



**The Role of Public Diplomacy and Soft Power in Technical and
Vocational Education and Training (TVET):
The Case of Australia**

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Abstract

Australia's international education serves as a public diplomacy in a way that advances Australian foreign policy priorities and national interests. The globalised nature of international education presents enormous opportunity for vital exchange and interactions between and with students, academics and communities via onshore and offshore modes of delivery. Over the last century diplomacy has expanded its parameters to include the concept of “public diplomacy,” a term that covers the actions of several actors and activities intended to promote favorable relations among nations. In the practice of diplomacy, countries have extended their national interests through education as it still plays an important role in the advancement of national influence. In this paper we focus on the role Soft Power and post-cold war public diplomacy plays in promoting and developing the education sector of countries with a particular focus on vocational learning and training and taking into consideration examples of successful countries in our case Australia in employing education diplomacy to develop educational capacities.

Keywords: Public diplomacy, Soft power, Australia, National interest, Vocational learning and teaching

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Introduction

Diplomacy has faced significant changes over the last decades. Factors such as outbreak of the First World or ending of the cold war have changed the characteristics of diplomacy. Any state aims to strengthen its position and prestige in the international arena, as well as to create favorable conditions for its long-term socio-economic development. To achieve these goals, the state uses a variety of foreign policy tools of both hard and soft power (Nye, 2009). However, it is observed that after the fall of the bipolar world order, many states tend to use soft power aiming to achieve their foreign policy goals. The main reasons behind this tendency are an increase of interdependence among states and the heavy price that nations pay for achieving foreign policy objectives with the use of hard power. In this context, soft power instruments started to occupy a more effective position in the foreign policy of the countries, and we can foresee that this position will continue to rise in the coming period.

Moreover, many new actors are also now involved in the international atmosphere which includes international organizations, transnational corporations, interest groups, NGO's, private companies, etc... Today governments have to face various actors that shape its agenda and the role of states have changed as a response to the involvement of these new actors that shape modern diplomacy. Public diplomacy can be used as an instrument that can build and leverage soft power to facilitate a nation's long-term strategic positioning.

In this paper Australia's VET (Vocational Education & Training) is examined. Australia's VET sector is based on a partnership between governments and industry. VET qualifications are provided by government institutions, called Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions, as well as private institutions. Australian governments (federal and state) provide funding, develop policies, and contribute to regulation and quality assurance of the sector. Industry and employer groups contribute to training policies and priorities, and developing qualifications that deliver skills to the workforce.

Public Diplomacy and Soft Power

If we consider the role that soft power and education play in the foreign policy of the state, it is important to note that soft power is a concept developed in 1990 by political theorist Joseph Nye of Harvard University to describe the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce, and use economic, cultural and political force as a means of persuasion (Nye, 2009).

In more recent years, the role of education and academic exchange in building international relationships has been characterized by the term "soft power". Rather than employing force, soft power is dependent on the strength of ideas and culture, to influence the friendship and disposition of others.

Education is considered an ideal vehicle for soft power. Only a developed education system that meets the requirements of innovative high-tech economy, and is integrated into the international educational and scientific space, can become one of the major competitive advantages of the modern state in the "global competition for minds" and attract the most talented foreign students. The provision of educational opportunities for foreign students is one of the most important instruments of soft power of the state (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008). Successful foreign students, who along with learning the language will gradually become acquainted with the achievements of science and culture of the host country, can gain valuable social capital after studying abroad. Consequently, after coming back with acquired knowledge and personal relations, they are expected to become effective transmitters of the language and culture of the country where they had studied (Nye, 2005). As a result, the effectiveness of exposure to the outside world

with the help of national education as an instrument of soft power is much higher than by military force or hard power.

Public diplomacy has a long history as a means of promoting a country's soft power. The basic distinction between traditional diplomacy and public diplomacy is clear: the former is about relationships between the representatives of states, or other international actors; whereas the latter targets the general public in foreign societies and more specific non-official groups, organizations and individuals.

