EDUCATION FOR ETHICAL PRACTICES: ALIGNING CURRICULUM TO WORKPLACE NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES

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Abstract— **Over the past decade, there has been an increase in ethics education in both higher and technical and vocational education programs in Fiji. Those of us who have worked in the field for some time now find it gratifying that the importance of teaching ethics is now recognized. However, educators who engage in ethics curriculum design and implementation for technical programs are confronted by many challenges. One of the challenges is overcoming a 'gap' between knowledge and skills acquired through education and training and those needed by industries. This "gap" is coined in as 'Transversal skill" in a UNESCO Bangkok regional study, entitled *Transversal Skills in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET): Focus on Pedagogies and Assessment in the Asia-Pacific* in 2014. This paper builds on the concept of transversal skills and refers to a number of important competencies that is acquired through ethics education and that helps TVET students' better progress through pathways between education levels and across employment sectors. These includes 'critical thinking skills', 'ethical practices', 'creativity', 'independent problem solving', 'professionalism', 'communications skills', 'teamwork', 'lifelong learning', 'reflective skills and collaboration skills, etc. This paper explores the current trends in pedagogies and assessment of transversal skills in ethics curricula for technical and vocational education programs at Fiji National University in Fiji. It documents the current trends in pedagogies and assessment of certificate level ethics course, highlights some of the practices highly recommended with identified challenges and recommendations for continuous curriculum improvement.**

Index Terms— **TVET Ethics curricula; transversal skills; Pedagogies and assessment; curriculum assessment and improvement**

I. INTRODUCTION

The ethics course titled "Fundamentals of Ethical Practices" is taught as a generic skill unit by the Department of Ethics and Governance to students enrolled in the different trade certificate programs at Fiji National University. The unit is a mandatory component of all programs currently offered by College of Science and Technology which adopted Ethics education into its program since its introduction in 2010. The unit provides students with a basic understanding of ethics and ethical behavior and practice, and equips them with skills and guidelines for making ethical judgments and decisions. It covers ethics in personal life, religion and ethical theories, law and governance, business and work ethics, ethics in professions and trades. Successful completion of this trade certificate ethics course prepares FNU graduates to deal with ethical challenges in their chosen trades and professions.

The inclusion of ethics course in TVET programs at Fiji National University indeed is an investment in the development of transversal skills (including 'critical thinking', 'ethical practice', 'creativity', 'independent problem solving', 'professional skills', 'communications skills', 'teamwork', and 'lifelong learning') .It helps in bridging the gap between what students are learning in the classroom and the application of this knowledge to the real world. Complete technical and vocational education training must allow students to acquire essential knowledge to become capable and competent in the industries associated to the training. Most industries recruiting workers look for trained professionals who are thoroughly prepared from solving practical problems to successfully team player. It is not enough to have good grades, an impressive intelligence quotient or a smart appearance. Nowadays, industries give precedence to workers equipped with moral values, professional ethics, discipline, awareness, attitudes that support industrialized work (Rosa, Miranda & Gonzalex, 2013).

A. Research Objectives

This research paper will contribute to expanding the knowledge base on transversal competency and focuses on the **implementation of ethics** in TVET program at Fiji national University. It explores ways in which transversal competencies are integrated and assessed in Certificate level ethics course in TVET and in particular:

1) Analyzes the current status of teaching and assessing of ethics course in TVET program at FNU
2) Highlights recommended approaches
3) Identifies challenges and provides recommendations

The overall objective of this paper is to document Fiji National University's attempt in bridging the "gap" between knowledge and skills acquired through ethics education and those recognized and needed by industries. This would thus provide a starting point for building a dialogue between academia and world of work, and help bridge any divides between teaching and learning and assessment methods, and the actual ethical challenges faced in industries. This can further help produce institutional recommendations that will advise policy makers on how to strengthen current TVET policies to effectively support pedagogies and assessment practices that are conducive to developing transversal skills, as well as showcase good practices in teaching and assessing ethical skills in TVET in Fiji

B. Research Questions
1. What are the current trends in approaches of implementation and modes of integration of ethics curriculum?
2. What pedagogies are being implemented in the teaching of transversal skills in the current ethics course?
3. What type of assessment is being used to evaluate students' transversal skills in ethics course?

