

A quarter of a century of CBT: the vicissitudes of an idea

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AVETRA Conference, Sydney, April 2009

Introduction

“For an idea ever to be fashionable is ominous, since it must afterwards be always old-fashioned.”

[Santayana, G., *Winds of doctrine*, 1913]

- Ideas change!
- CBT: enduring topic for debate!
- This paper: traces the vicissitudes of the idea:
 - the ‘educators’ version’ (Croydon program), from 1983
 - the ‘training reform version’, from the early 1990s

VET context in late ‘70s and early ‘80s

- A climate of educational experimentation
- Some emphases: individualisation, accountability, quality, youth employability, relations between work and education
- Emergence of a ‘competency-based’ approach
- Powerful influence of the Kangan Report: access, equity, primacy of the individual learner, need for continuing vocational education

Research process

A 1982 research grant:

- 1983
 - questionnaires and tests with learners (n=50)
 - interviews with staff (n=4), employers (n=23), some managers
 - tests with Croydon learners; and with ‘traditional’ learners in Sydney (n=43) and Croydon (n=20)
- 1984 and 1985
 - questionnaires with learners (1984 n=91, 1985 n=115)
 - questionnaires with staff (n=11)
- 25 years on ... a follow-up (2008)
 - interviews with staff (n=4)

‘Educators’ version’ of CBT: Croydon from 1983

- Three intakes of apprentices: 1983, 1984 and 1985
- Program informed by two models: Norton et al. (1980) and Blank (1982)
 - competencies identified, made public
 - assessment based on competencies, explicit, made public
 - individual development and assessment
 - actual performance as primary evidence
 - progression by demonstrating attainment of competencies
- Emphases: individualised learning, self-pacing, modular curriculum, outcomes, explicit assessment, in-house standards

The heyday of CBT at Croydon

- Process of curriculum development
- Demands on staff
- Consolidating the program
- Resourcing the program
- A beacon of curriculum innovation
- Spreading the word

Changing VET context in '80s and '90s

- National economic imperatives in the 1980s
- A role for VET in a globally competitive economy
- CBT as a mechanism for aligning VET with national priorities
- A new role for industry in VET
- The 'marketisation' of VET

Reform comes to Croydon

- Transfer of responsibility for standards development
- Perception of the erosion of standards in the 1990s
- Economic spotlight on resource-intensive CBT
- Return to 'lock-step' learning
- Perception that the 'training reform version' of CBT is not 'really' competency-based

Conclusion: Triumph of the 'training reform version' of CBT

- Industry-led system aligned to national economic priorities
- An attack on VET educators' professionalism?
- Has the training reform version of CBT lead to a lowering of standards?
- The marketisation of VET
- To what extent is the 'training reform version' of CBT truly competency-based education?
- RPL a conspicuous benefit of the 'training reform version' of CBT

“An idea isn't responsible for the people who believe in it.”

(Dan Marquis, in the *New York Sun*, quoted in *The Penguin dictionary of modern humorous quotations*, 1987, p.152)