

Management of knowledge in transnational VET: diversity of practice in three transnational models

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Abstract

This paper draws on a two-year research project aimed at addressing the issue of the mechanisms, strategies and tools employed to enable Australian VET 'know-how' to be responsive to host contexts' needs or the needs of a specific group of individuals in a non-Australian context. It focuses on the transfer of the Australian VET regulatory arrangements into non-Australian contexts and follows the adaptation of Australian regulations when they are used in the skill formation processes in the host contexts through different mechanisms. Three models are introduced upon three different case studies to explain the interactive roles of the parties involved in each model. The cases include a Chongqing-AUSAID project in China, a partnership VET project in the Middle-East, and a training project in a mining site in Laos.

The transnational dimension of the transfer mechanisms of the Australian VET approaches are discussed in this study according to the theories of globalization of business regulatory arrangements and the management of knowledge in transnational transfer. Some different aspects of the mechanisms that are used for the transnational transfer of the Australian VET knowledge are studied and used as a foundation for classification of transnational Australian activities under these three suggested models.

Data for this research was collected between 2008 to 2010 from interviews with project managers and educators involved in these projects. On the basis of the empirical data analysed in each model, a classification of transnational activities is proposed according to six dimensions of transfer activity: mechanism; drivers; key actors; purpose; context and outcomes. The findings of this paper would be of value to VET workers and project managers who are involved in transnational projects, and also to scholars in the field of transnational education.

Introduction

Knowledge, in multiple forms including skill, regulation, and technical know-how has become a most critical resource in the era of globalization (Bresman *et al.*, 1999), flowing in a worldwide pattern as a part of the circuit of capital (Thrift, 2005; Sharma, 2008). In recent years, Australian VET providers, through their transnational activities, are positioning themselves on this global circuit of knowledge and capital. They co-operate with each other and also establish partnerships with non-Australian (host-country) educational providers, and some industries and enterprises in host countries in different combinations.

Between 2003 and 2006, offshore VET programs were conducted by a broad range of Australian public and private¹ providers in different developing markets across 42 different countries (DEEWR, 2008). According to DEEWR (2008), 349 qualifications in 2006 and 325 qualifications in 2005 were delivered in foreign jurisdictions by Australian public providers. 'In 2006, 90.3% of students were

¹ Data is not available for offshore activities of private providers.

enrolled in courses that led to a qualification recognised under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)' (DEEWR, 2008, p.13). Host country teachers, rather than Australian expatriates, taught 76.8% of the qualifications in the country of delivery: that is, of a total of 349 Australian National Training Package qualifications delivered offshore, 268 were delivered entirely within a host country context.

The focus of this paper is the way in which the primary regulatory mechanism of the Australian VET system crosses jurisdictional borders to play a role in the transfer of knowledge from the Australian VET system into a foreign jurisdiction. Classifying these transnational activities as different models, and clarifying the characteristics of each model, will assist project managers and institutions to design, identify human resource needs and implement transnational VET projects. The following research questions are addressed by this paper: *What different mechanisms are employed to transfer Au-VET knowledge? What different actors operate? What are the scope and the main characteristics of each model?*

Theoretical Framework

This study is framed around two linked phenomena: *globalisation* and *the growth of transnational VET*. It brings a multidisciplinary approach to what might appear at first to be solely an international education study, but which in fact spills over into multiple domains: the political economy of international aid, globalisation, knowledge management and international trade. The concept of *globalisation*, specifically *globalisation of regulatory arrangements* is employed to analyse the transfer of Australian VET knowledge and practice at a macro-level and to name and classify these transfers. The *transnational transfer of knowledge* in globalising capitalism provides a frame for seeing Australian VET knowledge through a new perspective and understanding 'how' the transfer of regulatory arrangements takes place.

