Skilling for economic, environmental and social sustainability: Building 'integrated global educator' capacity in the VET workforce

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This paper considers VET workforce skills relative to current challenges of human security and sustainability. It suggests that the existing 'delivery' model of training downplays the human dimensions of VET in ways that undercut the capacity of VET to meet current demand for skill-building. A solution to this problem is explored by (a) documenting the kinds of skills required in globally networked VET through the experience of CROSSLIFE, a European-funded project that supported VET professional development in lifelong learning and work; and (b) reviewing research on VET practice and the changing character of VET practitioners. The skills required by 'integrated global educators' are proposed as a means of focusing a reprofessionalisation agenda in VET.

Today the world faces three major crises. The global financial crisis, climate change and Building skills, underpinning knowledge and understandings that inform action is critical in addressing these challenges. Yet the capacity of the VET workforce to address this necessary skill building has been compromised in recent years by the institutionalisation of a 'delivery model' of VET. Building skills for sustainable human societies requires urgent attention to the skills of the VET workforce.

This paper considers the kind of skills that might enable the VET workforce to address the challenges of human security and sustainability. It is a contribution to the urgent debate about the role of education and training in mitigating the impact of convergent global crises. I begin by elaborating the problem of skill-building for human sustainability and the challenges in realising this skill-building capacity in the current context. I suggest that the VET workforce requires a broader skill base to address these challenges. I then elaborate a case for reprofessionalisation. I firstly draw out limitations in the current delivery-model of training. Next I indicate the complex skills involved in

supporting learning by describing a specific professional education initiative, the EU funded CROSSLIFE project, which aimed to build skills required by global VET professionals. Finally, I draw on research documenting the emerging capacities of VET practitioners as a basis for developing a specification of skills required for professional renewal in VET.

Convergent crises and a crisis of VET capacity

At the United Nations Climate Conference in Copenhagen, the worldís leading scientists have drawn attention to the interactive effects of climate change, economic and social development and human security. Increase in average temperatures of up to six degrees by the end of the century is becoming an increasing possibility. It would mean massive rises in sea level, extreme weather and loss of human habitat. These changes would force billions of people to leave their homelands and create intense social conflict over space and resources (Age, 14/3/09).

At the DEEWR Big Skills Conference in Sydney, stakeholders considered the contribution of VET in addressing these interconnected crises. Deputy Prime Minister, Honorable Julia Gillard (2009) praised Australia's 'world class VET system' but stressed that 'relentless technological, economic and social change' was 'narrowing the gap between 'pure' knowledge and vocational skills. With growing demand for 'higher levels of knowledge and skills' in almost every industry, new employment opportunities in 'green-collar industries' and service work, and the world financial crisis, 'training and retraining will be an essential part of Australia's economic recovery'.

There is urgency in these convergent crises and their demand for higher-level and green skill-building. The challenge lies not only in addressing economic imperatives but also in developing individual and collective capacities to deal with the destructive effects of social exclusion compounded by escalating involuntary mobility. These priorities mean that skill-building in VET involves more than the development of technical skills necessary for specific jobs and industries. It also requires the development of soft skills, which enable communication, cross-cultural engagement and working together, and

values that grasp the need for agency, innovation and collective commitment to human security and care in a globally interconnected world.

Yet in 2009 the capacity of Australian VET to respond to these challenges is compromised by the institutionalization of a delivery model of training. As I have argued elsewhere (Seddon, 2008 a;b), the reform of VET in Australia since the 1990s has created a strong system with significant benefits for industry and individuals, but there are significant coordination challenges which undercut the capacity of the VET workforce to respond to urgent skill-building demands.

This compromised workforce capacity within VET is now being called to action by politicians, industry and citizen communities. The demand for skill building that addresses the converging economic, environmental and social crises of our times creates an opportunity to re-recognise the contribution that the VET workforce makes to human security and sustainability. This kind of reprofessionalisation can build on what is good in VET and also consider the way the context of VET, the codified and tacit institutional rules that govern VET practice, can be reconfigured to meet this challenge. Rethinking the delivery model of training provides a way into this agenda.

The limitations of 'delivery' in training

The idea of training 'delivery' has developed because training reform has been designed using an economic methodology. This framing represents training as a 'market', an institutional mechanism that supplies skills to those (industry, communities including the nation, and individuals) who invest in skills. Buyers and sellers come together to transact skills. The providers supply skills to meet the specifications of users. Yet this is a market that has prioritised service to industry users over individual and community users. It has operated on price signals (how much does training cost) rather than on quality signals (How good is this training? How do I value it relative to my needs? What values or 'goods' does this training offer?). It has privileged economic efficiency (return on investment) over educational ethics (Seddon, 2009).

