A case study of how those most affected respond to the processes and product of competency based training in the area of Office & Secretarial Studies

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
A case study evaluation was undertaken at the Great Southern Regional College in Albany, Western Australia during first semester 1993. The case study examine the competency based program offered for the first time in the College's Office & Secretarial Studies section. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine how those most affected respond to the processes and product of competency based training. Certain assumptions were made in relation to the conduct of the evaluation which are articulated in the Methodology (item 4) of this Report. Those involved in responding to the data collecting exercise were teaching staff, students, employers and educational administrators. Throughout the study, key times were allocated for open forums so that clarification and general discussion could occur between and among the stakeholders.

Recommendations
1.1 Competency based training programs should be delivered in the self paced mode.
1.2 An urgent need exists to develop quality learning materials to accompany this self paced delivery mode.
1.3 Teaching staff should be provided with considerable staff development in self paced learning techniques and facilitation techniques.
1.4 Prior to commencement of the course all enrolled students should be counselled effectively on the student centred approach emanating from competency based training and the expectations that this system places upon them.
1.5 Staff development is required of a general nature to allow delivery staff and administrators to discuss: "what is
teaching?" to reduce stress levels. (This may eventually become a substantial industrial relations issue.)

1.6 Time needs to be allocated to teaching staff to enhance industry liaison as well as a consistent sabbatical period to maintain staff skills currency through industry.

1.7 DEVET should support the view through the national Australian Curriculum Training Council ("ACTRAC") to allow for local needs within national curriculum documents.

1.8 DEVET should pursue a policy of providing a centrally run materials development centre, or, acquire same through other State agencies.

1.9 More thorough analysis is required by the administration in order to appropriately resource competency based training programs.

1.10 The Great Southern Regional College should provide training to employers within this region on recruitment techniques and the Australian Skills Framework.

1.11 Timetabling of modules conducted under competency based training should be as flexible as possible. This flexibility would allow industry personnel to attend individual modules for the purpose of upgrading or retraining.

1.12 In future evaluation studies the purpose of the evaluation should be far more clearly delineated to minimise difficult interpretations.

1.13 Greater time should be allocated to evaluation studies to meet the requirements of the evaluation and the associated deadlines.

1.14 The senior administration of the College should introduce the evaluator formally to the employer groups to minimise delays in establishing appropriate protocols.

1.15 In future evaluations a grievance settling group could be established to independently settle disputes arising from data interpretation.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Personal Value Position

I fully endorse the principles underlying the format for delivery and of assessment for those competency based training programs that explicitly align with the assumptions underpinning the principles. It is obvious to me that many fundamental training programs are ideally suited to this form of delivery and the outcomes would be enhanced by their adoption.

However, I do not feel that the competency based processes necessarily enhance all education and training programs.

I would highlight design (creativity), research, advanced
mathematics (creative), philosophical argument, negotiation, interpersonal studies and other more cerebral topics as areas that do not necessarily fit within the competency based training framework. It has become clearer to me during the course of this study that student interaction in such creative areas is a valid assessable item, which is outside of the scope of competency based training. That is not to say that norm referencing the same areas is necessarily any more valid. Thus I do not have comprehensive solutions to the problems that I foresee with the overall introduction of competency based training into all education and training programs.

My views concerning competency based training are based upon my readings commencing about the mid 80s from such reports as the Kirby Report and Australia Reconstructed, various papers by Prof Bill Ford, and papers on criterion referenced assessment from authors including David Adams and Richard Sweet. Accompanying these readings are 10 years of experience as a teacher operating both norm referenced assessment programs and criterion referenced assessment programs.

It is only of recent times that I have recognised the inter relationship between assessment and delivery formats. It is with this new found understanding that I see the considerable opportunities available to provide a client focused delivery system.

The formulation of national policy to adopt the competency based training approach universally has occurred at the ministerial level within the Commonwealth Government. The Minister of the time was largely affected by Kirby, Ford and others who proposed that Australia's lack of productivity and consequential limited export potential could be overcome if we adopted what was regarded as the economic answer linking production to training.

