

Social capital building within a human capital focused VET system: an Australian case study strengthening the deaf community

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Abstract

This paper is a research, work-in-progress, account of stakeholder valuing of an award winning Vocational Education and Training (VET) initiative. The research is undertaken against a background that institutional ethnography inquiry reveals an Australian VET system which focuses upon strengthening human capital with seemingly little declared regard for building social capital as defined in this paper; and, in this paper, embracing social cohesion strengthened through education. In comparison, the Deaf Community for whom the initiative was developed and delivered is highly social capital orientated.

In September 2010, the delivery of the TAA40104 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment in Auslan (Australian Sign Language) won the 2010 Victorian Training Initiative of the Year Award and was subsequently a finalist in the 2010 National Training Awards. As in any two languages, Auslan and English do not have a one to one equivalence for lexical terms for many concepts; accordingly, a great deal of customisation was required and presented a considerable challenge in strengthening both human and social capital attributes of the learners.

The juxtaposition of a seemingly VET human capital orientated entity and a seemingly Deaf Community social capital orientated entity, yielding a VET System award winning outcome, gives hope that VET in Australia may turn away from what is perceived as a narrowing focus upon training to the exclusion of education – the “E” part of VET having declined almost to the point of invisibility. It is this prospect of VET in Australia returning to balance between valuing more readily measured human capital outcomes and less easily measured social capital strengthening which gives rise to an Activity Theory informed pursuit of the research question – ***What is the human/social capital boundary crossing tool which has acted to bring about this partnership between the Australian VET system and the Deaf community?*** And taking a wider view, there is the prospect that the boundary crossing tool may have a generic utility across the Australian VET system and beyond in cultures of similar community tradition. In particular, the connection to lifelong learning invites consideration of the place of the boundary crossing tool (not the “why” or the “what” but the “how”) in the European Community Lifelong Learning Programme. As a broadening of relevance consideration the question is put - Is European Union VET attention already, knowingly, pursuing both human and social capital outcomes as it pursues economic strengthening and social cohesion within – and between – member states?

It is also pertinent to the next phase of our enquiry – the search for the tool – that the Centre of Excellence was also acknowledged by winning the Victorian VET Client Service /Support Excellence Award. When coupled with the training programme award, this is an outstanding multiple VET acknowledgement of value beyond just *the-job* focus. It adds to the worth of pursuing the research question.

Introduction

Informed by anecdotal evidence – including arising from volunteering research (Hughes 2007a; Hughes 2007b) - that the human capital focused Australian VET system adds more to social capital than is commonly perceived, and consequently valued, we (Lewis and Libby Hughes) are embarked upon inquiry into the factors which bring about VET melded strengthening of human and social capital. In this respect, stakeholder valuing of the award winning delivery of a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment meeting both human capital and social capital needs of the Deaf Community presents as an entry point for inquiry. Accordingly, the research question is –

What is the human/social capital boundary crossing tool which has acted to bring about this partnership between the Australian VET System and the Deaf Community?

Note: we are searching for the “how” more so than the “what” or the “why” – hence the focus on “tool” rather than “object” in an integrated activity system. This said, we are alert to the pivotal presence of an, at least, partially shared object between the two systems.

And taking a wider view than the initial focus upon the deaf community, there is the prospect that the boundary crossing tool may have generic utility across the Australian VET stem and beyond in cultures of similar community tradition. In particular, as there is connection to lifelong learning, there is seemingly relationship to the European Community Lifelong Learning Programme – drawing from and adding to.

In this paper, the position (but not necessarily agreeing) is taken that human capital relates to knowledge and skill – i.e. what a VET graduate knows and can do, as is the current narrow definition of competency in Australia. In relationship to this, social capital (as we posit is added to by VET in some, but not all, instances) relates to a person's trust in themselves and others trusting of them, their commitment to contributing to social good, and their propensity to being a lifelong learner as attributes which contribute to community cohesiveness – i.e. a VET graduate having capability orientation (Hughes & Cairns 2009) such that they make the most of what they know and can do, as deliberately/knowingly accrues throughout their life, to their benefit and the benefit of others in changing times.

The research approach is a coupling of institutional ethnographic examination of documents and a case study of the VET award winning instance of the delivery of a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment using Auslan (Australian sign language) as the training language. Research insights are viewed through the prism of activity theory on a quest for understanding of what acts as a boundary crossing tool melding human capital focused training with social capital focused learning.

The Certificate IV was delivered by the Centre of Excellence for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing which is hosted by Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT). This was one of two highly prestigious 2010 Victorian Training Awards won by the Centre of Excellence; and both give cause to suggest that there is more VET valuing of attention to social capital than is readily apparent. The VET building social capital proposition is further strengthened as one of these Centre of Excellence achievements (our case-study focus) was short-listed for the National Training Awards as there was an aligning category.

The awards were, respectively –

Victorian VET Client Service/Support Excellence Award: Awarded to the Centre of Excellence for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing and acknowledging it as having made an outstanding contribution to enhancement of educational success in VET.

Comment: Given concern that attention to the “E” in VET seems to have largely evaporated in the systemic view (Hughes 2011, p. 4) it is encouraging that this award category is specific in applauding “educational success”. Whilst the award criteria are known, the detail of what so significantly impressed the judging panel is not known to us. However, the evidenced success of the Centre in meeting its purpose of increasing and enhancing the participation of deaf students in VET across Victoria was, presumably, a powerful factor. Clearly such success strengthens the individual, the deaf community and, hence, the broad community in more than just employment terms.