This economic view downplays the way market mechanisms are always embedded in social and cultural contexts. It abstracts individual actors from the relationships, communities and cultures that make human agency possible. Yet these contexts enable and disable individual and collective capacities for action because of the way institutional rules develop to govern human behaviour. These institutional rules exist in two forms, as codified rules (eg. laws, regulations, principles) that are developed through rational decision-making processes, and as community-based conventions and norms that develop as people live together and are evident as tacit ways of living within communities.

It is these codified and tacit institutional rules, which are made through social and cultural processes, that shape the way the training market works. Economic methodologies systematically simplify these human dimensions of institutional arrangements through their neglect of contexts. Consequently the economic view of training as 'delivery' does not adequately acknowledge the human dimensions of skill-building.

Yet skills are always embodied by people who are embedded in communities and cultures. Skilled recruits for industry are people who have committed to learning that is relevant to particular communities of practice (industries, occupations, disciplines and cultural understandings). They have engaged in the appropriation of knowledge, skills and understandings so that they become skilled people who demonstrate educated performance. They do not just receive learning, like a letter delivered by a postman, but must wrestle with the complexities of practice, norms and ideas in order to be recognized and accepted as 'one of us' within the preferred community of practice. This process of learning is not a smooth or simple pathway but a road made up of rocks and hurdles as well as flowers.

The neglect of the human dimension in skill-delivery extends to the VET workforce. This term 'workforce' suggests the work of VET is done by an aggregated collection of individuals, with no particular social and cultural characteristics, no values, no social

commitments. This is a representation of ant-like functionaries who do training delivery. There is little acknowledgment that this work requires VET practitioners to support, enable, coordinate, organise and strategically plan VET learning as a collective human capacity that must be ready to serve future needs. There is almost no recognition that processes of learning are supported through both processes of 'socialization', which inducts individuals into the norms of a particular community of practice (eg. sitting next to Nellie), and 'education' through which learners negotiate their relationship to specific and more generalized communities of practice.

The economic view of individuals who relate to one another through market transactions fails to recognise that learners and the VET workforce are communities of practice. VET practitioners are an occupational community made up different job families (eg. teacher, administrator, manager, student support staff, librarians, decision-makers) that coalesce around a particular vocational stream (vocational education) and embody particular value propositions that are realized in everyday work practices (Buchanan, 2006). What is 'good' in VET is a consequence of the moral commitments within this occupational community and the way they are realized through the educated performance of these skilled workers within VET.

These limitations in institutional design mean that Australian VET has limited capacity to meet the challenges that we now face in the Australian part of a globally interconnected world. The delivery model of training has privileged socialization at the expense of education; encouraged learning that focuses on current skill-needs rather than developing the capacities for learning, researching and problem-solving that enable innovation; and institutionalized the industry trainer, a socialization expert, as the practitioner norm in VET.

These limitations in the delivery model of training are evident in most VET learning spaces. I illustrate this with reference to a particular project that aimed to support VET professional development to meet the challenges of VET in a globally interconnected world.

Acknowledging the human dimension in learning

CROSSLIFE (2009) was a EU-funded curriculum development project based on a 6-university partnership (Monash, Tampere Finland, Institute of Education London, Malta, DPU Copenhagen and Zurich). This cross-national character models the challenges facing VET today, with expectations about working globally and locally in networks, multi-agency decision-making and dealing with cultural complexities in all aspects of work and learning. In this way the project provides first hand evidence of the skills required to realize skill-building in a globally connected world.

The aim of the CROSSLIFE project was to design a study program, preparing VET practitioners for work in complex global-local professional networks and multi-agency decision-making contexts that are now characteristic features of VET on a global scale. This program design extended the old idea of 'academic apprenticeship' as a way of developing qualitatively new expertise relevant to globally connected VET practice. It was organised as a 5-step learning pathway that supplemented Masters and Doctoral research studies. Our 'students' were VET professionals recruited through the 6 universities who wished to develop their expertise in cross-cultural collaboration in education and work.

Students and tutors worked together in cross-cultural learning environments (face to face cross-national workshops and technologically mediated global communications). Participants were introduced to theories, empirical studies and interdisciplinary approaches that underpin research and professional expertise relevant to lifelong learning. They also engaged in experiential and reflective learning activities that developed their cultural understandings and awareness in cross-cultural contexts. Through these processes they learned more about globalisation and movements of peoples and ideas in education and work, developed research-based expertise and skills in cross-cultural collaborations, and considered the implications of these changing contexts of work and learning for their own practice within VET.

