

Policy and Impact of Introduction of CBT to VET System in Australia

Wang Hongkun

Foreign Languages and International Affairs Studies School of Zhengzhou University, Zhengzhou, China

Keywords: CBT, VET, Australian education system

Abstract: In this paper, explanation of the definition, arguments in adult education field, research findings and my personal views and analysis of the research related to competency based training are focused. And all the aspects I mentioned above are centered by the introduction of competency based education and training. In the first part of my essay I stress on an issue of why Australia government has introduced CBT into vocational education and training system (VET). With this question I would first describe the general social environment of Australia before introducing CBT system and then give definition and list advantages of CBT according to the academic texts. By doing this, it will be clear that CBT has to be the most commonly used system in certain context. The following part of the essay will be structured as report of three researches. In the third part, I would analyse three researches with their highlighted findings which supports and illustrates the feasibility of the CBT system. Finally it will come with a conclusion of all the content above and then a scope of CBT future development.

1. Introduction

During the late 1980s competency based training (CBT) has been introduced into Australia. On the one hand, in order to maintain international competitiveness Australian government has to work out a more effective training and education system or to improve the former one. (Hawke and Cornford, 1998) On the other hand, education system has an urgent need of being developed to a more broaden way which means more widely recognized, more practical, more useful, more reality-based, better managed and more responsible to the changing context. (Tennant and Morris, 2001) There is not a commonly agreed definition of competency based training (CBT) by both the government sectors who promulgate the standards and training providers who are in charge of the practice at the moment. However, according to Walker (1993) competency based training is a system which provides a common frame work for certain area or even for the whole country to develop and connect many elements in work and education. I would give detailed explanations of such aspects in working and educating area in the following parts.

In this paper, explanation of the definition, arguments in adult education field, research findings and my personal views and analysis of the research related to competency based training are focused. And all the aspects I mentioned above are centered by the introduction of competency based education and training. In the first part of my essay I stress on an issue of why Australia government has

introduced CBT into vocational education and training system (VET). With this question I would first describe the general social environment of Australia before introducing CBT system and then give definition and list advantages of CBT according to the academic texts. By doing this, it will be clear that CBT has to be the most commonly used system in certain context. The following part of the essay will be structured as report of three researches. In the third part, I would analyse three researches with their highlighted findings which supports and illustrates the feasibility of the CBT system. Finally it will come with a conclusion of all the content above and then a scope of CBT future development[1].

2. Why and what is CBT?

If we want to acquire the answer of the question why CBT has been introduced to Australia we have to get to know the general context that CBT was introduced and all the relevant contents of CBT first. According to Wheeler(1993), CBT is a nationwide vocational education training system designed and developed for adult learners or, we could say, workforce within the framework of national competency standards in both Australian working and education areas. Ministers from all States and Territories and the Commonwealth agreed to provide and accredit such system and common standards which play as a role of benchmark for curriculum design, accreditation, training methods and assessment within the vocational education and training system. Compared with the post-compulsory framework, the newly developed system has some elements that reflect needs of the society, industries and individuals:

National competency standards specify the skill and knowledge and the application of those skills and knowledge to the standards of performance in the workplace. They are developed by industry parties, based on the work structures within the particular industry and expressed in terms of workplace outcomes. They are regularly reviews to ensure their continuing relevance (NTB 1992).

From the agenda described above we could see that it no longer focuses on the forms, for example, fixed and often long term of learning time, or the input of training packages, further more, it stresses on the pragmatic outcomes. With this agenda trainees can be trained more skilful so that they could meet the need of developing industry than before. And with this new agenda trainers would work in a more effective, responsive and flexible training system (Wheeler, 1993). From my personal point of view, the aim of education and training is to foster and develop various kinds of skills and knowledge according to needs of society and individual interests. But before introducing CBT to Australian vocational education and training system the aim of education has not been well expressed and showed. New training system has several features and principles which ensure and support the skill needs of industry[2]:

- national competency standards to be the benchmarks for certification and accreditation by State and Territory training systems.
- training systems to be nationally consistent and competency based articulation between modules and course, and between training systems (i.e. Public and private training providers).
- recognition of individual competencies regardless of how gained (i.e. through formal instruction, prior learning or on the job experience).
- skills linked to career paths through awards and restructured awards.
- transfer-ability and portability of skills both within and across industries.
- training throughout the structure, with flexible entry and exit points.
- training system responsive to industry needs (VEETAC, 1991).