Victorian Training Initiative of the Year Award: Awarded for the delivery of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment with Auslan (Australian sign language) as the primary language in the classroom. This unique, responding-to-need, initiative went on to be a finalist in the Australian Training Awards and the Centre thus nationally acknowledged for its commitment to positive learning experiences for deaf students.

Comment: Although not overtly stated in the VET system's applauding, it is suggested as significant that an initiative – 9 month learning programme - which had wider objectives than employment outcomes has been so valued. This is in contrast to 10 day programmes (or even less) which are elsewhere offered for achievement of this qualification – noting that even though this might be spread over a period, such abridged learning is unlikely to be more than shallow in nature and with questionable Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) compliance.

The proposition - VET melding attention to human capital and social capital

In the Australian case, the notion of VET contributing to economic strength through attention to the human capital stock of knowledge and skill is well established. VET is seen as preparing people for employment and providing a skilled workforce as is evidenced by the manner in which Industry Skills Councils (ISCs)¹ indicate their purpose – e.g. ‘*CPSISC represents the workforce training and skills development needs of the construction and property services industries*’ (Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council purpose – <http://www.cpsisc.com.au> accessed 10 Aug 2011). However, it is not uncommon to find

¹ There are eleven Australia ISCs contracted by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to develop and maintain Training Packages specific to the industry area(s) for which they have coverage. (NQC Training Package Glossary)

social capital related inclusions in ISC annual reports and Environmental Scans² – e.g. *‘It [AgriFood Skills Australia] has emerged as a catalyst for bringing communities together through programs to take command of their own destiny, and address the challenges attracting and retaining workers. AgriFood has been applauded for its ability to turn research and policy into on-the-ground success.’* (AgriFood Australia (ISC), 2009/10 Annual Report, p. 2). The Transport & Logistics Industry Skills Council, 2009/10 annual report (p. 11) inclusion of *‘Increasing the engagement of Indigenous Australians in transport and logistics occupations in its Key people and workforce development issues’* is another example of responsiveness to strengthening community cohesiveness (social capital) in an entwined manner with addressing the human capital needs of industry - which may not be recognised as social capital related. And, possibly, the most explicit attention to social capital is that of Forestworks (Forestry related industries ISC) where frequent reference to “community” is made in its 2009/10 annual report along with its on-going project to recruit women into forestry – clearly the forestry industry is alert to its relationship to local (and broader) communities in more than just an economic sense.

Also, the repeated reference within Skills Australia (2011) to social and economic prosperity, the inclusion of discussion under the heading **“Measuring VET’s contribution to social capital”** in Skills Australia (2010a, p. 56), and the Australian government’s overview of vision for VET reform – *‘The Government is setting out a plan to modernise the VET sector for the future to meet changing economic and social needs’* (Australian Government 2011, p. 19), all add weight to the proposition that VET in Australia does include strengthening social capital in its intentions and outcomes.

At the outset of our exploration of the VET melding attention to human capital and social capital, our view of human capital was as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Human Capital refers to the stock of potential productivity in the workplace and thus, the ability for the individual to earn income in exchange for labour. (ABS, ECO 03)

The above ABS definition reflects the understanding of VET colleagues contributing to our initial scoping study and is consistent with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Human Capital Reform report of the National Reform Initiative Working Group (COAG - NRIWG 2006) as drawn upon from the OECD Micro-Policies for Growth and Productivity Final Report (OECD 2005).

The OECD report describes human capital as *‘... the knowledge, skills and competencies of workers which are relevant to economic activity’* (OECD 2005, p. 113).

In juxtaposition with human capital, the view that we have taken of social capital resonates with what is articulated in the OECD (2001) publication *‘The Well-being of Nations’*.

Social Capital: ‘Networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups.’ (OECD 2001, p. 41)

Informed by this OECD view, our use of “social capital” refers to the existence of social cohesiveness which accrues through individual and collective predispositions to strengthen society - it evokes the qualities of trust, valuing of self & others, and co-operation. In our contact with inquiry respondents, offering this understanding of social capital prompts their reflection upon the manner in which learner engagement with VET does yield benefits beyond the narrow (and seemingly narrowing) Australian understanding of work related competency outcomes.

Cathy, Centre of Excellence Co-coordinator, in explaining the challenge which deaf people face (worldwide) as a consequence of low literacy levels and the reason for establishing the Centre of Excellence as an advancement on conventional approaches – *‘...at the time there was a strong movement towards setting up classes for deaf people in a safe environment with the intention, over time, of joining mainstream programmes. It was about getting their literacy to a level where*

² Environmental Scan: a document developed on an annual basis by each Industry Skills Council (ISC) that captures and analyses the most recent grass roots industry intelligence gathered by the ISC, identifying existing and emerging skill shortages and training requirements. (NQC Training Package Glossary)

they could function or operate in the workplace and in other areas of their life and participate better in society.'