4. What are the proven pedagogical and assessment approaches recommended in teaching transversal skills?
5. What will be the challenges of these recommended pedagogy and assessment for FNU?

II. THE CURRENT TRENDS

A. *Approaches to implementing transversal competencies in ethics education*

There are many approaches documented in development of curriculum framework or other methods for the inclusion of transversal competencies. Although studies show different education systems adopt different approaches, there are roughly two types of approaches: (a) the analytical approach and (b) the holistic approach. This ethics course for certificate program takes a more holistic approach where learning of transversal competencies is introduced as a scheme that conveys an overall message.

B. *Modes of integration*

Different education systems utilize different methods of integrating the teaching and learning of transversal competencies into the curriculum. There are largely three modes through which learning of transversal competencies can take place: Specific Subject, Cross Subject and Extra-Curricular. For the certificate ethics course in view, learning of transversal competencies is included as a well-defined entity within the formal curriculum with specific goals through a unit descriptor. It is stand- alone unit (with 5 credit points) serviced to all certificate programs in TVET

III. PEDAGOGIES TO ENHANCE TRANSVERSAL SKILLS IN ETHICS COURSE.

This section documents pedagogies implemented in teaching of transversal skill in ethics education for TVET programs. The experiences created blends theory and practice to provide each trade student a solid intellectual framework with an understanding that this will be applied when needed. The following pedagogies not only create awareness but enhance ethical knowledge within the TVET program enabling students to have a comprehensive understanding of ethical issues. The knowledge that is developed is further transferred into a right, fair and just action. The following are high-cognitive level activities to deepen students' understanding and awareness of issues related to personal and professional life, to influence critical thinking and to enhance lifelong learning:

A. *Interactive Lecture*

Concepts and general knowledge of ethics are presented with PowerPoint slides. Questions are asked during lecture sessions and students allowed to respond. Students are given short exercises and are encouraged to work along with the lecturer and their peers as the lecturer covers each topic. These activities together with games, images, cartoon illustrations, poems and documentary clips used during lectures challenges students thinking and beliefs.

Getting students involved, rather than sitting passively, increases students interest and student perception of their own learning.

B. *Case studies*

Cases are designed to confront students with specific real-life and professional problems. Case discussion demands critical and analytical skills and, when implemented in small groups, also fosters collaboration (Pimple, 2002). By providing a focus for discussion, students are helped to define or refine their own standards, to appreciate alternative approaches to identifying and resolving ethical problems, and to develop skills for analyzing and dealing with hard problems on their own.

C. *Role play*

A primary purpose of role-play exercises is for students to imagine themselves actually facing the ethical challenges presented by the exercise. Students are asked to not just discuss a scripted case, but to develop a case and take on roles as specific characters. This helps them to develop critical ethical reasoning skills.

D. *Debate*

The principle of using a debate format to address ethical challenges is to encourage students to formulate their views and to deepen understanding of the opposing viewpoints enhancing analytical reasoning skills.

E. *Video/short documentaries/media*

Media is a component of active learning strategies which is usually a film clip, a song on the radio or newspaper article. Effective instruction builds bridges between students' knowledge and the learning objectives of the course. This engages students, aids student retention of knowledge, motivates interest in the subject matter, and illustrates the relevance of many concepts.

Students are also encouraged to create their own media. For example, student video recorded drama or role play is a powerful learning experience.