This approach to content and process learning built competence and capacities that enhanced student's professional and research expertise and practices in multi-lingual and multi-cultural collaborations and networks. The methodology encouraged dialogue and knowledge sharing that recognised the way participants were embedded within contexts, cultures and knowledge traditions. This cooperative approach built on the personal and professional knowledge that students brought to their work as well as the academic knowledge of university-based staff. It modelled the kind of critical respect and trust that sustains productive global relationships.

Boundary-crossing and working in ambiguous boundary zones were fundamental to both the study program and the work of the planning team. This meant that everyone found themselves engaged in new and challenging relationship work. The human dimension was critical. The way people conducted themselves in these culturally ambiguous settings was the make or break factor that made the difference in terms of project outcomes.

At the three workshops (London, Finland and Malta) students worked across national, occupational and discipline boundaries. These activities revealed the culturally embedded knowledge and practices of lifelong learning and work within the host country and also problematised the taken-for-granted national assumptions and expectations of participants from other countries. These dissonances prompted questions, discussion, reflection and knowledge-building within each workshop. In this way, the workshops supported experiential learning, critical reflective inquiry and theory-building related to global lifelong learning and work, cross-cultural communication and collaboration. These learning processes modelled ways of working as a cross-disciplinary and cross-national team.

The use of advanced communication technologies mediated this work at every stage and supported further boundary-crossing. ICTs served as means of communication, record keeping and as repository that was accessible over space and time. Students and tutors learned to work with technology, understand delegations between people and machines,
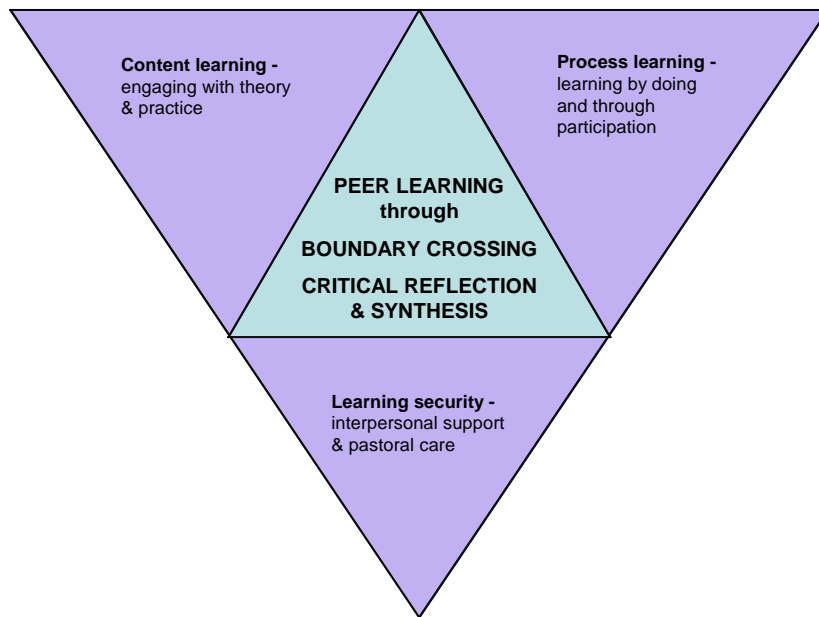
and develop new ways of using ICTs in project work and research. The storage of electronic records also made CROSSLIFE activities available for subsequent collaborative reflection, research, teaching and public communications.

Learning security was a critical precondition in this curriculum design. Students were being asked to work beyond their comfort zone and take risks as they engaged in boundary crossing and peer relationships across cultural differences and hierarchies. They had to feel secure in order to engage productively in the learning pathway. Pastoral care and emotional labour ensured a supportive learning culture and encouraged supportive social relationships.

CROSSLIFE's integrated learning design linked content and process learning with learning security (See Figure 1). By nesting learning activities in supportive collaborative student-tutor relationships, students benefited from the expertise of both university-based staff and students, but were also endorsed as 'knowers' with professional knowledge and research competence. They were empowered to ask questions, investigate and build knowledge within rigorous but respectful relationships.

In this way learning to know and do cross-cultural work became a process of learning to be a VET researcher-professional with the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed in globally networked times. As one European VET participant said in a workshop evaluation, 'I did not learn what I expected (theoretical knowledge) but I learned more than expected in terms of insight in academic work, project making, cross-cultural interaction, group processes, as well as capability of working in this setting myself'.