The "participate in society" comment by Cathy is highly pertinent to the theme of this paper; and this sentiment does arise in contemporary Australian VET system and government documents. For example, and closely aligned with Cathy's literacy point, the Australian Government's 2011 VET related budget statement included '*Around 40 per cent of working age Australians need improved literacy and numeracy skills to participate in society and meet the requirements of the jobs of the future*' (Australian Government 2011, p. 17). The significance of the government position is an acknowledgement (as we see it) that participation in society goes beyond the human capital notion of competency, as presently narrowly defined in Australia, to embrace being an included and valued (participating) member of society. There are social capital outcomes from VET which are beyond just the human capital focus of VET in Australia; and this is reflected in the Productivity Commission (2010 p. xxxiv) noting that, in addition to building human capital, '*The VET workforce... also contributes to social inclusion and civic participation*'. Accordingly, the opening of mind to social capital yields from VET is possibly not as large a step as it might at first appear – there is largely implicit, but not yet commonly explicit, recognition that VET is more than just about producing product in an economic sense; however, our exploration of this prospect does reveal influential resistance to such broadening of the delivery of VET in Australia.

Although predating our current enquiry, the research by one of us into retaining Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers (Hughes 2007) made explicit the link between competency and community cohesiveness. In the case of a CFA brigade, trust in one another – both on and off the fireground – is a key element in maintaining the sense of "family" which holds members of the brigade; and there is also a frequently expressed view (in rural communities with declining populations) that the CFA brigade is the "only remaining glue that holds the community together". Similarly, in other instances of our experience of people engaging, learning, and growing together – ranging from remote Indigenous communities, through industrial teams, to learning partnerships as we advocate for VET (Hughes 2011) and conventional notions of community – the cohesion within such groupings arises from the possessed social capital within the group; and, potentially, flows on to the quantum of social capital drawn upon by wider community.

In terms of VET's contribution to social capital, we have agreement with the identification by Megan Alessandrini that education is clearly associated with the intensity of social capital (Alessandrini 2006, p. 1) and her position that '*social capital is to do with trust, norms and networks*' (Alessandrini 2006, p. 5).

The Case study:

2008, 2009; 2010 (and continuing) Delivery of Certificate IV in Training and assessment for deaf learners using Auslan (Australian sign language) as the classroom language of discourse

In 2007, a number of agencies in the Deaf community – notably, the Victorian Deaf Society (Vicdeaf) – and Skills Victoria (State agency – previously known as The Office of Training and Tertiary Education) determined that there was a need for the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment to be customised for the Deaf. Other encouragement (and various modes of support) for this initiative included the Deaf Education Network (NSW), the Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association, and the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters.

In a meeting with a highly regarded advocate for the Deaf community, the point was made that having deaf people qualified in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment was a breaking free of the process where education for the deaf is a one way process. In a circumstance where learning is facilitated via an interpreter, there is very limited opportunity for the learner to be other than a receiver of information; and the opportunity for engagement with the teacher and class members is really not available. In this respect, it is important to note that deaf people see the world differently – they are visual learners and communicators. Where the learning is facilitated in Auslan, all in the class have the opportunity to be active learners - as a hearing learner takes for granted. In this way there is an empowerment of the learner with profound ramifications which include adding to deaf people having a say in the future of deaf people as a consequence of stronger engagement with learning leading to expanded competency. In essence,

this meeting firmly positioned the Auslan access to the Certificate IV qualification as a social equity imperative – adding to social capital.

At the time of initiation of the programme, the Vicdeaf grant application form required the applicant to nominate from the following - leadership, health & well-being, art & culture, international development, or empowering people - as the objective. This range of valued initiatives reflects the broad arena of support for the deaf community as the Vicdeaf *raison d'être* – noting the Vicdeaf vision “*Access and equity for Deaf and hard of hearing people*” (www.vicdeaf.com.au). In comparison, Skills Victoria has an announced focus upon meeting the needs of business - *Skills Victoria supports and facilitates access to training and tertiary education opportunities so that Victorians can acquire higher skills that are utilised by, and contribute to the success of, Victorian business.* (Skills Victoria website home page). In these respects, there is a coming together (each contributing funds) by a clearly social capital orientated entity and a clearly human capital entity to assist strengthening of the deaf community. The implication of this being that, at least in this instance, there is overl intersection (but not necessarily, in fact or required, complete commonality) between social capital and human capital interests.

The Vicdeaf and Skills Victoria intersection of view was largely motivated by the qualification being the entry level requirement for employment as a VET teacher and the social inequity which arises when a deaf person – through language exclusion – doesn't have access to the qualification. Unless addressed through this initiative, there is an expanding inequity as the access to training for the deaf community is severely restricted by limited availability of VET teachers who communicate in the language of the deaf - Auslan.

Moving to the circumstances of winning the Victorian Training Initiative of the year award:

The nomination, evaluation and judging:

The Award Criteria were – Excellence and Innovation; Client Focus; Impact of the Training Initiative; and Sustainability. In addressing each of these criterion, the Centre of Excellence's (CoE) written submission was strongly focused upon the access and equity social imperatives of meeting the needs of a '*marginalised and culturally and linguistically distinctive group*' (CoE submission p. 3). This submission was authored by staff with a deep commitment to their role and the community; and the evidencing of this was possibly a major factor in the short-listing outcome. Following short-listing, there were two visits by an evaluator and then a presentation to the judging panel. In the face-to-face phases of the evaluation/judging, the capability, passion and commitment qualities of the teachers were demonstrated to one of us³ as being of a high order; and were, presumably, similarly apparent to the evaluator and judging panel.

The feedback from participants (2008 through 2010) was very positive and confirming of the motivation in developing and delivering this programme. However, there was an intriguing silence regarding applauding the Auslan delivery which, upon reflection, is probably to be expected – one would not expect a hearing, English speaking, learner to remark upon a programme being delivered in English. With intent to move beyond this silence, we are presently inviting facilitators and learners to make comment upon their respective motivations and what they feel are benefits accruing to themselves and to others from their engagement with the programme.