Globalisation is a multidimensional process of, on the one hand, *breaking down borders and de-spatialising*, and, on the other, *compacting and forming new links* (Tetzlaff, 1998). This unitary process is increasing transnational movement of capital, goods, knowledge and people. The era of globalisation has brought with it concomitant implications for knowledge, education and learning. Indeed, 'The cultural circuit of capital allows the knowledges of very different situations to circulate much more freely and rapidly and to have a much greater say than previously within a space which is precisely tailored to that circulation, consisting of numerous sites and specialised route ways' (Thrift, 2005, p.94).

As Bloom (2004, p.71) notes, globalisation, 'then is increasing the importance of education'. As globalising economies and markets shift from manual to knowledge-intensive economic activities, globalisation fosters new skill formation needs. Nations are now recognising the need to reshape their educational and training systems to meet demands of industries for more complex and higher level skills. At the same time individuals facing the complex new conditions imposed by economic change are looking to the expanded training options offered by the new markets to improve their life chances. In this way globalisation is driving system reform and changes in individual choice of job and career. This multidimensional impact on skill formation is a feature of the knowledge transfer classification proposed in this paper.

Braithwaite and Drahos (2000, pp.15-26) conceptualise the process of globalization of regulatory frameworks in terms of the relationship between three concepts: *principles, mechanisms* and *actors*. Through their analysis of cases of globalisation they conclude that globalisation of regulation always involves more than a single process or mechanism (Braithwaite & Drahos, 2000, p.13).

Along with money (international investment) and technology, knowledge, particularly in the form of organisational principles and practice, is a critical resource driving globalisation (Bresman *et al.*, 1999, p.440). However, multiple mechanisms are needed to facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge between firms, groups and individuals in different regulatory environments (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1997; Kostova, 1999). Kostova identifies factors operating at three levels of *country, organization, and individual*, and develops a model which recognises that knowledge transfers are embedded in social, organisational and relational transactions. The differences to be transacted are identified as '*institutional characteristics, organizational practices that reflect the institutional environment of their origin's country context, and finally, the problem of "not fitting" the transnationally transferred practices with a new institutional environment*' (Kostova, 1999).

Using Braithwaite and Drahos' analyses and Thrift's proposition, the international growth of Australian VET is regarded in this study as a prime example of the circulation of regulatory knowledge designed for one jurisdiction to different jurisdictions. This circulation of regulatory knowledge is facilitated by government sponsored projects, international financial and aid agency support, international company skill needs and VET organisations' pursuit of international business. Kostova's theoretical model for the transnational transfer of organisational practices is used to throw light on the multilevel dimensions of the transfer.

Research method

A qualitative method was adopted in this research for two reasons. First, it has not been possible to access large, standardised data sets as much of the knowledge and understanding about the phenomena under investigation is emergent and being drawn from multiple domains of social, economic and cultural activity. Secondly, a case study approach was essential in order to investigate *what* was being transferred and *how* the conditions of the transfer affected the implementation of Australian VET in non-Australian jurisdictions. The analytical focus of each case in this study is at the stage when the highest interaction for transfer of Australian knowledge and practice takes place. In the first case the focus is on *project implementation*. In the second and third case studies the focus is on *provision of training services*. Nine interviews were conducted with project managers and educators involved in the selected projects, and annual reports, offshore project documentation and published reports from a range of sources were also analysed.

Regulation of the Australian VET system

The current Australian VET system is considered one of the most advanced in the world. The fact that a system can be *nationally regulated, industry-led* and *client-focused* has been commented on by international reviewers including the OECD (DEEWR, 2009). From the system goals of national consistency and local flexibility are pursued through three related sets of rules and standards. The first is through the

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), which classifies all recognised education and training qualifications. The second is *the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF)*, which provides ‘a set of nationally agreed standards to ensure quality of vocational education and training services’ (DEEWR, 2009). The third regulatory device is the Australian Industry Training Package comprising sets of nationally endorsed industry skill standards and assessment guidelines ‘packaged’ AQF qualifications.

As the Australian Government explains, these sets of nationally endorsed competency standards, assessment guidelines and Australian Qualifications Framework qualifications provide a mechanism ‘for recognising and assessing people’s skills in a specific industry, industry sector or enterprise’ (DEEWR, 2009). The current 75 Training Packages (72 industry Packages and 3 enterprise) developed by industry and endorsed by the National Quality Council, on behalf of the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE) cover 80% of the skills needs of the workforce across all industries (DEEWR, 2011).