Figure 1: The CROSSLIFE approach to integrated boundary-crossing learning

Content learning -
engaging with theory
& practice

Process learning -
learning by doing
and through
participation

**PEER LEARNING
through**

BOUNDARY CROSSING

**CRITICAL REFLECTION
& SYNTHESIS**

Learning security -
interpersonal support
& pastoral care

The success of the program depended fundamentally on the negotiation of human relationships, through dialogue, negotiation of meaning and relationships, and care. While skills were 'delivered' and transacted within the program, the personal and pastoral dimensions made the difference between successful learning outcomes and conflicted breakdown in relationships and activities (Kraus and Sultana, 2008).

The process of developing and implementing the CROSSLIFE learning pathway provided first hand experience of multi-scalar and cross-cultural network organization. It confirmed the importance of skills in culturally sensitive partnership work, decision-making and explicit governance, and diplomacy alongside emotional labour and care within professional relations.

Towards professional renewal in VET

If human societies are to ameliorate convergent economic, environmental and social crises, we need to build skills in working and learning together across cultural differences, as well as green skills. Such skill-building requires a global teaching

workforce that has the knowledge, skills and understandings necessary to support adult learning in changing and culturally ambiguous contexts, like CROSSLIFE. This kind of socializing and educational work requires much greater recognition of the human dimension than is currently acknowledged in the delivery model of training.

A broader skills-base within the VET workforce can build on the existing 'industry trainer' model's endorsement of lower-level teaching skills to support socialization. Extending cross-cultural competence and capacity amongst VET practitioners enables the development of higher-level teaching skills that support education for innovative problem solving in changing contexts. I suggest elements of this reprofessionalisation agenda under three headings: distinctive features of VET practice, key skills in VET practice, and processes of professional renewal.

Distinctive features of VET practice

VET makes a distinctive contribution to human security and sustainability. The Bradley Review recognizes this point. Compared to universities, VET supports broad-based access and participation in learning and high-levels of user satisfaction. This highlights the importance of VET learning cultures in skill-building and social inclusion.

VET learning cultures are an outcome of VET practice. Vocational education workers make these learning spaces and cultures through their everyday work. The capacity and capability of VET is anchored in specific teaching expertise that has developed in response to the imperatives shaping VET core business (Harris, Clayton and Chappell, 2008; Seddon, 2008a;b). I call this 'Applied Adult Education' expertise, following the terminology coined by pioneer VET practitioners who developed their specific skills as a result of historic public investment in VET and the transition from centralised to market training provision (Sefton, Waterhouse, & Deakin, 1994).

Applied adult education expertise distinguishes VET practice from teaching and learning in other education sectors in Australia. Its practices of teaching, organisational

coordination and stakeholder engagement support VET core business. Sefton *et al* (1994) describe this 'integrated training' in terms of:

- Working in mixed teams, including teachers, trainers and [industry] stakeholders, to develop 'sophisticated understandings and strategies' which support work-related and 'workplace learning and change processes'.
- Teaching that is 'active, experiential and inquiry or project based, linking theory to practice and promoting holistic' learner development and competence.
- Using partnership work to build learning cultures that 'model the principles, processes and practices' which learners are encourage to use in workplaces.
- Contextualising programs/projects so they are 'directly relevant to, and based upon the real world requirements' of each learner's 'particular workplace context and requirements'.

This VET practice mobilises applied adult education expertise in a wide range of relationship work - with learners, colleagues, and wider VET stakeholders. When generalized in this way, it distinguishes the work of 'intermediaries' who navigate and mediate between communities in sophisticated cross-cultural communications and collaborations. It is particularly significant skill today, in global training markets where higher skill levels are required to mediate substantial cultural differences in ways that realise productive outcomes.

New skills in VET practice

The development of applied adult education expertise has been documented in a range of research. Early studies of market reforms in VET highlighted the way staff in TAFE Institutes had to reconfigure their teaching and organizational practices as competition increased and Institutes moved into commercial work to supplement their public sector funding (Seddon, 2000; Seddon & Brown, 1997). Chappell (2001: 11) captured important shifts in VET practitioner identity, noting that:

> … the new VET professional must in some senses not only be capable of spanning the cultural divide that distinguishes the world of work from the world of education but also that which distinguishes the world of private enterprise from the world of public service. This requires them to negotiate different values, norms and modes of conduct than those currently found in either the public or private sector. How this might be achieved may well be the greatest challenge in the development of the new VET professional.

The term 'new VET practitioner' describes a new kind of demand-driven educational-organisational worker in VET (Mitchell, 2009). Such practitioners are responsive to the demands of industry and communities. They combine teacherly values and concerns about teaching techniques, learning materials and assessment strategies, with the values and concerns of VET business managers. These concerns related to customer service, client needs and building relationships that support business practice and organizational sustainability.