IV. ASSESSMENTS TASKS IN ETHICS COURSE

Student assessment, whether by invigilated exams or classroom-based measures, is a cornerstone of effective teaching and learning. Taken as a whole, good assessments can not only provide a reliable and valid measure of a student's learning and understanding, but also help narrowing the gap between knowledge learnt and knowledge applied (Ridgeway, McCusker and Pead 2004). This certificate level ethics course for TVET program has recently been adopted to 100% coursework based unit and has a combination of summative and formative assessments .This has enabled us to move from primarily measuring declarative knowledge(Biggs and Tang, 2007a) to measuring students' ability to think critically, examine problems, gather information and make informed reasoned decisions. With a goal of producing more ethical graduates with lifelong thinking skills we have organized our assessment activities as follows:

- **2 Short tests** worth 20% to enable students to identify, describe, list, explain, argue, compare and contrast the contents covered in the topics covered during lecture and tutorial. Multiple –choice and scenario- based questions are in use.
- **Role play** worth 20% to enable students to be actively involved. It promotes deep learning, long-term retention and can be very memorable and powerful. This training will help students be prepared to recognize and address ethical problems. To be able to think through the problem and gain some skills and tools to use should they encounter such a problem.

- **Portfolio** worth 60%. The majority of the assessment for learning in this course takes place in students' reflective portfolio which is designed to become self-directed and self-motivated learner. The portfolio process is continuous and ongoing throughout the 13 week Ethics course. This portfolio is used to measure students' personal growth and academic progress in the study of Ethics. This portfolio provides a comprehensive record of personal views, reflection on own learning and lecture, experiences, achievements, and demonstration of competencies through collection and documentation of relevant case studies, articles, profiles and interviews. In total it helps students in *collecting*, *reflecting*, *selecting* and *connecting* and is organized as follows:

  o SECTION 1-Reflective Writing
  o SECTION 2-Case Studies
  o SECTION 3:Documentation and additional resources
     (See Appendix 1 for details)

V. PEDAGOGICAL AND ASSESSMENT APPROACHES RECOMMENDED IN TEACHING TRANSVERSAL SKILLS

In all of the learning and assessments activities mentioned above, much of the knowledge is learned, not for its own sake so much but to construct a platform for launching informed decision makers and performers into the workforce later when required. However, Biggs and Tang, (2007b) called this "fill-up-the-tanks model" where knowledge is built up first, the application of that knowledge second. Studies indicate that though students manage to do those with varying degree of success but with experience of real world become increasingly better at that. Biggs and Tang (2007c) proposes a" just-in-time learning" model. Their focus here on teaching and learning activities beyond formal teacher directed situations. Just-in-time learning is now conceived more broadly in connection with lifelong learning in the workplace (Brandenburg and Ellinger 2003).Other researchers have also proposed an ongoing interface between educational institutions and industries and have related lifelong learning to situated work activities (Billet 2004a), workplace learning(Onstenk, Jeroen; Blokhuis, Franck 2007), work based learning(Biggs and Tang, 2007d),work integrated learning(Choy and Delahaye,2011). This model enables the integration of theory and practice, bridging the gap between the university and the workplace (Flanagan, 2000).

Workplace learning is an active learning experience focusing on student participation in situated work activities (Billet 2004b). It provides a teaching/learning situation where students learn through experiencing and active participation in learning (usually under supervision) in various aspects of professional practice situated in the real-life professional context.

VI. CHALLENGES FOR INTEGRATING WORK BASED LEARNING PEDAGOGIES AND ASSESSMENT IN ETHICS COURSE AT FNU

Though, work-based and just-in-time learning as mentioned above can apply to undergraduate, technical and vocational programs, it poses the following challenges for Ethics course at FNU:

A. Ethics is taught in a traditional (continued) post – secondary education classrooms format. This environment includes an already present culture of teaching and learning in TVET education. Even if the students feel that the material isn't immediately useful they may still operate in a culture that values knowledge for its intrinsic worth. Maintaining the same culture in a workplace is a challenge to academics as this means creating an environment to create a culture for worker-learners than learners only.

B. Currently ethics curriculum is designed and delivered by School of Social Sciences. It takes a holistic approach with aim of enhancing 'graduate attributes' with generic capabilities developed through a structured curriculum. The staff involved in designing, teaching and assessing have education and interest in ethical theory or practice. When such training is taken out into the workplace, the executives within the organization might find it irrelevant as he/she may have little knowledge and interest in this field. A study taken by Choy and Delahaye (2009) at Queensland University of Technology on some challenges for work integrated learning found that

"The NGO was interested in relevant sections of the study units, expecting immediate applications to respond to issues and trigger organizational change."