According to the principles which were agreed by States and Territories and the Commonwealth and arranged released by the National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT) aspects are not only related to general direction of new system but also the details of how the system runs. For example, according to later explanation by NFROT further agreements like "the curriculum and assessment methodologies are based on national competency standards" (NFROT, 1991). It means that

greater and deeper reforms not only influence the direction of general adult education but also brings effects into the field of every single aspect of training and educating such as curriculum, assessment, certificate, time of education and so on[3].

As I described above, CBT has become a very basic and nationwide rule for vocational education and training system in Australia and many other countries. And I have found that the main aim of introducing CBT to VET system is to enlarge the skilful labour markets according to all the policy documents and academic articles which I have read. Considering the relationship between education and training providers, labour markets, industry and national economic status, then now I am going to introduce the economic environment of Australia and outside world at the time of introducing CBT in order to understand the introduction better[4].

As stated in Dowrick's article(1990), world economy has been affected greatly by the first oil shock since 1973 and Australian industry, especially manufacturing, started to show an obvious slowdown since that time and even further since 1983. Surveys and statistics have been worked out by Economics scholars around this country as alarm to wake up the nation that a new time is coming and people should realize and do something for it. The simplest thing for them to do in such situation is making them strong enough to find a good position in the society and to keep the position stable in any unstable situation. In other words it means that employees have to make them more skilful to keep their jobs even when they face the revolution in economic field. An unqualified labour market was pointed out to be a very important reason that caused slowdown of labour productivity growth in Australia in 1980s. (Dowrick, 1990) Dowrick listed this issue on the top place of the three reasons which caused the slowdown in his article and he stressed that it was also worked out as a first reason by many economic agencies. Economic, technological and social changes have sharp impact to the industrialized world and the spread using of computers and automatic things have bring results of significant changes to the nature of work, knowledge and skill (Zuboff, 1988). Further more, as a result of the increased development of world globalization and the expanding of Asian countries in manufacturing industries, Australia are facing competition and urgent need to develop all aspects of business and industry (Hawke and Cornford,1998)[5].

According to an in-class discussion of the issue why adult education and training in a growing business, I consider that in spite of the more macro aspects which greatly influenced the reform in education and training system in Australia, more micro elements such as individual needs, technological development, requests of employers, and also the needs of the community and even our government can be sound ones that influencing the VET system. I would like to stress the issue of the influence from social economy to individuals here according to my personal experience. I am from China, a country which is in a speedy development of economy. During the last two decades which is just the period of my age, the whole country has done nothing but gather all strength to develop the national economy. I may be holding an extreme view to say so and as a common and simple element of the nation I just have such feeling and I can say that most people of my country have the same feeling with me. Under such policies and movements promoted by our government, every other field of society can remain and be better only if they gathered firmly with the economic conducting stick. Reforms have been taken in universities first. I got to know from a newspaper article (Liu and Chen, 2006) that during late 1990s and early 1980s in China Philosophy is most popular major in universities and new majors related to trading, economics, banking and finance etc. have become extremely popular since the development of the Reforming and Opening Policies. In 2000 when I was going to university and to choose a major to study with, it came a problem to me that I could not make decision of which department to go into: Chinese language and literature which is my favourite subject from the very beginning I got to know and learn; or any majors that related to business and trading. Finally I made a decision to go to English language and literature which is as the same nature as my favourite one and as the same function as the most popular ones. I felt so lucky for choosing such major

especially at the time of graduation for my fellow graduates and I can take up to an occupation much more easily than people graduated from other departments. Most of my fellow students got into international trading companies or foreign companies and others became English teachers. I might have run a little bit far from our theme of the essay but the experience of my own shows the relationship of economy and education system. I think that the situation would be the same in other countries just like in Australia. Therefore, education and training system must be put onto a place of service and supplement for economic developing[6].

