

The Story of “Class-Driving” Development

By Trevor Sobey BEd(ALD), dipProfCouns

Introduction:

This story describes the progress and change over a thirty-five year period at Driver Training Academy (DTA), the philosophies used in training of driver instructor training and the training conducted by those instructors and the influences of Competency Based Training on DTA since 1990s.

DTA adopted the “Roadcraft” school of thought in Driver Training during the 1970s. The principles of Roadcraft have a long history. In 1892 Dr Karl Benz demonstrated a horseless carriage at an English fair. The single cylinder engine had no sound silencer fitted and made a very loud, unexpected noise similar to a machine gun, which spooked horses working the fairground equipment resulting in damage and personal injury. The British Government reacted with a law preventing horseless carriages being driven on British roads unless a person walked ahead with a red flag by day or a red lantern by night. Apart from giving rise to walking races this incident furnished the cynical saying “Don’t make that law because it will scare the horses”: meaning Governments do badly at relating laws to the actual cause of a problem. This moment in history is an excellent example of the dilemma facing the law makers; slowing the vehicles down to that extent did mean they operated more quietly than if faster speeds had been permitted. It is easy to look back from our present vantage point and state that an example of a much better law would have been: “A horseless carriage shall not be operated on a British road without a silencing device which limits the engine sound to a certain number of decibels”. This would be a little difficult prior to the invention of the engine silencer.

The red flag / lantern law also reduced the number of vehicles in Britain to those owned by a few enthusiasts until after the law was repealed. Australia took up the motor vehicle faster than any other country; in 1927 90% of Australian households owned a motor vehicle at a time when there were very few vehicles in Britain. The English disadvantage was made a long term advantage with the work of Lord Cottenham who chaired a British parliamentary committee which looked at the motor vehicle accidents of the Police drivers. This report was brought down in 1936 and contained a driver training program which followed on from work that Lord Cottenham had commenced in 1926 with the writing of a book “Driving without Fear”. This early work still forms the basis of the British Police Driving manual and the driving manual of the British Institute of Advanced Motorists today. This school of thought focuses on

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developing driver’s thinking and habit processes in order to maintain safe driving practices and to react well in emergencies.

An alternate school of thought came out of American car racing fraternity. It focuses on skill manoeuvring which the driver is to apply to emergencies when they arise. Perry D. (1977) described the effect of these schools of thought and coined the terms “Roadcraft” to describe Lord Cottenham’s thinking and “Carcraft” to describe the race-track variety of training. Perry noted that there was a disparity with the outcomes of the two types of training. Unfortunately since Perry’s time academics have not kept the distinction between the two schools of thought clear. The separate elements of curriculum content have been merged as if they were compatible ideologies. I believe that “Roadcraft” thinking cannot be merged with “Carcraft” thinking anymore than oil can be mixed with water.

History of Driver Training Academy (DTA):

In 1974 driving instructor Trevor Sobey was deeply affected when an eighteen-year-old woman, a former student, died in a car crash shortly after gaining her driver’s licence. From this incident the DTA philosophy was born on two minimum standards: *never again teach someone how to merely pass a licence test and if there is anything that can be learnt about driving, teaching or communication, we would seek to learn about it.*

From around 1976, following the early training from instructors of British Police Driver Training background the DTA driver training followed the academic model of objective and process focus but with specific practical technique skills as a high ideal. While the process emphasised knowledge about observation, insight and planning; it placed credibility on specifics techniques of braking, gear-changing and steering with a focused fervour. While recognising the importance of developing mental skills of emotional control, anticipatory insight into likely behaviours of other and driving situations and calculating speed and distance; it saw certain driving techniques as a panacea of good driving practice.

The issues that were seen as important in the driving instructor training program were believed to just as important in the learner driver and the training provided for those who held a driver’s licence. In the following paragraphs I will consider both aspects of training generically.

