

Reconceptualising Competency-based Education and Training:

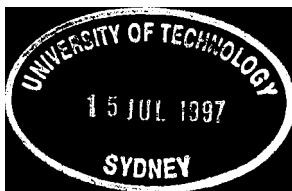
with particular reference to education for occupations in Australia.

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (by publication).

University of Technology, Sydney

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CERTIFICATE

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I have received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature of Candidate

Production Note:

Signature removed prior to publication.

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Linking Essay

- Publication (a)- Gonczi, A., Hager, P. and Oliver, L. (1990). *Establishing Competency-based Standards in the Professions*. National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service (pp 70).
- Publication (b)- Hager, P. and Gonczi, A. (1991). Competency based standards: A boon for continuing professional education? *Studies in Continuing Education*, 13,1, 24-40.
- Publication (c) - Gonczi, A., Hager, P. and Athanasou, J. (1993). *The Development of Competencybased Assessment Strategies for the Professions*. Canberra: DEET, Australian Government Publishing Service (pp 117).
- Publication (d)- Scheeres, H., Gonczi, A., Hager, P. and Morley Warner, T. (1993). *The Adult Basic Education Profession and Competence: Promoting Best Practice*, Sydney: University of Technology, Sydney (pp 80).
- Publication (e)- Hager, P. and Gonczi, A. (1993). Attributes and competence. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research*, 1, 1, 36-46.
- Publication (f)- Hager, P., Gonczi, A. and Athanasou, J. (1994). General issues about the assessment of competence. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 19, 1, 3-16.
- Publication (g) - Gonczi, A. (1994) Competency Based Assessment in the Professions in Australia. *Assessment in Education - principles, policy, practice*, 1, 1, 27-44.
- Publication (h)- Hager, P., Athanasou, J. and Gonczi, A. (1994). *Assessment: Technical Manual*. Canberra: DEET, Australian Government Printing Service (pp 158).
- Publication (i)- Gonczi, A. and Hager, P. (1994). The Distinction between Skills Based and Qualifications Based Procedures for Recognising Migrants Professional Skills. *International Migration*, XXXIII, 1, 127-144.
- Publication (j)- Gonczi, A. (1996). Future Directions for Vocational Education in Australian Secondary Schools. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research* (forthcoming). This is an adaptation of the paper below.
Gonczi, A. (1995). Future directions for post compulsory education: integrated competency based approaches to vocational education in NSW. Paper presented at the Vocational Education in Schools conference. May. Coffs Harbour (pp33).
- Publication (k)- Gonczi, A. (1996). *Competence Based Assessment* by Alison Wolf. Review Symposium, *Assessment in Education*, 3, 2, 241-247.
- Appendix (a)- Ash, S., Gonczi, A. and Hager, P. (1992). *Combining Research Methodologies to Develop Competency-Based Standards for Dietitians: A Case Study for the Professions*. National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition Research Paper No. 6, DEET. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Appendix (b) - Gonczi, A. Hager, P. and Palmer, C. (1994). Performance Based Assessment and the NSW Law Specialist Accreditation Program. *The Journal of Professional Legal Education*, 12, 2, 135-149.
- Appendix (c)- Gonczi, A., Curtain, R., Hager, P., Hallard, A. and Harrison, J. (1995). *Key Competencies in on-the-job Training*. Sydney: UTS-DIRETFE.

LINKING ESSAY

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Reconceptualising Competency-based Education and Training: with particular reference to education for occupations in Australia.

Andrew Gonczi

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An essay written in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (by publication).

The thesis

The thesis that emerges from the publications nominated for examination, is that a holistic or integrated competency based approach to vocational education and training (VET) and professional education (both initial and continuing) has many advantages over traditional approaches:

- It provides a curriculum framework which links practice to theory in more coherent ways than currently exist;
- It potentially provides a way of breaking the old dichotomy between "knowing that" and "knowing how" which has characterised Anglo-Saxon education and which has resulted in the belief that education which is practical is both different from and inferior to that which is abstract;
- It provides the basis for teaching and learning approaches which could enhance students' adaptability and flexibility over their lives;
- It has the potential for developing in occupational education more valid assessment strategies than those traditionally used and also for reducing the deleterious effects on learning of measurement-based assessment approaches.