Cultural Diplomacy

The new public diplomacy, and the rise of cultural relations as an aspect, acknowledges that the technological and mobility changes within a globalised society are creating a situation in which we are all potential ambassadors. This is highlighted in the Demos report on Cultural Diplomacy: "Where the rise of public diplomacy could be described as the shift from few-to-few communication (traditional diplomacy) to few-to-many, this era will be characterized by the growth of many-to-many interactions" (Bound et al, 2007).

Cultural diplomacy is regarded as forming international bridges and interactions, identifying networks and power domains within cultures and transcending national and cultural boundaries. With the presence of information technologies, soft power incorporates national culture including knowledge, belief, art, morals and any other capabilities and habits created by a society. The importance of public diplomacy has been emerging since soft power has been growing out of culture, out of domestic values and policies, and out of foreign policy. It draws on the significant role of cultural diplomacy as the linchpin of public diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy is a cost effective practice considering its outcomes and impacts on international ties between countries. Cultural diplomacy helps create a foundation of trust with other people, which policy makers can build on to reach political, economic, and military agreements. Cultural diplomacy encourages other people to give the nation the benefit of the doubt on specific policy issues or requests for collaboration, since there is a presumption of shared interest. In addition, cultural diplomacy demonstrates national values and creates relationships with people, which can result in changes in government and can reach influential members of foreign societies who cannot be reached through traditional embassy functions. In the meantime, it provides a positive agenda for cooperation in spite of policy differences, creates a neutral platform for people-to-people contact, and serves as a flexible, universally accepted vehicle for approach with countries where diplomatic relations have been strained or are absent.

In so many of the ways in which culture interacts with diplomacy, we see the need for education and training to make the project successful. Indeed, the new environment of many-to-many public diplomacy means that the general population's attitude to international issues and cultural affairs is a key to projecting a positive image of a country. This makes the idea of educational partnerships vital within the new public diplomacy as it is one of the few areas where we can realistically hope for genuine two-way cooperation.

Having international connections is becoming increasingly important to most universities. Links between higher education institutions is perhaps the fastest growing area of cultural relations. Several examples of Public Diplomacy are stated below with a brief description which includes the Fulbright Program, British Council, German Academic Exchange and China's Confucius Institutes.

The Fulbright Program—sponsored by the US Department of State—is an excellent example of public diplomacy, being furthered through higher education. Its principal goal is to foster mutual understanding between people and nations, and the program has always been a mix of government and people generated soft power. It claims the largest movement of students and scholars across the world that any nation has ever sponsored. Government officials often cite it as one of the great diplomatic assets of the United States.

Citizens and leaders of other countries who have participated in Fulbright frequently proclaim a familiarity with and a fondness for the United States and its people due to their experiences—a result that generates goodwill for the United States abroad. While Fulbright has not been replicated by other countries, there are other well-organized efforts to extend national diplomacy through education.

The British Council is a prime example. With offices around the world, sometimes operating as an affiliate of British embassies, the British Council describes itself as the United Kingdom's international organization for educational opportunities and cultural relations. Along with the Fulbright model, it offers scholarships for study in the United Kingdom and sponsors educational exchanges between higher education institutions there and in other countries.

The German Academic Exchange Service plays a similar but less extensive role; that non-Western countries have followed with their diplomatic efforts.

China emerged with an idea for its own brand of educational diplomacy, in 2004. Its Confucius Institutes are designed to promote Chinese language and culture abroad. By 2011, there were 353 Confucius Institutes in 104 countries and regions.

International Education Methods

Teaching of the national language abroad in international exchange programmes and a variety of other types of post-compulsory teaching and learning are among International education exchange programs. International education and training aims to build tolerance, understanding and communication, and develop relationships between nations through the intercultural learning of its citizens, particularly in higher education. This is education's contribution to diplomacy. The importance of recognizing and appreciating diversity is becoming fundamental in the multi-cultural societies in which many of us now live, and the decentralization of higher education, with foreign university campuses and student exchanges, is vital for preparing today's young people for life in a global community and economy.

One study that examines the relationship of higher educational links in the changing environment is Canto and Hannah's article on academic collaboration between the UK and Brazil. The collaboration was organized by the British Council and the Brazilian Federation Agency responsible for funding higher education in order to "promote and facilitate academic collaboration between universities in the UK and Brazil." (Canto & Hannah, 2001) The project was known in the UK as "higher education links" and in Brazil as "joint research projects" and was financed by the Department for International Development (DFID) and administered by the British Council. It set out to "replace traditional North – South relationships of donor and recipient with genuine academic partnerships."