In the Australian context the Training Package works as a technology for translating information about skill standards in three stages: from myriad enterprise specific practices into regulatory standards; and from these single sets of standards back into myriad education and training practices. Effective deployment of Training Packages as a technology of knowledge transfer requires the collaboration of stakeholders and units from inside and outside and at different levels of the VET system. The complexity embedded in these collaborations is magnified in transnational transactions. Even implementing individual components of the system such as a single Training Package qualification offshore is complex, because each component carries with it its regulatory relationship with other components.

The case studies

Three cases have been selected for an empirical analysis. The first is a five-year China-AusAID funded project in China involving Australian and Chinese institutions piloting VET reform across five industries in Chongqing, with the aim of developing a VET model that can be replicated on a national basis in China (AusAID 2007). The second case is the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) which is a cooperative venture between Australian TAFE institutes and universities, and international companies and investors to deliver Australian accredited VET programs. The third case involves the provision of training for employees of an Australian registered mining company operating in Laos. In this case the Laotian employees receive Australian certificates at AQF 3 which are delivered by an Australian training provider which employs local trainers to work alongside Australian trainers. These cases have been identified as three different models of transnational knowledge transfer as described in the following section of the paper.

Three models of knowledge transfer

Model A: Government-government cooperation: Transfer of Australian VET knowledge through a reform project – Case: The Australia-China Chongqing Vocational Education and Training Project (ACCVETP)

The ACCVETP started in early 2002 as a pilot project in the municipality of Chongqing and continued until 2007. The ACCVETP aimed to develop a VET system to address changing skill needs of industries in the rapidly developing

province of Chongqing, with a population of more than 32 million, and to influence skill development more widely in China (AusAid, 2007). The Australian Government and the government of People's Republic of China contributed to ACCVETP, with Australia contributing A\$20 million of the total budget of A\$25 million (Barnaart, 2007; AusAid, 2007). The Chongqing project which was the subject of agreements between governments aimed to influence the structural and regulatory arrangements of the host system (as distinct from the cases in models B and C which have more instrumental economic and business goals). The Australian Training Package was used as an exemplar for the design of Chinese qualifications for which graduates would receive a Chinese qualification.

The project was implemented by Hassall and Associates International (HAI) in association with RMIT University (Barnaart, 2007; AusAid, 2007) and involved two main phases. The first phase from Feb. 2002 to Feb. 2005 included initiatives implemented at school, municipal and national levels. The second phase, from March 2004 until August 2007, included an additional international component. Based on a 'vertical slice' project design, phase two aimed to replicate the successful outcomes of phase one and work on the development of four key components. (Barnaart, 2007). These components and related key activities are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Components and activities in Australia-China Chongqing VET project

Component	Key activities
Phase I	
<i>School-based</i>	Three secondary VET schools and two tertiary VET colleges were selected as the pilot schools of the project. School-based planning, developing and piloting competency-based curriculum, teaching and learning material development, professional development of school staff and equipment procurement to assist pilot activities.
<i>Municipal</i>	Establishment of 5 Industry Coordination Committees (ICCs) in the automotive, business services, electronics, hospitality and tourism, and construction industries, being modelled on Australia's Industry Skills Councils (ISCs). The Chongqing Normal University (CQNU) was chosen as to develop trainers' knowledge and skills in VET pedagogy.
<i>National</i>	The Ministry of Education and the Central Institute of Vocational and Technical Education (CIVTE) were enabled to observe and review municipal school-based activities; to choose those outcomes that would assist China to better incorporate industry participation in VET; and to be more innovative in the design of VET policy.
Phase II	
<i>School-based</i>	Competency-based courses developed in the industry areas during phase one were expanded from 5 to 21, and now range from entry level certificate to diploma programs. A number of linkages between schools and some of key industry enterprises established.
<i>Municipal</i>	All of the eight municipal ICCs led the development and review of new competency standards, which were approved. The VET teacher reform activities were expanded by CQNU. Twenty five ACCVETP participants completed training for the Australian Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, which was delivered by a full-time teacher development adviser engaged through Holmesglen TAFE in Victoria.
<i>National</i>	Establishment of a national ICC made up of national ministry representatives from related industries. This national ICC is working with the eight municipal ICCs, observing and reviewing the reforms they are putting in place. A draft national VET teacher competency standards and an associated quality framework were developed.
<i>International</i>	Linking Chongqing schools to Australian Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) in each state by establishing a Sino-Australia VET Network in 2005 and expansion of this network to include linkages between ISCs in Australia and Chongqing ICCs. Swan TAFE in Western Australia was linked with the automotive tertiary pilot college, and the Illawarra TAFE Institute in New South Wales was linked with the electronics tertiary pilot college as two Sino Australia Cooperative Model TAFE colleges.