Anecdotally, the motivations and accruing benefits which are being thus far shared align with the experience and logic which caused the programme to come into existence – as outlined in the following.

Delivery in Auslan for this learner group is very important. A Certificate IV in TAA requires a learner to have strong literacy and language skills; and for deaf people conversing only with sign language this is a significant hurdle as they are highly visual learners. For people who have been born deaf or who have very early life deafness it is extremely difficult to develop English literacy skills without access to spoken English – in effect, English is a second language for them. Teachers placed a strong emphasis on using a variety of learning strategies. The fact that

³ As Head of Department, Libby was a contributor to the presentations.

it was a cohort of students who shared the same language is most important in that it provided the group of learners with the opportunity to have collegiate interaction. This is not something that is ever available to deaf students who study in mainstream classes with hearing students because the language barriers are so significant.

English and Auslan do not have a one-to-one equivalence for lexical terms for a great number of concepts. Consequently, the approach to delivery of the Training Package⁴ had to be tailored to the needs of this client group – a major undertaking and achievement. Learners also needed to understand the English terminology so they were equal to their hearing peers teaching in the VET sector. Time had to be allocated to “un-packing” the Training Package and reframing it in plain English. Additional tutorials were provided to do this.

(Derived from the 2010 Victorian Training Awards nomination)

The expanded - beyond human capital – contribution to society of the Auslan delivered course is further reinforced by the Western Australia Deaf Society letter of strong support for the Awards nomination which addressed the importance of providing community introductory courses in Auslan 1 and 2 – for needs beyond the Employment Assistance Program - ‘*Access for Deaf staff or Deaf Community to a formal TAA [Training and Assessment] qualification program in their own language (Auslan) is vital for the Society to be able to continue to run its programs and remain relevant in responding to community needs.*’ This prompts reflection upon the question – “What is the connection between meeting the economic needs of a community and meeting the social needs of a community?”

With the foregoing in mind, our scoping inquiry to date has given rise to the broader VET questions –

- What is the nature and impact upon learning of social capital within a cohort of learners such as exists in a VET group learning environment? and
- What is a VET teacher’s role in nurturing social capital within a learning group? and
- How does the strengthening of learning group social capital carry over to broader community strengthening of social capital?

All the while the rigorous standards and benchmarks required by the AQTF had to be maintained. In this respect, the “Auslan” delivered programme has been an exemplar of AQTF compliance and is a rich learning experience. Unlike some other shallow learning offerings of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, which don’t in their time and manner of delivery engage learners in the full context of facilitating the learning of others, this programme went/goes beyond delivery as dictated by a profit centred provider business model to delivery which is quality centred. Under these circumstances, the teachers can engage with the learners in a way which yields deep learning outcomes as, we argue, is an expectation of VET in Australia, but not in all instances the reality. And, importantly, the graduates from these programmes have a quality centred model upon which to construct their facilitation of learning; and so this programme is a departure from the cycle of graduating generations of inadequacy (Hughes 2010 p, 5)⁵ in the preparation of VET teachers.

Returning to the particularities of deaf learners, and drawing upon the award nomination document, those deaf learners who had endeavored to study the Certificate 1V with hearing peers had found the experience arduous and most unsatisfactory. Clearly the learning environment was not good when it was very difficult to have student to student interaction. Also, receiving information through interpreters rather than directly from a teacher is not ideal because an interpreter filters information and this often affects the meaning and/or intent of the communication.

⁴ Training Package: a nationally endorsed, integrated set of competency standards, assessment guidelines and Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualifications for a specific industry, industry sector or enterprise (NQC Glossary)

⁵ The apparent Australian VET systemic tolerance of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment being delivered as a short course (as little as three days and commonly 10 days) is a matter of concern. In addition to the improbability of achieving the specified competencies, graduates are likely to model their facilitation of learning and assessment upon their experience of the short course – i.e. shallow learning and only superficial assessment. However, there is an indication that this worrying situation is about to be addressed – but it has been a long time coming.

This initiative provided a unique model which achieved a very positive learning experience for a specific client group. Not only has it improved training outcomes and employability skills but, most importantly, adds to the social inclusion of deaf people by providing them with a recognised qualification. Examples of this are the teaching of Auslan to families of deaf children and to the wider community and training in independent living skills to members of the deaf community who have a poor understanding of the community and minimal English literacy skills.

The activity of VET melded attention to human and social capital

Drawing from the work of Engestrom and others – e.g. Engestrom, et al (1999), Daniels, et al (2010) - who have expanded the application of Activity Theory from its Vygotsky, Leont'ev and Luria origins, Figure 1 is an interacting activity system representation of what we perceive as the research environment; and Figure 2 is what we perceive as the relationships which apply with the learner as the subject in the instance of melded attention to human and social capital. Note: Our construction of activity systems moves between a quest for understanding and architecture-for-achievement based upon inquiry derived insights.

