid may enhance the learner experience. This section of the panel will focus on the best pedagogical practices for micro-credentials online and in a hybrid nature. Standards such as the ASCILITE Technology Enhanced Learning Accreditation Standards (TELAS) can also inform best practice in digital pedagogies and ensure students have an enhanced learning experience when undertaking a micro-credential. This leads us to ask how do we design in ways that are pedagogically fit-for-purpose?

Symposia Questions/Format

The focus of the symposium will be introduced and then there will be a discussion for each of the themes.This symposia will offer the following questions for debate under these themes.

Diverse people:
- What is your purpose in developing micro-credentials?
- Who are the diverse people you are intending to serve?
- What do we know about their needs?

Deeper partnerships:
- What differentiates partnerships from stakeholder engagement?
- How can organisations leverage micro-credential partnerships?

Digital pedagogies:
- How do we design in ways that are pedagogically fit-for-purpose?

Expected outcomes include a discussion to move the field forward with the focus of the above questions. We expect to publish a blog post after the conference to allow all to engage with the session later on..

Panel Members

The four panel members are working in the area of micro-credentials and bring together a wealth of experience in the field.
- Dr Caroline Steel: Principal Strategic Consultant, Anthology Inc
- Professor Dominique Parrish: Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic, Torrens University Australia
- Associate Professor Chris Campbell: Sub Dean (Learning Technology), Division of Learning and Teaching, Charles Sturt University
- Claire Walters: Portfolio Manager, Professional Development, Auckland Online, The University of Auckland

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