Extracted and modified from: Barnaart, 2007

During the ACCVETP Australian and Chinese team members used Australian Training Packages to develop more than 410 units of competency in the Chinese language and add them to the Chinese curricula. In other words, information about *Australian* industry competency needs, collected and collated by *Australian* industries became a formal part of the Chinese training curricula, and Australian apprenticeship and on the job training practices were identified for adoption in the Chongqing pilot colleges.

However, in the design of curriculum and delivery of training, there was no evidence that the Australian outcomes based training system was in fact being implemented by the Chinese Chongqing training managers. And although teachers at the pilot schools in Chongqing practiced Australian competency-based assessment as part of their teaching (and, according to officials interviewed as part of this case study, were quick to develop Australian style teaching and assessment practices)², a final examination was still required after completion of the qualification in order for individuals to be recognised in the Chinese system.

Model B: Transfer of Australian VET knowledge via business partnership arrangements – Case: The Australian College of Kuwait (ACK)

The Australian College of Kuwait was sponsored by an Arab consortium, which established an investment partnership with the Boeing Company in 2004. The college is managed by a consortium of Arab and Australian partners. The University of Tasmania, TAFE Tasmania, the Central TAFE in Western Australia, and Kangan Batman Institute of TAFE in Victoria collaborate to deliver Australian accredited programs to Kuwaiti and international students, using Australian and local instructors. The ACK is introduced as the first private educational institution to start its operations from its purpose-built campus in Kuwait. Specialised equipment at ACK includes a ground-based Boeing 737-200 aircraft; aviation test benches and other sophisticated engineering equipment; a 57-foot boat; a state of the art marine simulator; and computer laboratories with the latest software. A broad range of short course, diploma and degree programs in engineering and maritime programs in business, aviation, and English language are delivered at the ACK³.

Both Kuwaiti and Australian teachers are employed to deliver programs at ACK. Through completion of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment qualification (TAA04) local teachers become familiar with Australian VET regulatory frameworks and program design, delivery and assessment practices. When they have completed the Cert IV-TAA they do their teaching practice in Australian training colleges for a period of a few months up to a few years.

In Model B, the focus of transfer is the Australian qualification, and the agents who perform this transfer are the training managers and teachers. Neither the Australian industry organisation role in determining standards, nor the VET system role in endorsing standards is significant here. Unlike Model A where projects are driven by government agreements for systemic reform, in Model B the driving factors are

² The fact that the teachers adapted quickly and effectively was, according to officials interviewed, largely due to the quality of the Australian educators involved in the project and their capacity to work in a cross-cultural setting.

³ A complete lists of programs and facilities are available at the college website at: www.ack.edu.kw (Accessed: 28. Jan. 2011)

business related, and located within the operations of the training institution. The role of the Australian Training Package in this model is as a framework for the issuing of a nationally recognised Australian qualification. The use of the Training Package forms a bridge between Australian industry as the sources of technical information about skill formation and training institutions operating in a broad range of offshore contexts. ‘Business development’ is the key promoter of the activities in this model, conducted by Australian universities and TAFE institutes. Offering Cert IV-TAA to local teachers of offshore programs can be regarded as a mechanism for developing Australian VET standards among the local VET teaching workforce in different contexts.