Academic and professional links and partnerships have always been important for progress in science and technology, but this is now taking place on a much wider scale, with many universities taking advantage of partnerships with Universities or campuses overseas, as well as creating links with foreign universities. The way these partnerships are conducted gives an interesting insight in the role of new public diplomacy in this type of exchange.

Role of Technology

20 years ago, the essence of diplomacy was described with the following components: state-centric environment, dominant formats of mutual cooperation between countries, ministry of foreign affairs as the exclusive institution in representing important governmental issues... However, we now see changes, the role of non-governmental actors has increased, and multilateral cooperation formats have become more important, the influence of information is growing, means of communication is diversified and innovative information technologies are introduced. One feature of the 21st century that is changing the character of

diplomacy is the use of advanced information technologies in modern communication. Nowadays, information circulation and its accessibility changes the dynamics of diplomatic work requiring faster reactions and other principles of information selection. The 21st century requires experts in various fields: energy issues, environment, finance, economics, human rights, health issues, information and communication technology (Klavins, 2012) for which new methods of training and education is required.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training methods worldwide

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems are increasingly becoming recognized by governments as very important to economic development through their focus on skills for the labor market. They are also seen as instruments of social policy, for example to assist those in particular social groups, such as those in poverty, or those who lack marketable skills (Basu, 1997).

Since the 1990s, policies of Agencies for International Cooperation move more and more towards Programme Based Approaches (PBAs). The purpose is to avoid fragmentation of development assistance, to achieve enhanced coordination of financial means and better cooperation. Also the ownership of development programmes of recipient countries and the support of partners' institutional development are strongly emphasized, which could not be achieved to a satisfactory degree by the project-based approach:

A) multiplicity of donor organizations pursued "their own" interventions, paying insufficient attention to intra- and intersectoral issues and to recipient country needs and preferences." 1 This does not mean that there is no support for projects anymore, but rather the embedding of the project approach has changed: "It is the notion of who is leading and who 'owns' the development agenda (Agencies for international cooperation in technical and vocational education and training, 2008).

The most important approach of programme-based assistance is the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp). It is characterized by various forms and definitions according to the multiple agencies involved in International Cooperation, which also name these approaches in slightly different ways. Individual interpretations by the various donors are mentioned in the respective sections of this guide (Foster, 2000).

A Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) is

"A process in which funding for the sector – whether internal or from donors – supports a single policy and expenditure programme, under government leadership, and adopting common approaches across the sector. It is generally accompanied by efforts to strengthen government procedures for disbursement and accountability. A SWAp should ideally involve broad stakeholder consultation in the design of a coherent sector programme at micro, meso and macro levels, and strong co-ordination among donors and between donors and government." The Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) also provides room for funding of projects, where the projects are entirely part of the policy and budget.

Most Agencies for International Cooperation favor programme-based approaches. They are in different stages of adaptation of their respective policies to this modality though. Agencies for International Cooperation vary in the interpretation of the concept of "ownership". The definitions of "ownership" ranges from (central) government ownership, over the inclusion of local government and/or key elements of civil society to "everyone involved in a given sector". Together with the idea of SWAp-like approaches goes the concept of Basket Funding (BF), which means joint funding by several donors. It may or it may not be provided in the form of budget support to the recipient government. The budget support (or cash transfer) in turn can be provided either as support to the budget as a whole or as part of a programme or sector (Foster, 2000).

International Training and Assessment Courses carried out by Australia

The international training and assessment courses are a set of international courses developed by the Australian Government to help meet the global demand for skilled trainers and assessors. These courses are based on Australian technical standards that have been internationalized to suit the requirements of a global labor market. The courses provide Australian registered training organizations (RTOs) an opportunity to expand their delivery to offshore markets through products that meet a key area of demand in foreign technical vocational education and training TVET systems.

