

A review of a report on competency-based education and training

Clive Chappell, of the University of Technology in Sydney, reviews two new volumes on accreditation of CBET

Theories of competence and the practices of Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) are major issues for all stakeholders in post-compulsory education and training. The education and training reforms of the last seven years have also precipitated a vast increase in the numbers and types of stakeholders who identify themselves as providers of postcompulsory education and training. Now school teachers, TAFE teachers, industry trainers, community educators, human resource managers, university lecturers, training and development personnel and private providers of vocational education and training are all introducing competency-based education and training programs within their areas of practice. They bring with them, of course, different perspectives and practices derived from and developed through their individual, organisational and institutional experiences.

Given this diversity it should come as no surprise that there is widespread disagreement and a great deal of confusion surrounding the implementation of CBET in post-compulsory education and training in Australia. The publication by the NSW Vocational Education & Training Accreditation Board (VETAB) of *Accreditation of competency-based education and training for a qualification: a review of the literature Vols 1 and 2* is a valuable contribution to illuminating many of the issues which currently confuse and divide post-compulsory education and training practitioners when planning and implementing CBET.

Written in an accessible style, this report makes for essential reading. Organised around an investigation of twelve key CBET questions, the report consists of an analysis and summary of the position of a wide range of commentators who have influenced the CBET debate both here and overseas since 1989. Questions such as *How is competency assessed?* and

Who should assess competencies? are used as devices to classify and order the contributions made by these commentators. The result is a straight-forward and readable account of contemporary views which now shape the current debate.

Volume one, the *Summary report*, provides readers with the results of the analysis of the relevant literature and a distilled summary of that literature. Volume two also provides detailed quotations from the writings of the commentators identified in the literature search and is therefore particularly useful for practitioners who would like to

interpret the position of the commentators themselves or who require a more detailed account of the national and international state of play in the on-going debate.

While not attempting to give definitive answers to the questions posed in the Reports, both volumes are important contributions to the continuing debate surrounding CBET. The Reports will certainly have a positive influence on the final structure and operational mechanisms which are adopted to support competency-based education and training in Australia. ■

Two for the writers' shelf

ADFA and ABPA have produced helpful introductory booklets

Authors and editors need to know something about what will happen to their product further down the line if they are to produce something useful. These two booklets can do just that.

The *Manual for editors*, prepared by Paul Eggert and Elizabeth Morrison and published by the Australian Scholarly Editions Centre at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA), has been prepared primarily for scholarly editors working on its own book projects. In only 46 pages, the *Manual* cannot go into great detail, and much of its value lies in indicating other standard references—vital information for a new author or editor. ADFA leans heavily on the *Modern Humanities Research Association style book* (London: MHRA 1991), calling on *The Chicago manual of style* and the *AGPS style manual* for specific aspects. *The Australian writers' and editors' guide* (Melbourne: OUP 1991) and the *Macquarie dictionary* are also seen as basic essentials. The editorial rules are

convincingly argued, and well worth reading. (Available from E Morrison, Dept of English, ADFA, for \$10 incl p&p. ISBN 0 7317 0281 6)

In contrast to this scholarly approach, the Australian Book Publishers Association's (ABPA's) *Introduction to book publishing* is aimed at the absolute novice. It gives 'some idea of of the business of publishing to authors and potential authors, those attracted by a career in publishing, teachers and users, readers and lovers of books...' It covers (in 52 pages this time) the work of the publisher and the editor, and some ideas on book production, sales and marketing, distribution, accounting and finance, export and copyright. Of particular interest are potted biographies of a number of Australian publishers, saying what they do and how they got there. There is a glossary and a list of professional associations with interests related to those of the ABPA (Available from ABPA, Suite 60, 89 Jones Street, Ultimo NSW 2007 for \$10 [\$5 to ABPA members] ISBN 0 9599796 8 9). ■