While the Training Package technology is being used by teaching staff as the basis for design of training programs and for delivery and assessment of training, it is not being used explicitly as a source of standards relevant to local conditions. In other words, it is the Australian teaching and administration staff who are the key actors in fostering utilisation of Training Packages, at institutional and individual levels, in the host context. Local Kuwaiti industry is not an actor in this transfer. The college is an offshore vehicle for Australian education and training

Model C: The transfer of Australian VET knowledge via outward Foreign Direct Investment – Case: The Sepon mine project by OZ Minerals in Laos

This model of transnational transfer refers to use by Australian firms operating across national borders of the Australian VET system as a framework for training local workers. The case studied in this model is a mining project conducted by the Australian mining and exploration company OZ Minerals (known as Oxiana Ltd before 2008) in the Sepon district in Central Laos. OZ Minerals acquired Sepon gold and copper mines in the Lao PDR through its Laos subsidiary company, Lane Xang Mineral (LXML), in 2000. As a key strategy, OZ Minerals has opted to train and recruit local workers in its projects. The Sepon mine project is as the largest Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) project in Laos to date, and has created a considerable number of employment opportunities for local workers. In 2006, a total of 3,372 full time and casual employees worked at the Sepon mine site (Matzdorf, 2007, p.17). With limited resources to spend on educational and industrial infrastructure, skill development programs in Laos have always been dependent on donations from overseas (Boupha 2007). The absence of a qualified and skilled Laotian workforce in mining and education prompted OZ Minerals to establish its own training operation. Table 2 includes a list of the training programs delivered by OZ Minerals at the Sepon mine site.

Table 2. Training programs delivered at the Sepon mine site

Australian VET Certificate Programs	Other (non-accredited) Training Programs
Cert. II and III in electrical trade skills and knowledge, metal TSK, building and construction, and automotive mechanical repairs	computer skill training including MS Word, Excel, Access, Outlook, and PowerPoint
Cert. II, III, IV, Diploma in Metalliferous Mining Operations (processing)	vehicle licenses and operating permits for heavy machinery and equipment
Certificate II in business	unexploded explosives demolition
Certificate III in business administration	exploration and geological surveying
Cert. III and IV in business (frontline management)	safety training programs, including general safety, safety for forklifts, occupational H&S, risk assessment
Certificate IV in business (human resources)	English language skill training with five levels
Certificate IV in training and assessment.	Lao language skill training to improve the literacy levels of local employees

Extracted and modified from: Matzdorf, 2007, p.23

In July 2006, OZ Minerals initiated a Mining Apprenticeship Training Program for Sepon workers and signed a contract with RMIT University⁴ to implement the required training for the apprenticeships under the auspice of the Australian national VET framework (Matzdorf, 2007). The program provides 110 apprenticeship places to Lao workers over a four year period, the first program of its kind in Laos (Oxiana limited, 2006). Since training delivery commenced in 2006, a total of 71,326 hours of technical training has been delivered to Lao workers at the Sepon operation along with 1,152 hours of cultural awareness training at the Golden Grove operation and 2,928 hours at the Sepon operation (Oxiana Limited, 2006, p.18).

Whereas Model A involves systemic reform and Model B involves the offshore delivery of Australian qualifications to enrolled individuals, Model C involves the transfer of technical skills within a single company which is using Australian Training Package qualifications as a framework for company level training. In contrast to Model B, Model C has no host institute or local industry involvement. Individual Australian teachers and training managers play a major role in the transfer of knowledge by delivering training programs to non-Australian students in their own locale, and at the point of practice. In this way, an Australian industry VET stakeholder and an RTO are transferring Australian VET knowledge overseas via a foreign investment project.