The focus here was more on applied knowledge than theories. This is surely leading to a difference in agenda between the university and the industry and more than a little ambiguity as to what counts as "ethics" for delivery (Choy and Delahaye 2011) to learner workers.

The organization executives and leaders might also feel targeted when topics such as "whistle blowing", "Workers' rights" etc are discussed.

C. Teaching ethics in a particular work-context mean structuring pedagogies and assessment for discipline specific skills, knowledge and competencies usually carried out by an expert. In case of TVET education, it would mean automotive engineer for automotive industry, mechanical engineer for mechanical industry, building and civil engineer for building industry and electrical engineer for electrical industry. Hiring experts to teach ethics can however be very costly as these engineers will command higher salaries with arguably better career prospects outside academia.

It is true and also necessary to note, that engineers have expertise knowledge and real experience in ethical issues concerning their industry, however, they may not have teaching experience or teaching qualification. Likewise the academic community won't necessarily have the engineering background. The question is: Are our universities prepared to do a bit of training of staff and equip them with some professional training?

D. It is clear that introducing student centered pedagogies into the workplace is a process of change for both students and teachers. Teachers will have to leave their comfort zone of frontal instruction, e.g. give away a certain degree of control, and shift to pedagogies that can develop students into self- motivated learners. Students will have to learn to adapt to new learning environments where they are required to be active participants who share and learn from each other's experiences.

E. Given that assessing ethical skills can be more complex than that of occupation-specific skills, there is concerns of fairness and validity of the assessment methods, the assessor and ultimately the assessment outcome. To ensure credibility of results, teachers need to be adequately prepared to monitor and assess their students' performance. Setting appropriate attainment goals is an important factor that needs to be carefully considered given that different occupations need different levels of ethical awareness and sensitivity enhancements. Therefore, the purpose for assessment needs to be clearly understood as it helps students improve their preparedness to meet requirements of their prospective occupations in a rapidly changing world.

F. Finally, knowledge of pedagogy and assessment suitable for the teaching of transversal competencies in workplace is still relatively weak. There are a number of documented experiences that are yet to be supported and explained by theory. There are also findings from research that are relevant to transversal competencies development, yet practices and policies are not informed by such findings. Without moving to the forefront of action research, FNU is not positioned to take the lead in narrowing this gap and in maintain the leading role in enabling its' graduates meet the needs of the nation and contribute to a sustainable future. (Draft Strategic plan, 2013)

VII. CONCLUSION

There is growing concern and recognition of a "gap" between knowledge and skills acquired through education and training and those needed by industries. The author documents use of high- cognitive level learning and assessment activities in an Ethics course titled" Fundamentals of Ethical Practices "which is taught as a generic unit by the Department of Ethics and Governance to students enrolled in TVET program at Fiji *National University*. The experiences are created through interactive lectures, case studies, role play, debate, portfolios that blends theory and practice to provide each trade student a solid intellectual framework with an understanding that this will be applied when needed. It also helps to deepen students' understanding and awareness of issues related to personal and professional life, to influence critical thinking, communications skills, teamwork, and to enhance lifelong learning. However, many researchers have written against a model where knowledge is built up first, the application of that knowledge second. Studies indicate that though students manage to do those with varying degree of success, with experience of real world become increasingly better at that. Biggs and Tang (2007) proposes a" just-in-time learning" model. Their focus here on teaching and learning activities that put knowledge to work, with particular reference to professional contexts. However this poses a number of challenges particularly in TVET ethics course for Fiji National University which relates to increased cost for hiring experts, need for additional adaptation time for both teachers and student, building an academic culture outside classroom and concerns of fairness and validity of the assessment methods, the assessor and ultimately the assessment outcome. This study therefore concludes that to ensure the development of well-rounded ethical graduates, transversal skills need to be developed along with generic and specialized skills. The study substantiates that successful work based learning meets the needs of individuals and their workplace but calls for more research to understand the dynamics and ways to approach learning partnerships between Fiji National University and industries in Fiji.

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Appendix 1