
Competencies are still a central feature of industry, education and training reform across Australia. The concept of competence and competencies and their value to industry continues to be debated within the education and training sector, workplace and professions. A review of the literature identified a number of critiques on the competency-based model, yet very little reflects the views of employers, assessors and employees or explored their experiences of using a competency-based model within a workplace setting.

The research uses critical social science as its philosophical framework to provide a critical reflection and appraisal of the debate on competency-based training and assessment.

This study is in three stages: The first is a critical reflection of the literature on competency-based training and assessment, to identify, interpret and understand factors about the social groups and their settings that make up the competency-based movement across Australia and at the workplace. Stage two provides a critical ethnographic study focusing on three distinct groups, managers/staff development personnel, assessors, and those who are assessed. All represent the nursing profession located within a health service. Non participant observations and semi-structured interviews are used. The third stage is a review of workplace documentary materials related the process of competency assessment.

This research provides an understanding of those who influence the use of competency-based models within the workplace, how these models are used and why. It also uncovers areas of oppression that are supported either unintentionally or deliberately by the use of competency-based assessment processes.

Through this research the silence of those who are assessed, is broken. This research gives them a voice to present their views on the value of using competency assessment and how they have experienced it.

Through the evidence presented in this thesis managers who are deliberating on whether or not to use competency-based assessments will make their decision based on an informed understanding of this complex concept and be aware of its influence on their work culture.