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Planning for Leadership

A staff works to improve graduate study.

DESIGNING a framework to provide opportunities for learning is a responsibility the curriculum leader faces in our public schools. Yet what type of framework, what type of environment, is most apt to provide the opportunities the future curriculum leader needs? And, opportunities to learn what? For what purpose?

These were some of the questions confronting us as we began to design a program to prepare curriculum and instructional leaders at the advanced graduate level.

Basic Considerations

It seems important that those who would give this type of leadership should have experiences which would assist them in developing the behavioral characteristics such responsibilities call for. We tried to take into account:

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1. The differences in each individual entering the program, resulting from his previous experience, his formal education, and his own personality or personal qualities

2. The fear and anxiety (often poorly founded) of students as they view the hurdles and requirements of a doctoral program

3. The need to help students and faculty see relationships and consistent interaction between goals of the program and what actually is happening in the day-to-day experiences provided by the program

4. The part that imitation of others plays in determining one's "teaching style." Therefore, the importance of demonstrating a point of view—about the way people learn, grow, change—about a free, responsible academic climate should not be overlooked.

5. The desire to use procedures and approaches which are consistent with what graduates may use in their professional work

6. The individual nature of the learning process, and the desire to extend the concept of the learning environment beyond the typical course and other re-

quirements which tend to be recognized on the basis of what can be verbalized.

With these kinds of concerns in mind, we began to realize that we could not be satisfied with merely identifying what we hoped doctoral students would learn in the program (usually described in terms of content and skills). Certainly being knowledgeable is important and being able to demonstrate a command of skills is essential. We wanted, however, to go beyond this point so that we could see knowledge and skills being put to use—at the behavioral level, e.g., as a member of a seminar; in planning and helping to carry out a conference; in serving as a consultant to teachers; as a researcher gathering, analyzing and evaluating data; participating in a state or national convention.

Expectations

As a result of this thinking, we developed a list of competencies which we considered essential. These aims were sufficiently broad so that most curriculum workers could endorse them. For each competency listed an attempt was made to indicate what this might mean in behavior, and by what means at our disposal students might get help in developing a degree of competence which would be observable at the behavioral level.

The competencies included the following:

1. Competence in planning for and directing (guiding) educational change

2. Competence in improving instruction

3. Competence in human relations

4. Competence in educational research and evaluation

5. Competence in communication with appropriate publics (communication skills;

understanding of people with whom, and of climates in which one communicates).

Initial Contact with Student

In the initial contact with a prospective student a complete outline of competencies, listed above, is explored. This discussion with one or more members of the staff provides an opportunity to explain and elaborate on competencies, behavioral definitions and expectations, means of developing competencies and behaviors, and approaches to appraisal and evaluation. An attempt is made to assess with the student how his experience, formal education, and career goals fit into the general plan.

There is, of course, considerable flexibility in the program and prospective students are helped to see how their individual needs and desires might be met. In this way a student is encouraged to explore rather thoroughly, before formal application, whether or not the program seems appropriate for his purposes in pursuing graduate work. From the limited feedback of students who have gone on in the program, this procedure has been reported as highly profitable. It seems, also, to have given students an impression of the spirit and attitude of the faculty.

Admission Procedures

Traditional procedures of admission, including submission of transcripts of previous work, letters of recommendation, a battery of tests, and information on experience in teaching, research, writing, and other professional activities, are supplemented by an interview. Three or four faculty members (including one from another department) spend at least one half hour conferring with an appli-

cant. The interview provides an opportunity to assess such factors as the applicant's personality, ability to verbalize, and poise. It gives the candidate an opportunity personally to express his goals and purposes for embarking on advanced graduate study. It also affords him an occasion to raise questions.

Faculty satisfaction with the time-consuming interviewing process seems unanimous. This is indicated by continued willingness on the part of faculty members to serve on admission interview groups.

Program Planning

After admission, the student is assigned a temporary adviser. The student, in consultation with his adviser, makes an initial assessment of his interests and needs in light of his purposes with the previously described outline of competencies and behavioral definitions as a point of departure. Initial courses, seminars, independent study, and other opportunities (as developed under means) are also developed in terms of purpose.