That is, the acceptance of the Japanese model. This debate was not accompanied by discussion on attitudinal differences among many other differences between the two countries.

The realisation of the competency based training policy is now in full swing where a mammoth juggernaut has been set in motion and has such inertia that it would be extremely difficult to stop. This has been done by the establishment of amyriad of groups, eg Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee ("VEETAC"), ACTRAC and Employment & Skills Formation Council ("ESFC" © Carmichael Committee). Each of these groups is dedicated to marketing, monitoring, producing, delivering and evaluating competency based training at all levels throughout the technical and further education system. The only group that is
unable to enter the debate is TAFE, which at this moment would be seen as reactionary and heretical if it were to utter any opposition to competency based training applied in all areas of education and training.

At practitioner level the realisation of the policy is largely complete in some States. This is not the case in Western Australia. Within the Western Australian system the opportunity exists for TAFE to learn by the mistakes and frailties of other pilot programs within Victoria and New South Wales. To date there is no evidence to suggest that this is occurring and nationally agreed programs are being implemented regularly without training and without a proper and thorough analysis of resource requirements. This is placing a considerable burden upon the classroom teacher. Many of these teachers have not recognised that accompanying competency based training is the need for a notable increase in multi©skilling and an ability to manage a classroom laboratory or workshop so that learning is facilitated with the student directing the learning processes.

2.2 Great Southern Regional College
Moving on specifically to the Great Southern Regional College, courses are provided from year 10 to degree status and all points in between so that the levels of programs offered in the College are:
Certificate
Advanced Certificate
Associate Diploma
Degree
Graduate Diploma

All courses above the level of Associate Diploma are provided through a contract arrangement with the universities in Western Australia.

The College supports a regional population of 50,000 people with a growth rate of about 5% per year. This translates to 2,000 students of which about 400 are full time.

Further, the College has 11 centres throughout the region, a size similar to that of Victoria. The centres include:
Denmark
Mt Barker
Katanning
Tambellup
Borden
Walpole
Frankland
Gnowangerup
Jerramungup
Kojonup
Many Peaks

The College also supports a farm that provides the resource base for agriculture, horticulture and sheep and wool.

The staff employed at the College total over 100 full time employees and a large number of part time employees.

INTRODUCTION

During the period 1992 to present various programs within the Great Southern Regional College have been rewritten on a national basis along the agreed lines of competency based format. Programs that have been implemented over this period are the National Metals modules for the Metal Trades, the Office & Secretarial Studies programs, Horticulture and Woolclassing. During the next two years other programs will be implemented sequentially and these are: Hospitality, Tourism, Management, Art, Carpentry and Joinery, Accounting, Computing, Agriculture, Land Care, Nursing, ChildCare, Hairdressing and Fashion Design.

Since competency based training is in its infancy within the Great Southern Regional College it is important to identify particular problems that relate to the delivery for staff, students, industry and administrators. It is only with a coherent approach to the implementation of the new programs that the same problems will not arise in each case. Thus, an evaluation study was regarded as essential and the Office & Secretarial Studies area selected on the bases that:

2.1 the staff were accepting of the evaluation;
2.2 the students were all employed or placed in areas in close proximity to the College;
2.3 the industry base was easily identifiable;
2.4 the staff were experienced in the traditional mode and were all long standing within the organisation minimising one variable relating to experience; and
2.5 the structure of the curriculum was based on theoretical and practical elements as well as work experience. Thus, all elements likely to be confronted by other programs were available within this one course.

PURPOSE

The major evaluation objective was to evaluate how those most affected respond to the processes and product of competency based training in the area of Office & Secretarial Studies. In particular, the evaluation conducted using the case study model was improvement oriented.
The major use of the findings was expected to be by teachers, administrators and our industry partners.