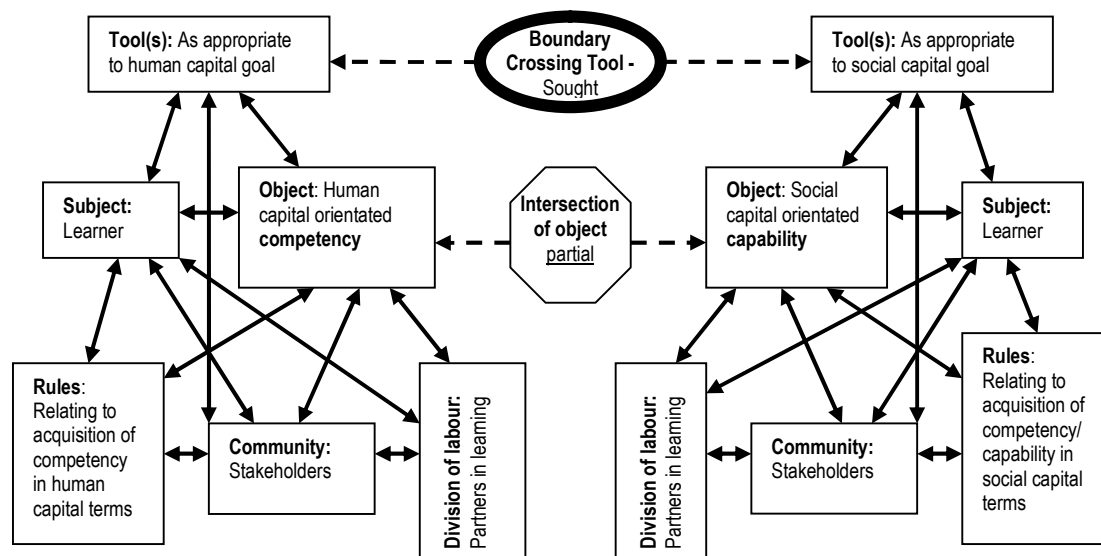


Figure 1a - Human Capital orientated VET system

Figure 1b - Social Capital strengthening quest for capability

Figure 1 – Interacting Activity Systems

The “Object” in Figure 1a is purposefully indicated as being directed at achieving competency in terms of knowledge and skill (as is the present Australian view). In comparison, the “Object” in Figure 1b is purposefully directed at achieving “capability” as an enriched learning outcome – i.e. “competency” plus attributes which add to the social capital of the individual (learner) and the social capital of the community.

As our exploration of melding VET attention to both human and social capital is grounded in the existence of this in some instances – but not explicitly acknowledged – there is already an intersection (partial) between the objects of the respective activity systems. Accordingly, we are seeking insight as to the nature of the tool being employed in the melding of objects – i.e. what is acting, within the activity system of our case study, which is yielding the melded strengthened learning outcomes so applauded by the Australian VET system in the instance of this case study.

As indicated in the foregoing, we are alert to the interacting influence, and dependency, of multiple activity systems which apply in the delivery and/or deriving advantage from VET. The complexity of this web of interacting influence is deepened by consideration of differences arising from total focus upon human capital outcomes as compared to total focus upon social capital outcomes – i.e. where there isn't a shared (albeit properly partial) object. Accordingly, Figure 2 is a representation of the learning activity where the learner is the subject; however, this activity system does not exist in isolation from other activity systems

such as apply from the perspective of the teacher, the provider, the client, etc; and what we see as the meta interaction of the human capital focused and social capital orientated activity systems.

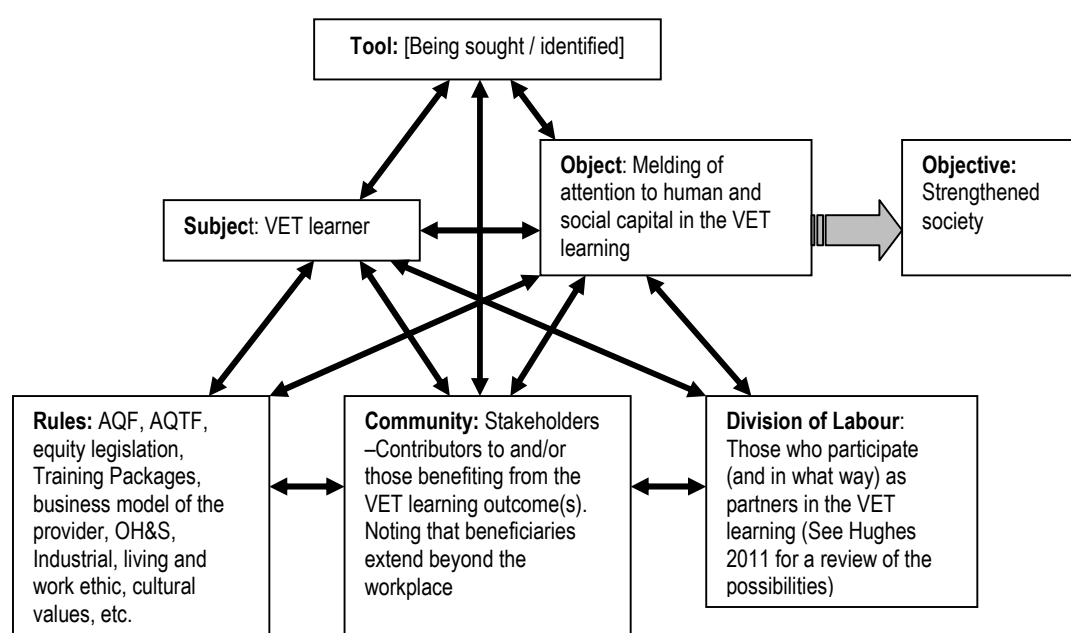


Figure 2 – VET melding attention to strengthening human capital and social capital

Research outcomes to date – August 2011

- Our institutional ethnographic review of VET documents yields a perception of systemic narrow classification of stakeholders – i.e. primarily, industry/employers drawing upon the knowledge and skills of the workforce and government(s) funding and regulating VET. The explicit inclusion of learners and community are noticeable omissions. Accordingly, we suggest that there is much to be gained by the following classification of VET stakeholders as a mechanism for expanding the mind and informing richer “making the best use of VET” strategies.