Knowing the general climates with which CBT was introduced and promoted, I would like to talk something about the general features of CBT itself in the following several paragraphs.

The introduction of competency-based training in Australia was a government movement aimed to increase the standards of skillful work and performance (Hawke and Cornford, 1998) and there is no commonly agreed definition of the term CBT according to Smith (1997), researchers have summarized a list of CBT features for course from which we could understand it better:

- Based on industry competency standards.
- documentation on CBT format.
- industry involvement in monitoring.
- RPL(recognition of prior learning)available.
- criterion-referenced assessment.
- assessment available on demand.
- assessment carried out, at least partly, in the workplace.
- modular format.
- assessment based on competency standards.
- assessment based on demonstration of skills.
- non-graded assessment.
- assessment criteria made available to students.
- flexible entry and exit to courses.
- practical and theoretical training.

Brief and clear features have shown us the meaning of CBT course and we could summarize some general points of the definition of CBT from them: CBT focuses the outcome of the training; CBT outcomes is measured against certain standards but not fellow students; CBT assessing standards are designed according to industry needs(Smith, 1997). However, real practice and understanding of this agenda are depending on the type of students, providers and real settings of industry area (Smith, 1997). Different teachers and trainers have difference point of views of CBT, some of them stated that it is all right for them to take on for it is just suited for their own ability to offer such training, and some others, mainly TAFE teachers, are worrying more about the educational impact. However, CBT has been promoted as a dominate method of carrying VET system in Australia so that teachers and trainers from all providers are just accepting it and trying to achieve a best result for their learners and students[7].

During the former part of the essay I have described general climate of the introduction CBT and some features of the CBT course according to government policies and academic researchers. Many researches have been taken to find out the impact of the introduction of CBT to Australian VET system, while in the following part I would report on the impacts through three researches. By the introduction of CBT to VET system in Australia, there are many changes to the prior training sectors so that the roles of the teachers and learners have been changes a lot. To some of them it is a positive change but unfortunately it is not a all-mighty standard can be accepted nationwide by everyone. But we all know that no policy is perfect so that we just accept the most suitable and effective ones which could make contribution to our society and the nation.

2.1 Report one

2.1.1 Introduction

This is a 12-month research organized by Tom Lowrie which aims to search for various impact, then evaluate the effects of competency-based training as the role of instructors in the vocational education training sector in Australia and then supply the findings for further development of CBT in VET sector. The data of the research has been collected with the methods of nationwide survey and case studies (Lowrie, 199).

2.1.2 Findings

The researchers have organized a nationwide survey which assesses the understanding level of CBT and provide information in order to reflect the attitudes, views and practices to CBT of instructors from TAFE sectors only. Data of the survey was summarized and analyzed through several categories like "type of provider", "location of provider", "AQF level of students" and "nature of students" (Lowrie,199)and with these categories the researcher has collected the information about the "view of teaching", "their organization", "their opinions of CBT", "their experience in CBT" and "ways in which they learn about CBT". According to the results of the questionnaire and interview (Lowrie,1999), most(67%)of the instructors have a strong positive attitude towards the CBT, over 80% of them suggested that they had a very strong understanding of CBT.

Case study was held by researchers to non-TAFE sector only including different range of providers in different parts of Australia. The researchers collected the data from the instructors with both individual and group interviews and the procedure took two days. Results came in to two stages with one is simply reporting what the interview showed in common and the second one is identifying the importance of aspects examined from the first stage of research work. About ten points were concluded through the analysis and I just give five for example: understandings of the nature and practice of CBT is varied in all interviewees; And those understandings are influenced by many factors including the type of providers, industry area, the method of introducing CBT, the level and preparation of staff development status and so on; The third one is that CBT expressed different forms according to the industry and context which it was organized and designed and students and teachers quite enjoy the shifts for suitable situation; Teachers and trainers welcome the staff development support which can be designed professionally and qualified; Last but not the least, the introduction of CBT was limited more like events but not reasonable organized procedure of development and changes. In the second procedure of the research, they worked with six individual cases in a more detailed way of researching and focused on the forms of staff development which impacted the understanding level of individuals on the nature and practices of CBT (Lowrie, 199)[8].

