



Competency Based Education and Training: A World Perspective. Argüelles, Antonio, and Andrew Gonczi, eds. Mexico City: Grupo Noriega Editores, 2000. 229 pp.

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Editors Argüelles and Gonczi have gathered a collection of ten articles that deal with the need for an integrated approach to assessment of competency in the workplace. It is their purpose to demonstrate that a competency approach provides a framework for improving vocational education training and creating a closer connection with general education, thereby enhancing workers' effectiveness. Although the subtitle of the book refers to "a world perspective," there are articles from only five countries, with the Asian continent omitted altogether.

In the first article, Gonczi traces the trends and developments in competency-based education and training (CBET), noting that this novel concept was launched to raise skill standards in the modernizing industrial world by having workers assessed on what they actually do. The article reports that it is still too early to determine the effectiveness of CBET and that serious problems still exist, such as its being too rule bound and complex, and its failing to ensure the involvement of those who deliver the system. At the same time, it has the strengths of a practice-based curriculum that judges performance against clear, predetermined standards. Gonczi cites the U.K and Scotland among the countries where CBET is used most (along with Australia and New Zealand), but he only mentions these countries briefly, and they are not treated in any of the other articles in the collection.

Argüelles' contribution looks at the experiences of the National College of Technical Professional Education (CONALEP) in Mexico. Their modernization project was introduced because of an urgent need to upgrade practical skills after Mexico's inclusion in the North American Free Trade Agreement. The author discusses the creation of the National Council for Standardization and Certification of Competency Standards, and why the task of attracting trainees with competency award incentives met with limited success. He further outlines the challenges of the future, such as involving industry more in defining competencies and clarifying the relationship between competency awards and professional qualifications.

Misko and Robinson look at a decade of CBET in Australia, noting the possible negative effect of its downplaying the importance of knowledge and understanding. They emphasize the importance of generic skills such as human relations' skills and critical analytic skills that should become part of CBET in the future. Gilling and Graham also survey CBET in Australia, specifically in the manufacturing industry, where one of the key reforms after the change to a conservative government was "recognition of prior learning" (RPL). A simplified training framework includes the notions that no judgment will be made about where, when, or



how one got skills, nor how much time it took. Their case study of the Huntsman Chemical Company is useful for illustrating successful implementation of CBET. Hager's article, too, provides a success story from Australia, namely that of the Law Society of New South Wales Specialist Accreditation Scheme. Here the designation of specialist lawyer in 12 specializations was created, and assessment is now done through videotaped simulations in which professional actors play the role of solicitor-candidates' clients. Workplace practical judgment can thus be evaluated in a holistic manner, exposing qualities desired by clients, such as humanness and approachability.

Additional articles focus on Costa Rica, France, South Africa, and New Zealand. For Costa Rica, Morales relates how CBET was introduced with the creation of a National Integrated System of Technical Education for Competitiveness (SINETEC) in 1998.

Here the objective was to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of both the public and private sectors, which should ideally work together in the country's training institutions. Kirsch's article on France (written in French) emphasizes that the educational bodies in France must gain an interest in practical, experiential matters, something difficult in the French system. South Africa is represented in the article by Rademeyer, who provides a case study about standards-based assessment in the Ingwe coal mining industry. She describes ongoing paradigm shifts and organizational challenges for enhancing individual and company performance. Bowen-Clewley contributes a New Zealand perspective, outlining the three major assessment models used there, and explaining how the move toward evidence collection and holistic performance assessment models has been validated.

Capper's article on understanding competence in complex work contexts is excellent for providing a theoretical framework for CBET. He offers a clear discussion of assessment contexts and models, making this article one of the most insightful in the volume. On the whole, this book will be useful for those interested in the progress and potential of the relatively new field of competency-based education and training.

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