The international training and assessment courses are the first in a suite of International Skills Training (IST) courses being developed with Australian TVET expertise, in partnership with Australian RTOs, governments and/or private enterprise and are licensed by the Australian government for delivery by quality Australian RTOs. The international training and assessment courses are designed to assist in building capacity of trainers and assessors; a key foundation of any successful training system.

There are three courses: TVET Trainer, TVET Assessor and TVET Advanced Trainer and Assessor.

The TVET Trainer Course and TVET Assessor Courses provide learners with a vocational background of the skills to train or assess learners in their industry of expertise. Appropriately skilled trainers will have the confidence and capacity to make reasoned judgments when training, including adapting teaching materials and learning techniques to meet industry and learner needs. Skilled assessors will help to meet the needs of industry and enterprises through assessing learners' skills and knowledge for the workplace.

The TVET Advanced Trainer and Assessor Course provide learners with the skills to take up a leadership role within a training organization, enterprise or industry. Learners in the advanced course are expected to take a strategic approach to TVET and have extensive knowledge of systems and processes, and are able to develop effective learning and assessment materials to improve professional practice in TVET. They will assume a critical role in the development of skilled workers, equipped with the knowledge and capability to help shape professional practice in the vocational education system. (Australia Gov, 2016)

In completing a course specifically designed for an international context, learners will develop skills which prepare them for greater opportunities to participate in the globally-mobile skilled workforce. All learners who successfully complete a course will be awarded a completion certificate carrying the Australian Government crest and the Australia Future Unlimited brand. The Australian Government is working with national governments and relevant organizations to ensure these courses are recognized internationally.

These courses offer Australian RTOs a chance to expand their opportunities to deliver training overseas, particularly through bilateral partnerships with industries and businesses. As many countries attempt to increase their skilled workforce, there is a greater demand for 'train-the-trainer' programs which meet the needs of the local workforce. These courses offer different and additional educational services to the Australian Qualifications already being delivered. They are tailored for an international context to meet training demands and overseas skills training needs. They are designed to be scalable and adaptable to the local overseas environments (Australian Gov, 2016).

International Training and Assessment Course pilot programme

The pilot programme took place throughout the Asia Pacific region and was finished in March 2016. The pilot involved delivery of the courses to students from India, Saudi Arabia, the Solomon Islands and Korea. The pilot has primarily been delivered in India, where the Australian Government has worked closely with

the Indian National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to establish partnerships with federal and state government agencies, as well as local businesses and training providers.

Also, The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) is the managing agency of the Australian Government's official overseas aid programme. It is an administratively autonomous agency affiliated with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Australia's aid contribution lies with 0.25% of the gross national income over the international average of 0.23%. Concerning the field of education, AusAID puts particular focus on basic and technical and vocational education. Major topics are TVE curriculum development, teaching standard and competency, and infrastructure. Support is given to the introduction of demand driven approaches, the encouragement of public and private sector employers, and activities to improve the access of vulnerable groups to TVET and skills development, especially girls. Major regional focus areas are Australia's neighbors in the Pacific and South East Asia (Agencies for international cooperation in technical and vocational education and training, 2008).

Conclusion

The Educational system is one of the vitally important spheres in every country and also in our case Australia, and its degradation leads to the degradation of the entire country. In most educational diplomacies there are mixed motives for seeking engagement. The search for fee-paying students is a leading reason for greater cross-border activity. Institutions and governments in countries with well-developed higher education are creating initiatives to receive students from many developing countries. Some universities in spite of less well developed higher education seek relationships with other institutions they view as more prestigious to increase their chances of a higher degree in global rankings. Countering these more narrow motivations for engagement, many institutions are developing broader internationalization strategies, to seek cooperative agreements that define themselves as global institutions. They may want to pursue a variety of goals through engagement—to enrich their academic programs, enlarge the knowledge and experience base for their students, host a more internationally diverse student body and faculty, provide more opportunities for their faculty to join international research networks, and ultimately to develop a wide spectrum of joint activity that will benefit both partners. As with all sustainable relationships, the character of the parties and the ethical framework in which they operate are all important. Countries and institutions engaging in educational diplomacy have an obligation to consider the benefits—not merely to themselves but also to their partners. This will be in the best spirit of international relations and internationalization of higher education.

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