2.1.3 Conclusion

CBT has caused different impact on learners and trainers. Under CBT students tend to be freer in learning process for their teachers have no more been the centre of the classes and they are standing at the same position as their teachers. They usually learn by themselves and only with some necessary assistance from teachers. Learners have self-satisfaction within this kind of learning environment (Lowrie, 199). While for teachers and trainers the situation seems much different and they usually feel uncomfortable and difficult with the newly promoted system. There are several reasons which were concluded by Lowrie (1999) according to some researches, such as Robinson, Smith and his own research. The first point is the unsound educational outcome of CBT course which shifted a lot from the traditional training method. And this is also the main point about which teachers from TAFE mostly worried (Robinson, 1993).Second, lack of adequate training to teachers and trainers are another

reason caused their difficulties (Smith, 1997). In such case teachers are lack of confidence to use CBT and of course they are always wondering whether they deliver the training packages in an appropriate and right way or not. Last but not the least, the roles of changes to teachers seems to be dependable. Some are quite comfortable with the practice of CBT for their former experience are to some extent similar to the features of CBT course and some, however, are really unsatisfied with CBT for they have a totally different teaching background and they have to shift into the current one as soon as possible even if it is difficult for them to do so. In spite of the changing role for learners and trainers, there are other findings to be showed by the research. CBT is put into a range of different situation through out the nation. It is held by different providers, TAFE and non-TAFE, is provided to learners of different levels and the standards of CBT course and assessment criteria are reflecting differently according to the area and needs of industry. As a result, attitude of CBT, teaching pedagogues, assessment design and evaluation of teachers and trainers from different background are quite varied. According to the interviews (Lowrie, 199) with educators of different background, instructors from TAFE sectors turn to be more negative than those who from non-TAFE sectors. It is said that instructors from non-TAFE sectors are easier to shape CBT practice into their teaching context which is suitable for their competitive needs. Further more, almost all instructors are requiring for staff developing methods in order to shape more positive and effective attitude to such practice[9].

2.2 Report two

2.2.1 Introduction

The research organized and reported by Derek J. Kosbab is focusing on a particular part of adult trainee who, according to Kosbab (2003), are dispositional or unemployed. The research was based mostly on Malcolm S. Knowles' theories which argue that adolescents' education is more important than those who has already been mature enough on four aspects according to Knowles'(1984) when he tried to define the concept of adult in his work. By doing this, Kosbab illustrates that his research is meaningful for it shows how CBT has helped adolescents or unemployed people to finish the transfer from dispositional to maturational and also awared educators to pay more attention on the field of adolescents' training and education. The participants of the research were sixty unemployed adults joined in Certificate IV in small business management course delivered by class.

2.2.2 Findings

There are mainly four findings according to the in-class research of the training procedure. As said by Kosbab (2003), the first one is that for both competency based training and non-competency referenced one unemployed adults got two different kinds of outcomes which are assessable and learning. The second one is that vocational trainees described their learning through terms of values, interests and attitudes. Third, dispositional learning can be organized and delivered by maturational way. Last, the target trainees get improved and moved to maturation followed the six week training and the last point proves the argument within scholars that competency training methodologies do not delay the improvement of adolescents but improve the delivery of training packages.

2.2.3 Conclusion

The four findings above mean so much to all trainees beside adolescents under VET or CBT. From dependent learning process of childhood and adolescents to independent or automatic study of adults, every single aspect and experience would leave impact on people's later study life and all the elements of their learning procedure. The nature of this learning period can be seen as a process of removing dependent and turning to adult autonomy (Knowles,1996). Therefore, during the first several year of

education and training, the role of adult educators has become more and more important[10].