METHOD

A research team was established by the Director of the Great Southern Regional College that included myself as the Associate Director as the researcher for the program and Ms S Perkins as secretarial support.

Having established the purpose as previously stated, the major stakeholders were identified from whom information would be sought by the researcher. The stakeholders identified were: students, staff, administrators and industry groups.

It was decided to obtain information as much as possible in the open format and consequently instruments were designed to elicit views from the groups identified. It was further decided by me that I would conduct interviews of all data sources. The reason behind this decision was to minimise those numbers not responding and to provide respondents with clarification, if necessary. Thus, the potential for misunderstandings was minimised. This was particularly relevant to industry groups who have found some difficulty maintaining up-to-date knowledge of what competency based training really means.

Originally, I had intended to tape record the interviews as recommended by Stenhouse (1982). However, some interviewees would not grant permission to use a tape recorder. Subsequently, as I am an experienced shorthand writer (120 wpm), I had little difficulty in taking notes. Yet, I was careful to ensure that broad strokes of the account, eg key words and statements, were recorded so that I could observe facial contact and other non-verbal actions. This note taking did not appear to inhibit interviewees.

I also conducted a thorough information search and participated as an observer in several classes. The observation as a participant was relatively brief and as Ball (1982) indicates, perhaps superficial. Still, some valuable information was gained in addition to that accumulated through the interviews.

The assumptions made in regard to the case study were that:

5.1 There was no reason for respondents to state anything other than their actual views in relation to the questions posed. Since the interviews were carefully explained and their purpose and the
questions asked tended to be unobtrusive in nature.

5.2 Provided consistent communication existed between the researcher and the groups concerned, fears, rumours, and other forms of negative elements would be largely removed thereby enhancing the unobtrusive nature of the research study.

5.3 Staff were sufficiently interested in improving the program delivery for future offerings, that they would be prepared to identify weaknesses within their own professional make-up.

5.4 The student/staff relationships were sufficiently healthy that students would not opportunistically seek to discredit staff.

Moreover, it was decided that the timeliness of the report was as important as the report itself. Thus it was necessary to establish a gant chart (see Appendix 1) that identified: each process; the stakeholders relating to that part of the process and the time involvement of each of those stakeholders in that part; the feedback mechanisms required throughout; and the date of the final report; to maximise the opportunity adjacent to the research project to bring about required changes.

Associated with this gant chart was the need to establish a contract with the Director that indicated his requirements and the requirement of the researcher to operate demonstrating fiscal responsibility.

It was also identified within the contract that certain standards of evaluation were to be adhered to. These included: utility, including report clarity; feasibility, including political viability; proprietary, including conflict of interest; and accuracy, including defensible information sources as well as reliable measurements or conclusions.

It was regarded as critical in the construction of any case study that it be undertaken with sensitivity, intelligent interpretation and with integrity.

The principles that applied to the study were based upon national agreements as to the format for competency based training curricula. The objectives specified within a norm referenced assessment curriculum model are replaced by a set of competencies, their associated standards as agreed by the
National Training Board and the conditions under which the competencies will be assessed against the standards. One principle assumed was that the Office & Secretarial Studies course was suitable for the competency based approach to delivery.

Another principle adopted was that having changed the assessment format, the delivery processes would be affected substantially. During the study that this principle was not adopted by the teachers when implementing the program.

RESULTS

All respondents were asked a series of questions in the open format and this was regarded as appropriate since the numbers were quite small (less than 30 per group) for the case study approach. The questions were developed for the particular groups which related directly to the purpose of the exercise. However, where additional information was forthcoming from the respondent this was not truncated as it was felt that questions may be answered that were important but outside of the confines of the purpose. This is in keeping with the goal free evaluation model used by Scriven.

The data gathering instruments were:

6.1 Students
Comment on the way in which the course is taught.
Comment on whether the way the course is taught is changing with time.
What aspect(s) of the course do you believe are the most disappointing?
What aspect(s) of the course do you believe are the most positive?
Do you believe this evaluation has value for you and future groups?
Is there anything else you would like to add about the course?