Outcomes stakeholders: Those who benefit through drawing upon the outcomes of VET – graduates and partial graduates (uncompleted qualification – continuing learners and/or exiting with statements of attainment/skill sets) and their customers of what they know and can do. Noting that “customers” goes beyond employers to include clients, family dependents, and the community in diverse ways including volunteering⁶ and its strengthening of social cohesion.

Inputs stakeholders: Those who benefit (in diverse ways) through the design and delivery of VET – teachers, provider organisations and suppliers of goods and services.

Controlling and influencing stakeholders: Those who benefit through having systemic authority in the design and operation of the VET system – government(s) and agencies. Noting that this includes Industry Skills Councils and might be seen to include industrial associations (and the like).

- Examination of Australian VET system documents reveals a tension between a narrowing view of competency and the community need of capable (in work and life) members. In what we style as the core ruling documents – the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF); the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF); and the Training Package Development Handbook – it is difficult to see other than a skills-for-work orientation and there are silences/assumptions regarding what constitutes learning as expected of adequate delivery.

⁶ In Australia, there is a high level of volunteering. In 2006, 3.1 million Australians (21% of those aged 18 years and over) worked as volunteers at least once per fortnight (ABS 4102.0)

- In the statement of purpose, the AQF qualification type learning outcomes descriptors (AQF 2011, pp 14 to 17) refer to undertaking work and a pathway to further learning for the VET Certificate I through to Associate Degree as the goal.
 - The AQTF is a series of compliance documents which are silent in terms of discussion of human and social capital. These documents can be accessed at www.training.com.au
 - The overview of mandatory text for Training Packages (Training Package Development Handbook @ August 2011 – on line access via the DEEWR⁷ website) in its 4 dot point description of Training Packages focuses upon workplace skills meeting industry requirements and learning and assessment which lead to verifiable workplace outcomes.
- In comparison to the foregoing core ruling documents, there is a large body of literature which may only be valued by those with an “educationalists” orientation – e.g. reports arising from review of future needs such as being authored by Skills Australia, research reports arising from the activities of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research and others seemingly valuing “education” as a VET outcome beyond just knowledge and skill. The deletion of “attitude” from the descriptor of competency is iconic of this tension and seems counter to Skills Australia (2010a, p. 56) including a section titled “Measuring VET’s contribution to social capital” in its discussion paper. In large part, the VET system literature seems to be differently drawn upon by providers with a profit business model and those with a learning business model – it may be that the notion of VET system encouraging competition between providers has not served the intended purpose.
 - The various implicit inclusion of attention to social capital matters in Industry Skills Council’s reports and other documents adds weight to the prospect of more overt attention to social capital strengthening via VET. However, acting upon this requires respect for the prime focus of Skills Councils as meeting the needs of industry.
 - Engaging stakeholders in conversation regarding lifelong, lifewide and lifedep learning as advocated by Cairns and Malloch (2010) in respect of the “three dimensional learner”, and seemingly common place in Europe, has potential as an opening of mind mechanism with respect to VET melding attention to human capital and social capital.
 - Our scoping inquiry conversations point to there being much to be gained by Australian VET teacher practice embracing facilitation of learning which is responsive to the Cairns and Malloch (2010) “Three dimensional learner” and aligning with the connection made by Hoskins and Deakin Crick (2008, p. 5) between *key to successful life* competencies and competencies for *learning to learn* and *citizenship* – noting that the Hoskins and Deakin Crick (2008) is a European Union commissioned review of matters relating to progress toward an EU Framework of Key Competencies which supports the ‘knowledge economy’ and ‘greater social cohesion’.
 - Even though the Innovation and Business Skills Council (having coverage of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and operating as Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA)) does not articulate a vision overtly embracing social capital, its aim to become a model innovative organisation (IBSA 2007, p.1) appears to carry with it being open to conversation regarding social capital strengthening - ‘*Economic measures cannot capture all of the factors that allow innovation to flourish – cultural, social and political factors will also play a key roll*’ (IBSA 2007, p. 3). This perception is strengthened by IBSA citing the Australian Productivity Commission’s key functions of the Australian VET sector as -
 - inspiring, stimulating and enriching learners from all segments of the community;
 - providing the skills needed by the economy; and
 - contributing to social inclusion and civic participation.

(IBSA 2011, p. 7 citing Productivity Commission 2011, p. xxxv)

⁷ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)

It is especially germane to the case study, that the above citing is an inclusion in the IBSA User Guide for the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Although there have been considerable difficulties in achieving uniform adequate quality in the delivery of this qualification leading to it being identified as a qualification of high risk from a quality assurance perspective (Skills Australia 2011, p. 88), there is support in this citing for the encouragement of richer VET learning than shallow attention to knowledge and skills to the exclusion of other values.