At an appropriate time, usually within the first 15 quarter hours of work, the student, in consultation with his adviser, selects a doctoral guidance committee. At this point the student may choose his chairman or major adviser (within the limitations of faculty load and a professor's interest and willingness to work with the student). Prior to a meeting with his full committee (usually four faculty members and ordinarily including a person outside the college of education) the student works out a tentative draft of his program proposal. This again is in terms of a personal assessment of himself, his strengths, weaknesses, experiences, formal education, and career goals, as these relate to the competencies and behaviors desired. There is no requirement for a specific number of courses.

The program may be changed as the student develops and as subsequent assessments of progress are made.

Lest the preceding paragraph sound like many graduate programs, with their emphasis solely on course work, it should be stated that other experiences are included in such planning. Students have been active participants in planning state ASCD conference programs; they have assumed leadership roles in local, state, and national conferences, as their particular needs and talents dictated. They have taken leadership roles in state curriculum committees, and they have served on consultative teams. While such opportunities are available to most educators, the important point here is that these activities are recognized for their inherent *learning value*. They become, in many cases, as crucial a part of a person's program as any course experience. Moreover, the need is recognized for the student to have an opportunity to analyze (intellectualize) the professional experiences he is having.

Advisement

Advisement has been mentioned from the outset. This function deserves special attention because of the importance of student-adviser relationships throughout the program. Hopefully, as rapport is established, advisement will be a continuous cycle of planning, doing, evaluating, planning, and so on. The student is encouraged to do more and more self-appraisal. Feedback from other members of the staff who have contact with the student is also an important element in appraisal.

Appraisal

To date, appraisal has included the usual grades received in graduate courses. Equally important has been appraisal of an "objectively subjective" type. Plans are under way to seek additional faculty appraisal in terms of competencies and behaviors. In some cases, such as in courses and seminars, appraisal will supplement and elaborate letter grades. There have been efforts to share information on competencies and behavioral goals with members of the faculty outside the curriculum area.

In the advising procedure a student has the opportunity to talk about his assessment of progress and needs as well as evaluation by the faculty.

Summary

In summary, after four years, two of planning and two of implementing, we believe this program has merit; yet it needs more rigorous evaluation. There are, however, some notions which seem solid enough to mention, perhaps as an assessment of progress to date or possibly as hunches which need more testing.

1. Careful selection procedures, using objective and subjective data, ensure a better-quality student. Despite suspicion of subjective judgments, the interview is a significant aspect of the admission procedure.

2. Students seem to understand better the nature of the program since the faculty has developed and shared the outline of behavioral definitions and means. Reactions indicate that there is more clarity of goals for individuals.

3. Advising is an important part of the program. This takes a great deal of time. However, it does enable the faculty to know students well and to be in a better position to develop programs with students.

4. Many behavioral goals cannot be achieved through typical graduate courses. In the usual course there are insufficient opportunities to observe many of the behavioral dimensions of the program. Conscious planning for other types of learning experiences seems to have contributed to student growth.

5. Cooperative planning at the graduate level pays dividends in student motivation. Students report seeing a greater consistency between their goals and faculty expectations.

6. More feedback from faculty outside the curriculum area is needed. Interestingly, where appraisal beyond letter grades has been made by the faculty, there has been greater effort to know the student.

7. Students who have completed or are about to complete their program demonstrate at the behavioral level, in varying degrees, the behaviors listed in our document.

8. Faculty members in the field of curriculum work together more closely. There is common commitment which all understand and support.

9. There is no feeling among staff that "we have arrived." The balance between satisfaction and desire for improvement seems healthy. Efforts are to develop more rigorous and telling means of evaluating progress and making changes in terms of evaluation.

Obviously, this program is not a panacea. It is described in the hope that it may have characteristics of interest to others. It represents an attempt to move beyond intellectualizing to a concern for what a student is able to do on the basis of what he knows, believes, feels and thinks.