6.2 Staff
What aspect(s) of the delivery would you want to change?
Do you believe you are well equipped to introduce competency based training? Why?
Do you believe that the quality of the intake groups were typical? Explain.
What elements of the course do you see as positive for you as a teacher and for student outcomes? Why?
What changes would you like to see to the curriculum documentation and thus to the way the course is delivered including content?
How long have you been teaching?
Have you always taught in this particular subject area?
What is your employment history?
Do you have a good relationship with industry?
What is your age?
Do you believe this evaluation has value for you?
Is there anything else you would like to add about the course?

6.3 Administration
Is competency based training different from norm referenced curricula to administer? Why?
Is the resource base for competency based training different from the traditional delivery base? How?
What advantages do you perceive in conducting competency based training?
What disadvantages do you perceive in conducting competency based training?
Has competency based training been introduced at the Great Southern Regional College in an appropriate manner administratively and educationally? Why?
Are there any other comments that you would like to make about this competency based training implementation?

6.4 Industry
What do you understand by the term competency based training? (Researcher to explain in detail if necessary.)
Have you detected any differences in the student skill base including attitudes to work resulting from competency based training?

Having examined the curriculum document what comments would you make about any aspect of the program?

What comments would you make about the assessment system arising from competency based training?
Are there any other comments that you would like to make about this competency based training implementation?

ANALYSIS

7.1 Students
From the data it was apparent that virtually all the students expressed difficulty in coping with lectures which were aimed at least four different groups. The groupings resulted from the failure of some students to achieve competency at the first attempt in several modules. It would appear that about 70% of students achieved competency on the first attempt in each module.

Consider one module which is defined by:
At the end of this module the students will able to type at 30 wpm for a period of three minutes tested on three separate occasions with 98% accuracy using a QWERTY keyboard in a classroom from material within a syllabic intensity of 2.

For every 10 students being assessed only 7 will achieve competency on the first occasion. This leaves three students still to continue this work to achieve competency and 7 students able and ready to undertake the next module. The teacher is now placed in the unenviable position of attempting to support two different groups. The situation is exasperated when one of the three actually achieves the competency before the other two and two or three of the seven achieve competency before the remainder of that group. This now gives the situation of three modules operating simultaneously.

Basically this scenario is what happened in the program. Further, staff teaching the program did not see the need to provide self paced materials and operate it differently. Rather, they attempted to deliver in the didactic format over a range of modules and with students all with different and particular problems.

The students singularly complained that this was the worst feature of the delivery of the course. Clearly there was a need for the delivery system to be different from the beginning and to be in the self paced format. Such a format would require quality learning materials and the teacher to act as a facilitator or tutor. The need for self pacing and flexible delivery has been supported by ample research, eg Collins (1993) and Hermann (1986).

Again from the data, the students felt that the course was assessment dominated where students were continually trialing their skills against set standards rather than undertaking what they thought was more learning. Recent research in the United Kingdom Vocational Education and Training (VET) highlights that knowledge is spiralling as assessment issue © with knowledge testing substituting as a 'fall back' stance when performance assessment or evidence is not available (Mansfield, 1990). Other research reports, eg Mitchell and Cuthbert (1989) and Miller et al (1988) are highly critical of current approaches and methods, identifying wide ranging shortfalls in validity, often justified by the search for a spurious reliability.

It was evident that the Director had made substantial efforts to conduct staff development in competency based training despite the low level of staff development that has occurred nationally.
In 1990 only 15% of TAFE instructors had received any staff development in competency based training (Thomson, 1990).

Nevertheless, the students openly supported the quality of the teachers and their efforts in helping them throughout the course but felt that the delivery of this type of program was unsuitable.

More than half of the students indicated that they felt that the competency based approach gave them confidence in the workplace. It was generally argued that it was comforting to be assured that they were competent on each element of the vocational requirements as assessed off the job.