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Developing Effective Driver Training:

DTA colleague, Dr Helen Rabbette emphasised five main points in developing effective driver training: One; programs must be structured so that students with differing personality types and learning styles are catered for. Two; learning progress must be objectively assessed throughout the process. Three; group interaction is necessary for attitude development. Four; the program must be intensive. *Short sessions spaced over time don't achieve the best results.* Five; timing of this program is critical. It works best if it is administered at the very start of the ‘Learner-Permit’ period.

Winds of Change towards Competency Based Training:

Seddon (1993) described the early discussion about Competency Based Training (CBT) produced sharp ‘them-and-us’ type arguments between ‘competence’ and ‘excellence’; training and education. She described ‘Liberal meritocracy’ as an increasing view in both education and training arms of the polarised debate. Government economic policy challenged liberal meritocracy with its ‘equality of opportunity’ and replaced it with ‘consumer choice’; however the consumer can only choose from products on offer which are designed and developed by ‘guardian’ interests. pp8. The market has become the social regulator and social ‘goods’ are seen in economic terms.

Marginson (1993) stated that the most important change in education since 1960s was the introduction of Competency Based Training (CBT) pp 143. . Marginson describes three forms of CBT: 1. CBT ‘Behavioural’ - transparent, observable, measurable. It is a hierarchical order of behaviours expressed as Performance Criteria. 2. CBT ‘Generic’ a broad clusters of abilities or attributes which aim to assess the whole situation in a manner of an ‘ethical-person’. 3. CBT ‘Cognitive’ Potential or actual performance which seeks to measure the Underlying intellectual & affective resources. The Mayer Committee rejected narrow ‘behaviourists’ view of ‘capacity-to-do-a-specific-task’ promoting ‘competencies required for effective participation in employment generally’. pp160. Marginson makes the following points: 1. All CBT removes competence from social to local-occupational-organisational culture. pp145. 2. CBT reduces the emphasis on knowledge. pp248. 3. CBT is difficult to assess with clarity and consistency. pp164. 4. Often reduces the standard to the minimum required ‘to-pass-the-test’. pp164. 5. There is a conflict between the desire to be flexible and diverse; while at the same time being

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standardised. pp164. 6. An attempt at creating a seamless system between academic and vocational learning produced an unresolved debate. pp162-163.

Marginson’s points highlight much of the criticism about driving schools and driver training generally. Driver training is seen often to be narrowly focused towards the licence test conducted by the Authority. Christie, R; Harrison, W. (2003) Much of what is called training is inadequate, poorly timed and poorly designed.

Christie, R. (2005) Poorly timed and poorly designed training programs may contribute to increased collision rates if novices are licensed to solo driving without adequate supervised experience...Victorian research and collision information confirms that many learners are gaining sub-optimal levels and variety of experience; the quantity and quality of supervised driving prior to solo driving is the single most significant factor in risk reduction.

By the late 1990s Competency Based Training became a requirement for instructors providing driver training services and licence assessment on behalf of VicRoads and as a minimum requirement for instructors to provide training within a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) was Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment. DTA became a RTO.

DTA response to CBT:

DTA adopted the CBT principle of objectively measuring observable behaviour at the conclusion of each learning task. This innovation made a significant improvement to the learning speed and general learning progress of participants.

DTA had previously developed seventeen Learn-to-Drive exercises which are written in a participant’s program book “Class-Driving Made Easy”. These now had score sheets added for assessing each learning task. Each exercise is focused on a particular phase of the driving task and may contain one, two or three learning tasks. Collectively these exercises met and exceeded the requirements of the Road Transport Training Package.