- **To this point (August 2011), consequent upon scoping inquiry of stakeholders, a view (serving as an hypothesis) has been formed that the “educationalist” predisposition of the teacher is at the core of reaching beyond shallow VET learning outcomes such as arise when attention is narrowly focused upon human capital. In this respect, the culture of the learning environment acts to encourage or discourage the educationalist in enriching the learning experience beyond a minimalist approach addressing only the acquisition of knowledge and skill within limited bounds.**

Our meaning of “educationalist” goes beyond just specialist principles and practices of teaching knowledge. For us (Lewis and Libby Hughes) being an “educationalist” refers to a teacher who, by inclination, engages the learner in their passion for the subject and the joy of the learning journey. For example, the student feedback - ‘... so in essence, I just want to thank the three of you [VET teachers with acknowledged passion and within the same NMIT faculty hosting the Centre of Excellence] for your hard work.’ This feedback was from a graduate in the VET Liberal Arts programme who undertook the course in preparation for going on to university and subsequently achieved the Vice Chancellor’s Award for Academic Excellence - there are other anecdotal evidences of rich learning outcomes from this programme – adding to the students human capital and self-confidence and valuing of others social capital - which can be attributed to high quality learning partnerships between learner and the educationalist orientated teachers.

This resonates with the research finding by one of us (Hughes 2008, p.5) that the motivation-to-learn culture of the learning environment is a key factor in sustaining men 45+ years in undertaking new learning required for new career directions. This was typified by a respondent remarking that a pivotal moment for him was the realisation that his opinion counted and he was active in a learning environment markedly different to his earlier experiences. In earlier learning, he was required to be a compliant learner rather than an active learner drawing upon and expanding his life experience. In the men 45+ research, it became apparent that qualifying for career change was greatly aided by the facilitation of an educationalist teacher; and this was coupled with valuing the learning outcome in a life-changing and greater contributing to society way.

- Whilst the culture of the learning environment is not the core determinant, our work-in-progress inquiry suggests that it has a profound influence upon the motivation of the educationalist to add social capital context to the learning as compared to a facilitator who is not so predisposed either through deliberate choice (self determined or imposed by the provider) or unawareness of educationalist values. From a learning richness perspective, our inquiry is probing the proposition that Australian VET learning environments range across a spectrum of actively encouraging to actively discouraging; and the educationalist VET teacher variously thrives, creatively perseveres, or is frustratingly suppressed.

In this respect, there is, scoping-research evidenced, resonance with the underpinnings of the LCM Model (Hughes 2007) in which organisational achievement is enhanced by enmeshing valuing of what a person (in this instance the “educationalist” VET teacher) knows and can do; with an environment which values drawing upon this; and valuing the “acting” motivations of the parties to the learning. In this instance, the LCM sweet spot (the intersection of the three values) would be defined as strengthening the human capital and social capital outcomes from a defined VET learning experience.

In exploration of the “educationalist” hypothesis – Valuing the “educationalist” VET teacher

Our research and practice experience is that VET in Australia yields when delivered by committed educators - those with an educationalist approach - richer outcomes than are systemically recognised.

Importantly, it is the journey to these richer outcomes which motivates and sustains the professional commitment of VET educators as different to facilitators with lesser commitment.

Notwithstanding the high level of commitment characterising the Australian VET workforce, it is not uncommon to come across expressions of frustration by VET teachers that they feel inhibited in facilitating rich learning experiences. This is particularly in instances where an otherwise quality committed teacher is obliged to deliver shallow learning in the face of apparent systemic tolerance of competition from providers promoting what appear to be superficial pathways to qualification – i.e. meeting a client need for the ticket (qualification and/or license to act) more so than the competency (Hughes 2010). For example, educator commitment is undermined when obliged to join the market driven provider “race-to-the bottom” (Hughes, 2010, p. 2) so as to compete (on ease of achieving the qualification rather than quality of learning) when a competing provider is offering the Certificate IV in Property Services (Real Estate) as a 10 day programme as compared to the nominal⁸ notion of a 730 hour programme.

The foregoing example is indicative of educationalist frustration when there is an appearance of VET systemic acceptance of short courses which are unlikely to yield competency outcomes as anticipated by endorsed qualifications. In this instance, how is it likely that in ten days of learning a student can achieve and demonstrate the competency required of a licensed real estate agent? It seems that there has been a losing of way in respect of the competency-based-training stance that achievement of competency is the goal rather than insistence upon time or process of the learning. This losing of way is a loss of valuing the learning journey and consequent inadequacy of assessment leading to awarding a qualification of questionable status. For an educationalist orientated VET teacher, the frustration goes beyond bewilderment at apparent systemic tolerance of inadequate delivery to undermining their commitment.

The undermining of commitment is fueled by the systemic acceptance of competing inadequate programmes reducing enrolments in educationally high value programmes to the point of not being viable and/or oblige a provider to follow suit causing educationalist teachers to lose regard for their provider (employer) and the system.

It is very hard to compete with a nearby provider [Registered Training Organisation] which is offering Community Service courses, leading to national qualifications, in less than half the time and with little effort by the learner. (Paraphrasing a VET teacher expressing frustration and concern at the apparent systemic tolerance of inadequate delivery and questionable awarding of qualifications)

The above said, we have a sense that VET systemic insistence on quality is about to strengthen as a consequence of awakening to the problem and the move to a national regulator⁹. However, it may be that this occurs within a “training” culture more so than an “education and training” culture. The distinction being that “training for work” values may predominate to such an extent that “education for life” values will continue to be suppressed as a consequence of being only weakly tacitly valued – i.e. out of sight and therefore out of mind. Putting this another way, whilst strengthening fitness and availability for work in human capital terms is properly the core VET raison d’être, adding to community cohesiveness through constructing a *sense of purpose through having a job*¹⁰ along with capability and commitment to strengthening society are social capital outcomes from VET which are vulnerable to being under-valued.