Finally, students believed that it was unusual for them to be asked their views or to have their views valued in relation to decisions concerning course delivery. Thus, many students commented that they felt empowered by this process and there was a sense of nobility in the cause of assisting with the improvement of the course delivery for future groups.

7.2 Staff
The teachers were unanimous in stating that the delivery of competency based training as undertaken by them was not working satisfactorily. They claimed that it increased the stress levels of each of them and the outcomes were not markedly different from their traditional programs.

This represents a major attitudinal shift from that exhibited at the commencement of this study. During informal discussions to open the path for the evaluation study to commence, it was clear that several major assumptions had been made by the teaching staff in relation to the nature of adult learning.

One major assumption was that all adults will commence the course at a given time and complete it at the same time using the same learning strategy. It is important to distinguish here between what the learning strategy meant to the teaching staff at that time. It was evident that the traditional pedagogical model associated with adult learning was the one learning strategy available to the teaching staff, perhaps through training and perhaps through the repetitious use of the didactic model. It was also apparent that the teaching staff had not countenanced the need for any alternative delivery strategy and in my view would not have countenanced any variation to that in which they felt most comfortable. This was in spite of several staff development programs conducted on just this topic.
It is conceivable that the most powerful lesson that one can obtain is by learning from experience and the staff certainly acknowledged their changed views as a result of the failure of a tried and tested method against a changed format for assessment. This lesson is transferable to the way in which their own students' learn. Having pointed out to the staff that they had received staff development to allow them to analyse their delivery approaches as a function of the curriculum format, they were unanimous in stating that they felt this to be somewhat esoteric and not of practical use.

As well, the staff in complete accord supported the view that the quality of the intake was no different to that which they would normally observe.

The majority of the staff stated that this type of program increased their need to be involved with industry. This was seen both positively and negatively. Firstly, it was agreed that industry liaison having been enhanced improved the value of the job in terms of maintaining vocational currency for the teachers and for getting feedback from employers. However, the staff felt that this was considerably more time consuming than they had first assessed and this placed a burden on them that required a reduction in teaching load to facilitate.

The teachers undividedly supported the view that the national curriculum was not what they would have preferred from their own professional experience. They also felt that there were gaps in knowledge and skills that would seriously limit the scope of the graduates. Further, they felt that some of the material was irrelevant to the industry.

7.3 Administration
The administrative group canvassed included the Director, the Assistant Director, and the Registrar. The administration supported the national agenda regarding competency based training. However, there was some concern that mechanisms need to be set in place to establish high quality learning materials for self paced learning. Moreover, administration suggested that without this mechanism the cost to individual colleges may become prohibitive.

Additionally, it was pointed out that the overall cost of running competency based training would increase for some time. The cost would increase until extensive staff training exercises had been undertaken, more thorough counselling undertaken with prospective students and an information sharing system established to keep industry informed of the progress to date.

7.4 Industry
It was stated by most respondents that the performance, standard and conditions against particular competencies were not entirely relevant to their own skill needs. Some of this can be explained on the basis of simple parochialism but it was too consistent to ignore. This has particular implications for national curriculum development over which this evaluation will be ineffectual.

There was absolute agreement that the competency based assessment reporting format did not discriminate between individuals and thus could not be used effectively to assist recruitment or promotional mechanisms. It was generally believed that marks should be assigned to particular competencies in spite of the impossibility of this suggestion compared with the national standard approach.

There was considerable support for the competency based approach in that industry would be far more involved with the assessment system. Thus, some competencies would be assessed on the job allowing employers the opportunity to recognise skills and to get closer to potential employees.

An interesting comment was made by some employers suggesting that some of their current staff could undertake some modules without having to do the entire course simply as upgrading and retraining mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

Using the case study model it can be seen that the Great Southern Regional College implemented a nationally accredited competency based program in Office & Secretarial Studies commencing Semester 1, 1993. Staff with minimal training were placed on the delivery of this program. The staff implementing the program were experienced and well qualified.