After describing two particular cases of researches in VET system related to CBT, I have found that the researchers are trying to prove that although there are many arguments and doubtfulness about government's domained policy of developing CBT in Australia, the impact to learners and teachers showed advantages of CBT. Therefore, we have sound reasons to believe that government policies of promoting the educational system in Australia is quite positive. Two sample researches can not show all the aspects of the impacts that have been brought by CBT, but we can at least learn a little from them that CBT has such good effects. The introduction of competency-based training in Australia was a political decision aimed to increase the level of skill and the average standards of working and performance in various kind of industries according to Hawke and Cornford (1998). And I believe that the introduction by Australian government will keep on going and have further development and changes which might be more efficient and sound in adult education field[11].

3. Conclusion

The introduction of competency based training to vocational education and training system in Australia is surely the most commonly used one in Australia and has a trend of developing by government, industries and many educators and trainers. In this paper, I have firstly cited several government agreement policies and discussed several reasons for the introduction of CBT which are mainly the economic influence, then I reported two researches which focused on the impact of CBT to teachers or trainers and learners and both of them trended to for the policies of CIBT and its further development; later on I have discussed the researches and the policies together as a whole[12].

No policy and system is perfect, and the current used one-CBT of VET in Australia surely requests more and more improvement and change to meet the needs of the ongoing social, economic, globalizational, technological revolutions (Hawke and Cornford, 198). Therefore, there are still challenges and chances get together for education system to face to and according to the scholars who have organized researches and tried to prove that CBT is the most suitable one in Australia, there is a bright future and space for CBT to develop[13].

References

- [1] Dowrick S. (1990), *Explaining the labour productivity slowdown of the 1980s*, *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, Vol.16, No.4, pp174-198.
- [2] Hawke G.and Cornford I.(1998), *Australian vocational education policy change: but will the revolution improve the quality of training?* *ANZealand Journal of Vocational Education Research*, Vol.6, No.2, pp104-129.
- [3] Knowles M.S. (1984), *Contributions from adult education*, *Adult learner: a neglected species*, Gulf Publishing, p43-63.
- [4] Knowles M.S. (1996), *The modern practice of adult education: from pedagogy to Andragogy*, Prentice-Hall, Regents, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- [5] Kosbab D.J. (2003), *Dispositional and maturational development through competency-based training*, *Education and Training*, pp526-539.
- [6] Lowrie T. (1999), *Policy innovatona in the VET sector: the role of instructors in a competency-based environment*, *Global issues and effects: the challenge of educational research*, AARE/NZARE Conference, Melbourne, December 1999.
- [7] *National Training Broad (1992), National Competency Standards: policy and guidelines second edition*, Canberra.
- [8] Robinson P. (1993), *Teachers facing chang: a small-scale study of teachers working with competency-based training*, Adelaide: NCVER.
- [9] Smith E. (1997), *How competency-based training has changed teaching and learning*, *Training Agenda*, Vol.5, No.4, Nov. 1997, pp20-21
- [10] Tennant M. and Morris Roger (2001), *Adult education in Australia: shifting identities 1980-2000*, *Adult Education in Australia*, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol.20, No.1/2, January-April 2001, pp44-54.
- [11] Walker J.C. (1993), *A general rational and conceptual approach to the application of competency-based standards*

to teaching, Australia's Teachers: an agenda for the next decade, AGPS, Canberra.

[12] Wheeler L.(1993), *Reform of Australian vocational education and training: a competency-based system*, Collins, C. (Ed), *Competencies: The competencies debate in Australian education and training*, National capital printing, Canberra.

[13] Yang L. and Chen Y. "Changes in Popular College Majors", ([http:// www. learning. sohu. com/ 20050609/ n225880865. shtml](http://www.learning.sohu.com/20050609/n225880865.shtml)) [9 June, 2006].