Mitchell (2009) suggests it is this merging of educational and business thinking that creates distinctive VET learning cultures. When the boundary between the educational and organizational dimensions of VET practice shifts, practitioners develop sophisticated skills in listening and communicating across cultural boundaries. They build stronger relationships between education, industry and communities, and customise programs to suit enterprises and individuals.

However continuing institutional change required these new VET practitioners to engage in practical innovation as well as continuous improvement. These trends prompted Mitchell to coin the term 'advanced VET practitioners' to described the superior skills that some practitioners developed. The advanced VET practitioner has 'extraordinary capabilities' for building client relationships, ensuring customer responsiveness and supporting flexible delivery (Mitchell, 2009: 25). He notes:

> VET practitioners range from novices to very experienced, they continue to learn

from a range of different experiences such as on-the-job cases and off-the-job and from their relationships with peers, learners and clients, and their practice changes and deepens, including their approaches and standards, over their career. Like the master artisans of previous ages, advanced VET practitioners take to higher levels than their peers their work-related learning, skills, performance and impact (p. 13).

This categorization of VET practitioners captures important features of the shifting context, content and complexity of skills required within contemporary VET. Yet it doesn't capture the full range of skills required today because it over-emphasises demand-driven teaching within a single spatial scale as the core-business of VET. It acknowledges developments in Australian VET but downplays cultural diversity and its implications for teaching, business practices and governance within complex networks. A broader conceptualization that considers VET within globally interconnected industry, labour market and education systems begins to reveal the skills required by 'integrated global educators'.

Skills required by integrated global educators

The idea of new and advanced VET practitioners captures the way demand-driven VET reform has encouraged boundary crossing through commercial relationships in Australian VET practice. The 'integrated global educator' does all this, at both low and high-levels of skill, but also extends the range of skills embodied in their work.

This practitioner is not locked specifically into VET but reaches out from this location to access resources and relationships in other social spaces. They consciously engage in networked relationships and partnership work at many scales. They work globally and locally, paying attention to system interfaces and the importance of internal and external relations in strategic development, succession and sustainability, and the competitive edge that underpins innovation capacity.

Being conscious of themselves in time and space, as a located node within networked organization, encourages the integrated global educator to be explicit about value-propositions – the distinctive 'good' that they embody in market relationships, decision-making activities and in their community commitments. They are alert to the importance of building knowledge and managing information to convey this good within the network.

Integrated global educator engage in partnership work that combines high levels of emotional labour, interpersonal respect and care, and ethical practice in contexts of ambiguity (Seddon et al., 2008). Good practice is not just about learning or business outcomes but is judged against multiple criteria of success:

- Process outcomes: working more closely with partners, sharing information and staff resources, financial collaboration via pooled funding of activity;
- Governance outcomes: development of a collective vision and agreed strategy, widening the range of interests involved in local decision-making, creating a stronger local voice, projecting specific value-proposition, standing for something, encouraging commitment, improving the perceived legitimacy of local governance, exercising more effective influence locally and nationally; and
- Service outcomes: areas of progress in service improvement, delivering services that conform to local community strategic plans, better meeting local community needs.

This structure of skills that extends new VET practitioner integrated educational-business thinking is suggested in Table 1.

Table 1: Skill requirements: from traditional VET to integrated global educator

	Traditional VET	New-advanced VET practitioner	Integrated global educator	
Skill eras	Formalised education-business division of labour	Integrated educational and business skills	Multi-agency and multi-scalar global-local partnership work	
Character of skills (evident at high and low skill levels)	Educational skills Vs Business skills	Teaching skills	Cross-cultural teaching skills & learning support	
			Intercultural communication and partnership work	
		Customer responsiveness	Knowledge building, information management and research	
		Client relationships	Organisational development and HRD	
			Multi-agency decision-making and governance	

Toward professional renewal in VET.

The 'industry-training workforce' that is currently institutionalized in Australian VET includes many individuals with sophisticated vocational education skills. They embody 'applied adult education' expertise that underpins teaching, organizational and collaborative VET practice and gives VET its distinctive learning culture.

Yet these practitioner skills are poorly recognized, rewarded or mobilized in current VET regulatory and pricing structures. Their supply is increasingly problematic as a consequence of demographic aging, dispersion of workforce expertise due to the terms and conditions of VET work, and systemic failure to invest in VET workforce skills. This is symbolized by the institutionalization of a Certificate IV as the necessary qualification for teaching in VET.

These arrangements render sophisticated VET expertise relatively invisible within vocational education. As an unacknowledged and unmanaged resource, its sustainability is becoming questionable just as demand for sophisticated applied adult education expertise increases. In this context, professional renewal becomes urgent.

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