The administration of the College arranged an industry dinner at which the competency based model was explained. This included the recognition of prior learning, competency based assessment according to National Training Board standards and the need for a coherent approach to on the job assessment. Training was also available to those industry assessors through the entrepreneurial arm of the College. Many of the industry groups took up the opportunity of training.

Students
Students entering the program were counselled by staff and a qualified counsellor in order to prepare them for the modifications to the learning environment perceived. At this
stage the staff and administration saw little need for major changes to delivery style and for the need for quality learning materials to facilitate any changes. It was also perceived that the current equipment and resource base was appropriate.

Staff
During the research exercise it became clear that striking attitudinal changes were taking place. It seemed to me that some of the teaching staff were more willing than others to modify their approach to meet the demands placed upon them as the program unfolded. There was some indication that this willingness to change was linked with age or the number of years the teacher had traditionally taught. This perception is in line with that reported in a case study by Kenyon and Hermann (1986). However, even the more accepting of competency based training went back to what was more comfortable when things became very difficult to manage.

Although there were substantial changes to the attitudes of the teachers they invariably felt that their jobs were less rewarding and more demanding under a competency based training system. It is believed by the administration that this issue will need to be addressed through a more comprehensive staff development exercise which places these teachers as the focus in the exercise. That is, as a result of the experiences of Semester 1, 1993 the Office & Secretarial staff will deliver programs from their own experiences to staff whose involvement with competency based training is imminent and any other interested staff members. The Office & Secretarial Studies staff responded positively to this suggestion. It is hoped rather than known that this may bring about even greater attitudinal change towards the requirements for student centred learning as opposed to the traditional didactic model.

8.3 Administration
The administration conducted several open forums during second semester 1992 for the purpose of open discussion to elicit information on staff views of the impact of competency based training on themselves as well as the students. Although ultimately the accountability resides with the Director there was a willingness by the administration to empower those staff to arrange the program in away that best met student needs. From the time the program commenced, the power to make formative changes resided with the teaching staff together with the head of that section. It was perceived by the staff that they were responsible for virtually all elements of the delivery of competency based training within the College for that program.
However, in terms of resourcing, the administration required cogent argument before agreeing to varying the financial base of that section. This was not perceived as a shift in power and control but simply as an accountability mechanism and a requirement by central office to provide for a given and agreed training profile.

8.4 Industry
There is a convincing argument to develop national curricula using a common core model surrounded by which would be elective competencies determined by the local industry. This evaluation study may not be influential in facilitating this need but it may stimulate discussion by those within the Department of Employment, Vocational Education and Training through the State Training Board to the Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee.

There is clear recognition given by industry to grades allocated by the training institutions. Without even attempting to demonstrate the predictive validity of the process, employers have assumed that this will reflect upon work practices. This is a particularly frightening aspect of recruitment within the private sector in this region. During the course of this evaluation it was not possible to debate the validity of this process and the absurdities that are built into the assumptions readily accepted by industry. However, my conclusion is that there is a demonstrable need to provide training to employers and personnel officers on recruitment practices and at the same time "sell" competency based training and its reporting format.

There is also an obvious need to provide training to industry again in the Human Resource Management area in respect of the use of the Australians Skills Framework as a promotional structure. That is, instead of employers accepting assessment results for the purposes of promotion of staff within the organisation it will be necessary for them to assign accepted competencies against salary level within the enterprise. Thus, the industries concerned have an industrial relations issue which will need to be resolved rather than presuming that a set of norm referenced marks directly relate to enhanced promotional opportunities.

There is a critical need and demand for training to be provided to industry in relation to on-the-job assessment.

All modular based courses should be conducted in such away as to allow for industry personnel to attend individual modules for the purposes of upgrading and retraining.
EVALUATION TECHNIQUE

This section I have reserved for my own observations regarding the manner and format of the evaluation undertaken. I wish to propose conclusions which will assist future evaluators and overcome some of the pitfalls to which I am victim.