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The process of program delivery is as follows; typically a group of participants are involved in between four and seven learning tasks per day. With each task six steps are followed: one, read together the ‘Learning Outcome’ of the task and agree to participate together in the learning process; two, read and discuss the theory associated with the task; three, the instructor demonstrates the task; four, one participant who acts as ‘driver’ for the time being is assisted on a diminishing basis by the instructor and another participant who acts as ‘coach’ for the time being; fifth, the ‘driver’ performs the task unaided while yet another participant who acts as ‘assessor’ for the moment objectively marks a score sheet associated with the current task in the ‘driver’s’ participant book; six, the vehicle is parked and a feedback session is conducted to a prescribed format. Then the participants change roles and steps four, five and six are repeated until the group has completed the task. In the case of a participant not reaching competency on a specific task another opportunity may be offered to repeat further practice and subsequent assessment. Alternatively the final ‘Statement of Attainment’ may be reduced to a ‘certificate of attendance’. DTA training retained the process of developing cognitive, spatial and affective mental skills through the theory component (learning step two) and the discussion which took place during the feedback step (learning step six).

Development of Five-day Learn-to-Drive:

The Group-Learn-to-Drive program was developed during the 1980s and by the 1990s it had evolved into a sixteen-exercise core program which could be delivered sequentially in ten days to a group of three participants with one instructor and two vehicles (with automatic and manual transmissions respectively). In 2004 the Bendigo Bank franchise known as the Maldon Community Bank requested that the program be delivered in five days in return for funding local youth through the program. This was achieved by razoring the program to fifteen exercises over five long days. It is seen as the minimum that could be used to meet the requirements of the “Training Package” and issue a “Statement of Attainment”; and have the majority of participants meeting the standards of competency.

Having a Nationally Recognised Training Package assisted in declaring a minimum standard with authority. DTA has received request to provide training over shorter than five day periods, however it

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can be demonstrated that the minimum standard set out in the Training Package cannot be accomplished by the majority of participants in a further reduced time.

When the program is conducted over five days, some of these exercises are delivered in part and only one of two exercises which are conducted in city traffic; the city layout determines which one is most appropriate for the learning progress of the participants.

Looking at the history of program delivery, both with the ten-day and five-day versions, it has been noted that the program content deliver across instructors has been consistent in terms of practical driving technique; however there has been a disparity in the outcomes and satisfaction by participants. The consensus of opinion between DTA instructors states that it is likely that the learning atmosphere and the relationship between participant and instructor will prove to be significant factors in determining both the outcome and the satisfaction with the program.

Developing Transferrable Instructor Skills:

The DTA Driving Instructor program evolved from 1977 through to its accreditation by VicRoads in 1991. As previously stated the original DTA course retain much of the process of the academic style of the former British Police Motor School, which assisted new instructors comprehend meta-cognitive learning for themselves and the learner drivers and the power of the group training model. For example, if I know the process by which I learn, I am able to use that understanding as a ‘tool’ to enhance my learning. VicRoads ceased issuing accreditation for the driving instructor programs and an alternative was sought.

The DTA driving instructor training program was then written to comply with the standards of the package developed in NSW (*NSW Course Number: 6277 - National Course Code: 91000NSW*) which expired on the 31st December 2007. This package was comparatively easy to develop by modifying the existing program which had been accredited by VicRoads.

The new package (*TLI41207 Certificate IV in Transport and Logistics (Road Transport – Driving Instruction)*) is the currently package. Interestingly this new training package focuses more on the OH&S, business and business promotion than on issues such as road rules. While complying with the standards

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set out in the new package it will be necessary for DTA to maintain its emphasis on personal development and communication skills of new instructors if the integrity of the Group Learn-to-Drive program is to be retained.

Conclusion:

In retrospect it may now be noted that the goals set following the death of a former student in 1974 has kept the DTA focused on what is important through all the vagaries of learning fashion and changes imposed by Government on the training process. The goals might now be rephrased as: Doing what is in the long-term interest and safety of the program participant; and continuous learning and improvement in ways to convey that message.

It will continue to remain a priority that the latest information on learning process becomes part of the professional development of DTA staff and that compliance with Government requirements is maintained. However the guiding light should remain; what is in the best interest of the participant and how can the communication of that information be improved.

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