In summary, it is argued that the integrated approach to competency-based education provides a conceptual base for the competency movement and a promising direction for educational reform for all levels of occupational education.

It is further argued that competency standards developed through an integrated approach can facilitate the implementation of a number of other areas of social

and economic policy, such as the recognition of qualifications of overseas professionals in Australia, and the internationalisation of professional services.

Overview of the publications

The publications span a six-year period from 1990 to 1996. The first of them was written at a time when there was very little literature in the area (and virtually none in Australia) and when there was a great deal of confusion about the nature of competency, how to develop competency standards and the implications of the competency approach for education and training. What literature did exist, was mostly twenty years old and was largely a reaction against educational curricula which, it was felt, had failed to adequately prepare students for occupations or for life more generally. In place of a curriculum based on the acquisition of knowledge most of the critics suggested that curriculum should be based on an analysis of what people needed to do. Conceptually, as Wolf (1995) and others have pointed out, it was based on a naive reductionism arising out of behaviourist approaches to education. This approach was quite powerful for a brief period in the 1970s in teacher education programs in the United States. However the challenge to behaviourism from cognitive and humanist approaches to learning seemed to undermine the conceptual basis of the competency movement and very little was written about competency approaches until the late 1980s.

As Raven (1996) has recently pointed out, the literature on competency-based education which has appeared recently is also a reaction against "something that is sensed to be wrong" (p.74). But what this is, what needs to be achieved and how this could be done is not clear. He suggests that the contemporary competency literature lacks a conceptual and analytical base and that there is little recognition of the need for a research program which develops a better understanding of the nature of competence, how it might be developed in individuals, how it might be assessed and what impact this would have on individuals, organisations and society generally.

It is these issues that the publications submitted for examination have addressed. They have attempted to provide a conceptual base for competency-based education and a framework for how competency might be developed and assessed. Much of the recent literature in Australia has built on the approach which the publications originated.

The publications can be divided into those dealing with the nature of competency, particularly the integrated model, (a, b, d, e) those dealing with curriculum and teaching issues (b, j) and those dealing with assessment of competence (c, f, h, i, k). The theme which unites them, is the integrated approach to competency and its capacity to provide a coherent framework for improved educational practices in all occupational education.

Another possible way of categorising the publications would be by educational level. For reasons associated with the traditional division of labour in our workforces we tend to think about the differences between educational levels rather than the similarities. It is usual to think about higher education for example, even when it prepares people for occupations, as substantially different from other occupational education. This is underlined by the fact that there is no term, in common usage, to encompass both what is currently referred to as middle level or vocational education, and education for the professions. Despite its specific nature, professional education is often identified with academic and general education, while vocational education is identified with practical education and is assumed to be devoid of substantial theoretical content. In fact much of higher education for the professions is practical and much vocational education is grounded in theory, even if it is not always made explicit.

A conclusion which I believe can be drawn from these publications as a whole is that the difference between higher education for the professions and vocational education for middle level occupations is one of degree rather than one of kind. Obviously most professional work is more complex than work at, say, trades level. But it is better to conceptualise these levels on a continuum rather than to see them as essentially different. There will be many instances when professionals need to do things which are routine where simple competencies are used. Conversely many tradespeople will need to use complex combinations of competencies to solve challenging problems. Hence, it is not useful to divide the publications into those dealing specifically with the professions (of which there are six- a, b, c, d, g, i) and those dealing with issues relevant to all sectors of education (of which there are five- e, f, h, j, k). What the publications have to say about the nature of competency, how to develop competency through curricula and teaching and how to assess it, is broadly applicable to all occupational education irrespective of the context in which it is discussed.