9.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation must be more clearly stated. It is difficult to determine in general discussion or open ended questioning whether or not something is good, better or best. I found the interviews difficult with some groups, in particular the student interviews and the industry interviews. I had assumed that the language I used was appropriate to the particular respondent group but found that the time allocation for individuals within these groups was substantially understated. This was due to the need to explain much of what goes on in training to the individuals being interviewed. If the purpose of the exercise had been more specifically stated then the questions asked would be less open to interpretation and would all relate directly and relevantly to the purpose.

I recognise that this is an about face as I had been quite satisfied initially with an almost goal free approach. If I were to undertake any form of evaluation in the future which had elements of goal free evaluation embedded, I would not place myself under the pressures that I did with this case study by underestimating the time constraints.

9.2 Administration Involvement

Prior to undertaking an evaluation study in the future I would recommend strongly that the administration becomes more significantly involved with the groups involved in the evaluation. Some industry personnel who were interviewed by me expressed the view that my status within the organisation may bring about little or no change and how did they know that I had access to change agents within the organisation. It was this single item that caused industry personnel most annoyance.

9.3 Evaluator Credibility

It was indeed fortuitous that I selected an evaluation of a particular study area which was educationally and emotionally healthy. The strain placed on teaching staff who have great difficulty accepting any evaluation since it may reflect badly on them is enormous. However, during the conduct of the evaluation it became evident that some staff were becoming apprehensive. This problem was largely overcome as a result of consistent communication and a very balanced report (not selective). I would say that my credibility as an evaluator has been enhanced as a result of this exercise.
Accordingly, it may be in the administration's best interests to include me even as a consultant to any other evaluation study undertaken within the College. This would be particularly valuable until others had also proven their willingness to operate according to the ethical and educational standards required of any evaluator.

9.4 Veracity Coefficient
Had I had more time and experience at the time of undertaking this study I would have organised my questions of the various groups in such a way as to be able to establish some veracity coefficient for individual respondents. The reason for this decision is that I sometimes felt that I was relatively obtrusive and the respondents answered in order to please me. In future I would look at establishing a series of questions placed randomly before the respondent which gave me the opportunity to look at the reliability of the responses perhaps through the split half reliability mechanism.

Given that I have already suggested that the purpose needs to be more explicitly defined to probe sensibly, I unfortunately did not have the purpose appropriately defined and thus many responses were open to interpretation. I suspect that my own experiences and professional background allowed me to take some licence in the way in which I did interpret them. I feel this is always going to be an issue with the case study model, but in hindsight I would have adopted more checks and balances to convince myself that my interpretations were directly resultant of the observations. I feel in my defence on this point that I was somewhat relieved to find I did not get major variance of opinion from the various groups during the open forums in which I provided my reasoning and analysis to the data.

9.5 Future Evaluations
Stufflebeam (1984 quoted in paper by Kleinschafer, 1985) suggests that whilst positivism answers educational questions it does not allow for the investigation of the most important social questions. Many of the questions posed in this evaluation study are those that will be more reliably answered when one looks at the period historically. Perhaps future evaluations should focus more forcefully upon whether or not competency based training: places significantly low levels of performance on students; is a demotivator in relation to competition; and removes the democratic right of individuals to exceed artificial boundaries.

I pose these additional issues because competency based training is a very saleable item for industry, students and staff if, and
only if, one accepts certain presumptions.

It is well understood that norm referenced assessment is by no means infallible. However, it would be folly in my view if one were to presume that competency based training which replaces norm referenced assessment is free of other frailties. The more I study competency based training and its impact on various groups the more I become unsure as to what is the most appropriate system for teaching people how to learn. (Perhaps the most noble of teaching endeavours.)