Our optimism is further fueled by there being voices which are encouraging and supporting depth in learning facilitation as exemplified by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) commissioning a study of five Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries pursuing strategies directed at nurturing lifelong learning and building learning cultures (Kearns & Papadopoulos 2000). Also the 2008 Australian Government legislated establishment of Skills Australia and its awakening contributions such as ‘*Skills for prosperity: a roadmap for vocational education and training*’ in which aspiring to excellence is a key recommended position (Skills Australia 2011, p. 147)

⁸ Nominal hours are a device set by government for the purpose of purchasing training from a provider. They are indicative of expectation of the period of supervised learning.

⁹ Hitherto, the regulation of VET provision has been a State responsibility; however, a national regulator is now in the process of assuming this responsibility (but with some variation in respect of Victoria and Western Australia).

¹⁰ Citing Julie Gillard, Prime Minister of Australia, in her Putting a Price on Carbon address (10th July 2010)

gives cause for hope that quality will be assured; and, maybe, embracing more holistic learning objectives as implied in the adaptive layer notion of VET.

The VET sector has unique capabilities because it connects learning with the labour market, the workplace and community development as well as within individual learner and employer aspirations. It is the 'adaptive layer' of the Australian education system. (Skills Australia 2011, p. 28 – acknowledging Gravatt and Silver (2000).

At this time, in our work-in-progress research, there is much which indicates that the “educationalist” contribution of a VET teacher is at the heart of achieving VET outcomes which are human/social capital rich in nature. There is reason to further probe the validity of **explicitly valuing, overtly applauding and purposefully empowering** such a teacher as the boundary crossing tool (Or might this be better thought of as a boundary melding tool?) integrating the interacting human capital and social capital activity systems of Figure 1 where such broad and deep advantageous melding exists. The advantage is to the learner and the community in both economic and cohesiveness terms.

In conclusion – a “Global” thought underpinning continuance of this research

The research derived insights, thus far informed, beg the question “**Given the overarching social capital contribution of VET to the global community, would it not be advantageous to view VET human capital strengthening as an outcome of social capital strengthening?**” i.e. turn the human capital/social capital relationship on its head.

On the matters of global competitive and co-operation capacity, in Australia the rationale for strengthening VET outcomes is frequently expressed in terms of economic advantage as grounded in the outcomes of the 1987 Australian Council of Trade Unions and Trade Development Council mission to Western Europe (ACTU/TDC 1987). However, the origins of VET in Australia lie in community strengthening philanthropic motivations such as articulated by Francis Ormond in bringing about the establishment of the Working Men’s College – later the Melbourne Technical College and now the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University.

I thoroughly believe in education, every branch of education, and in subsidising education. I am firmly of the opinion that in no other way could I confer a greater benefit to my fellow-countrymen. I believe that education will make men more God-fearing, and better members of society. It will enable them to perform their parts intelligently in the world and in the business of life. Education breaks down the lines of demarcation between rich and poor. (Frances Ormond - as cited by Kemsley 1945, p. 36)

Given the globalising world, and the apparent valuing of VET in social cohesion terms by countries other than Australia, it is cause for concern that systemically VET in Australia appears oblivious to broad valuing of VET beyond knowledge and skill generation. This is notwithstanding findings (consequent upon exploration of learning and training cultures in Britain, USA, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands) by Kearns and Papadopoulos (2000, p. v) ‘... policies for building a learning culture are not only focused on economic objectives, but are directed at key social, civic, cultural and educational objectives. A key feature we observed were attempts to create stronger linkages between social, educational, and economic policy with more integrated whole-of- government strategies a target of policy.’ Kearns and Papadopoulos (2000, p. xii) went on to assert that a key issue for Australia was to foster collaborations/partnerships between stakeholders – such as exist in the five OECD countries – which ‘... assist in mobilising civil society to address community regeneration needs and the broader spectrum of social, cultural, and educational issues resulting from the conditions of the new economy and new society.’

It is worrying that the *raison d’etre* for strengthening VET outcomes in Australia is seemingly silent on social capital grounded co-operation within and between communities such as draw upon VET outcomes. This is not the case in Europe, as we find from VETNET colleagues (and sampling of their papers) participating in ECER¹¹ conferences – e.g. the insights and motivations leading to linking education

¹¹ VETNET is the vocational education and training stream within the European Educational Research Association annual conference (ECER).

[across the spectrum], identity and globalisation reviewed in Schrottner and Hofer (eds) (2009). It may be that the broader (than Australian) European Union view of competency

'Competence means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development'
(European Commission 2008, C111/4)

is influential in broadening the European view and delivery of VET. However, this is not to say that VET in the EU is fully aligning with its rhetoric and that some deeper reflection upon the European Commission view is required to support our view. As for Australia, reflection upon intentions and action to ensure achievement are worthy – arguably imperative – processes. In this respect, we suggest that much resides in the empowerment of VET teachers to act in an educationalist manner. Such empowerment is pivotal to VET outcomes and cohesiveness in a global society. Increasing, our capacity and commitment to learn, work and live together – globally – is a significant factor in achieving and maintaining global harmony.

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