Model C is uniquely an extension of the Australian VET system because it involves all three regulatory mechanisms in quality assurance. Trainers qualified under AQTF requirements deliver AQF qualifications and the Australian Registered Training Provider is audited according to AQTF standards. This has been a source of some controversy. There are Australian VET specialists and offshore project managers who find it hard to imagine how an Australian apprenticeship can be implemented in an offshore program. They are sceptical about the extent to which the outcomes of the program and the qualifications issued will be actually recognised by all aspects of the VET system: government, industry and training providers. Whether or not this is the case has not yet been tested in practice as no Laotian LXML workers have applied for recognition in Australia.

Summary and conclusion

This study encompasses two broad fields of investigation: *globalisation* and *the growth of transnational VET*. The key purpose of this study has been to show how three different projects represent three models of transnational VET. The study shows that Australian VET regulatory arrangements and practices are transferred in three models (summarised in table 3), each of which employ a different mechanism with which to affect the transnational transfer of VET knowledge.

Table 3. A classification of transnational Australian VET activity

	Model A International educational reform project	Model B Transnational college based training	Model C Transnational company training
Description	Education and training policy as a vehicle for education reform	Training as a commodity being traded in a global market	Training as a tool for labour force development offshore

⁴ Kangan-Batman TAFE is also involved in the training as a sub-contractor to RMIT

Mechanism	Transfer of Australian VET knowledge through an intergovernmental project	Transfer of Australian VET knowledge through offshore training partnerships between Australian RTOs, local institutions in the host country	Transfer of Australian VET knowledge via outward foreign direct investment. No institutional partnership is established.
Outcomes for students	Students may receive a host country qualification on successful completion. Receiving an Australian qualification is not the goal.	Students may receive an AU nationally recognised qualification which may be recognised within Australia by job seekers.	Trained workers receive an Australian nationally recognised trade qualification.
Policy driver	Government policies in a global economic context	Transnational business strategies of investors and training providers	Host Government foreign investment policies and corporate growth strategies in a global market
Source of funding	Australian aid agency and local government	Partnered institutes and (in some cases) sponsoring enterprise investment	Investing company facilitated by host country's government (i.e. removal of financial and policy impediments)
Main actors	Governments and government agencies	Australian VET providers, locally registered training institution and perhaps international companies	Australian/ international company, Australian registered training provider
Level of interaction between Australian and local training players	Highly political Highly institutional Individual engagement mediated by government policy, local institutional involvement and enrolment as a student. <i>(a vertical slice through the host system from policy making to local training practice)</i>	Less political Highly Institutional Individual engagement mediated by enrolment in training as a student.	No political intervention in training practice No local institutional involvement Individual engagement mediated by company as employer
Core/cores of interaction	Macro policy making Institutional administration Training practice	Institutional administration Training practice	Training practice

As a result of these different transactions, the form in which Australian Training Packages are transferred as Australian VET knowledge varies from one model to another. In the different settings, under different circumstances, this transfer saw the Training Package being the vehicle for:

- Transfer of regulatory and institutional knowledge for the operation of training as happened to some extent in Model A.
- Transfer of knowledge and skills to individual learners (Models B & C).
- Transfer of new certification arrangements and training practices to teaching and administration staff (Model B).
- Transfer of Australian qualifications and quality standards (Models B & C).

All the studied models also transfer English language to non-English contexts. Model A includes some programs taught in English at the time of project implementation. In Model C, in the case studied here, interpreters were involved in training delivery.

Programs in Model B have a stronger mechanism for fostering English learning at the global context as they are delivered in English and they generally consider IELTS as a prerequisite for enrolments.

The study reveals that Australian VET knowledge is being used in two different modes. The first mode involves the use of the Australian regulatory arrangements and practices to update, reform and enrich local regulation and practice (model A). The second involves the use of the Training Package as a '*technology of trust*', that is, an agent which manages to hold the face value of its components (e.g. units of competency and qualifications) intact in different settings and under different training and assessment practice regimes (models B and C). Finally, the development of transnational activities according to each of these modes acts as a catalyst for development and the expansion of the Australian VET approach to training regulation, in different forms and with different degrees of effectiveness in a global context.

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