9.6 Power and Authority
In reference to power and authority it may be necessary in future to establish an arbitration panel for particularly sensitive evaluation studies. In this project the indicators were ideal for the evaluator to relinquish authority over data and analysis. Where studies are more likely to identify individual weakness, I would recommend that a formal grievance system be established as part of the contract. I feel it was recognised during the study that my role was one of a researcher attempting to constructively bring about change for the betterment of future students. Thus it was unnecessary for me to require or use power and authority over other staff. Ideally, however, negotiation prior to the event seems to have paved the way for this evaluation study to be undertaken without serious incident.

9.7 Equity
All respondents from the student and teaching groups were female. Yet, all of the respondents from the administration were male and almost all the respondents from the employer groups were male. As part of my assertion previously that goals would identify themselves during the course of the evaluation (goalfree evaluation) one issue which may need addressing by future studies is that of career path for students of Office & Secretarial Studies.

Within the TAFE system there is no natural progression for a student of Office & Secretarial Studies into management or for that matter any other higher level program with advanced standing. It is apparently accepted by training authorities nationally that Office & Secretarial Studies is a free standing occupation and has no relationship with any other program and, in particular, with programs that are likely to lead to higher status within an organisation. It is worth pointing out at this stage that this issue was identified by the administration. They have now placed Management and Tourism with Office & Secretarial Studies as a section called "ManagementStudies" in an effort to increase the career paths of young women entering the workforce.
and study from the Office & Secretarial Studies' platform. However, this is not a national trend.

It may be worth considering in future competency based training programs that the method of delivery will clearly require the use of quality learning materials. These materials must be carefully vetted to guarantee that they are free of bias of any type which may inhibit an individual's learning. To this end it may be feasible to establish a quality assurance group whose responsibility it is to carefully assess all learning materials for content validity, coherence, logical sequencing, communications style and equity.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

On the basis that Hospitality, Tourism, Management, Art, Carpentry and Joinery, Accounting, Computing, Agriculture, Land Care, Nursing, ChildCare, Hairdressing and Fashion Design will be coming on stream in a competency based format in Semester 1, 1994, the following actions need to be undertaken in order to smoothly facilitate the delivery of these programs in the light of the findings of this evaluation:

10.1 June 1993 Commence material development of stage 1 modules with the deadline of January 1994 for completion

Establish a quality assurance group to examine materials as they are developed to guarantee relevance, coherence, internal consistency and appropriateness for the target group. This particular group should comprise Associate Director, Head of Program Support, the Senior Lecturer and Lecturer from the area concerned and the Counsellor.

10.2 July 1993 Provide training to administrative staff responsible for resourcing programs. The training may take the form of a small forum which would include the evaluator, the Senior Lecturer, the Assistant Director, the Registrar and teachers from Office & Secretarial Studies and the Senior Lecturer from the area responsible for the proposed new program.

10.3 August/September 1993 Provide staff training on competency based training generally. Training on the role of a teacher in self paced programs. The use of learning materials and the function of the teacher as one of the resources. Competency based assessment training. The importance of maintaining currency in the study area through enhanced industry links.

10.4 October 1993 Provide an industry dinner where representatives from the competency based training programs to be introduced are invited. At this forum introduce competency based
training and its ramifications. There will probably be a need to provide advanced organisers prior to conducting the forum.

10.5 December 1993 Provide training to the College Counsellor on information requirements of potential students and for current students undertaking competency based training programs.

10.6 February 1994 Provide a forum to discuss with delivery staff the need for, the depth, and the detail required to counsel students upon entry into competency based training programs. I have estimated that the entire cost of these exercises will be in the order of $5,000. This includes some travel for deliverers from Perth as well as hospitality expenses. In my view this will be money well spent in terms of meeting our commitment to enhanced client focus.

OVERVIEW

From a literature review, it appears that competency based training can be successfully implemented in many vocational courses. This case study has highlighted a number of issues, ie adequate groundwork and commitment of the teaching staff, the provision of appropriate resources, and the provision of adequate counselling to facilitate students from a traditional approach to competency based training. Such a result is consistent with other studies, eg Harris et al (1985a) and Kenyon and Hermann (1986).

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