

# Impact of Competency Definition on Teacher Preparation

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Choice of definition for teaching competency is certainly the most important decision a designer of CBTE can make.

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**A** MAJOR issue within the competency-based teacher education movement today is this: How is teaching competency to be defined? The range of positions taken on this issue can be framed by a series of questions. Is demonstrated mastery of knowledge about teaching to be considered teaching competency? Is skill in performing the behaviors or tasks of teachers the meaning to be given teaching competency? Or is teaching competency a term to be applied only to the demonstrated ability to bring about the outcomes desired of a teacher in a certificated teaching position? These questions represent markedly different views of what competency-based teacher education (CBTE) is all about, and set markedly different requirements for program structure and operation.

Within this general framework a variety of views are held. Some teacher educators, for example, equate competency with any measure of performance. Persons

with this point of view insist that measures of knowledge and skill are as appropriate as measures of teaching competence as are measures of the ability to bring about desired learning outcomes in pupils.<sup>1,2</sup> Others argue that distinctions should be made between knowledge, skill, and the consequences of teaching, and apply the term competency only to higher order skills or the consequences of teaching.<sup>3</sup>

While the argument ultimately comes down to a matter of *the kind of evidence one is willing to accept as a predictor of the success of teachers*, most states adopting competency-based accreditation standards

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Elam. *Performance-Based Teacher Education*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, December 1971.

<sup>2</sup> R. Turner. In: B. Rosner, editor. *The Power of Competency-Based Teacher Education*. First report of the Committee on National Program Priorities in Teacher Education. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1972. pp. 3-8.

<sup>3</sup> H. D. Schalock. In: B. Rosner, editor. *The Power of Competency-Based Teacher Education*. First report of the Committee on National Program Priorities in Teacher Education. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1972. pp. 113-34.

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and most institutions attempting to implement CBTE programs have opted for the more general position.<sup>4</sup>

When first encountered, the issue of competency definition may seem to be abstract, academic, and far removed from the development and operation of competency-based teacher education programs. Nothing could be further from the truth, for the definition of competency adopted by a state or program shapes all else. Definition wields a powerful influence on the kinds of evidence to be sought by certifying agencies on teacher performance, and thereby on program structure and operation as well as the wherewithal of teachers as they enter the teaching profession. It even wields an influence on the kinds of institutions and agencies that need to join together in carrying out the process of teacher education; for if higher order definitions of competency are adopted, colleges and universities cannot carry out CBTE programs by themselves.

The purpose here is to describe briefly the implications of alternative definitions of teaching competency for program structure and operation. The rationale is that choice of competency definition is the single most important decision to be made in entering the competency-based arena, and that decision makers should be fully aware of the consequences of that decision before they make it.

<sup>4</sup> An exception to this trend is Oregon. As used in Oregon, a teaching competency is defined as "the demonstrated ability to bring about the expected outcomes of a role or function included in a job definition," and a competent teacher as "one who has acquired and demonstrated the essential competencies of a professional position, and integrates and utilizes them effectively in meeting the requirements of that position in accordance with its level and certification status" (*Oregon Process Standards*, 1973, p. 17). The Oregon College of Education at Monmouth has implemented a CBTE program that accepts this definition of teaching competency. For a description of this program, see: H. D. Schalock, B. Y. Kersh, and J. H. Garrison. "From Commitment to Practice in Assessing the Outcomes of Teaching: A Case Study." In: T. E. Andrews, editor. *Assessment in Performance-Based Teacher Education*. Albany, New York: Multi-State Consortium on Performance-Based Teacher Education, 1973. (In press.)

## Implications for Instruction

If competence is defined in terms of the mastery of knowledge that pertains to teaching, instruction in a teacher education program can assume the form of most instruction found in high school and college classes; that is, reading, lectures, discussions, and opportunity for reflective thought. These are tried and true procedures for knowledge mastery, and require for their operation only a library, knowledgeable instructors, and opportunities to engage in reflective thinking and discussion.

If competency is defined in terms of simple teaching skills, or even complex teaching skills to be demonstrated under simplified or simulated conditions, procedures such as microteaching and supervised teaching under simplified classroom conditions represent appropriate instructional strategies.

If teaching competency is defined in terms of complex teaching skills to be demonstrated in real-life contexts, however, or in terms of the outcomes to be accomplished in a particular teaching position, the instructional process must take on the characteristics of instructional and supervisory procedures that typically accompany internships or other forms of on-the-job training.

The resources required to meet the needs of these various approaches to instruction vary greatly. They vary in kinds of competencies needed by instructors, kinds of physical resources that can be drawn upon, and time required to complete the instructional process. All such variability is a reflection of the definition assigned teaching competency, and the designers of competency-based teacher education programs need to keep this clearly in mind.

## Implications for Assessment

The implications of competency definition are as great for assessment as they are for instruction. If competency is defined in terms of knowledge outcomes, standard paper and pencil measures of the kind used in high school and college classes, or standardized measures of achievement, are appro-

priate. If competency is defined in terms of skills or products, however, paper and pencil measures are not sufficient. The assessment of teaching skills requires one or more observations of the skills being performed and some judgment as to the adequacy of their performance.

The assessment of products involves judgment as to the adequacy of the *outcomes* of behavior, rather than the adequacy of behavior per se. This requires, for example, an assessment of pupil outcomes as products of a teacher's behavior, an assessment of curriculum units developed by a teacher, an assessment of the attitudes of parents toward a school, and the like.

Assessing outcomes is a considerably different task than assessing knowledge or skills, and it involves considerably different assessment procedures. The designers of competency-based teacher education programs need to be aware of this fact, and take it into consideration when they are in the process of defining what they mean by teaching competency.

### **Implications for Program Governance**

The implications of competency definition for program governance parallel its implications for instruction and assessment. By and large, as instruction and assessment increase in their dependence upon persons beyond the college context, the complexity of program governance tends to increase. When schools assume the status of partners with colleges in the preparation of teachers, persons from the schools quite naturally wish to be represented in program policy and governance decisions. They also have more to give to such decisions, for when competency definition extends beyond the level of knowledge, teacher education has moved into the arena of the educator as a professional.

The vehicle that has emerged to facilitate more broadly based policy and governance decisions in teacher education is that of the teacher education consortium. As generally conceived, a teacher education consortium involves a college, one or more school

districts, and one or two other representative groups, for example, parents, students of teaching, representatives of teacher bargaining agencies, representatives from professional education groups, and the like. Consortia vary in size, complexity, and function within a teacher education program, but almost without exception something comparable to a consortium must emerge as a vehicle for program governance when the definition of competency extends beyond the knowledge level.

### **Implications for Certification**

Historically, certification has depended upon acceptable grades in a specified series of courses, acceptable performance in a student teaching experience, and acceptable references as to personal character. Evidence of teaching skill beyond that reflected in the student teaching experience (however that might be measured), and evidence of the ability to bring about the outcomes expected of a teacher in a certificated position, typically have not been required for certification. Such an approach to certification rests on the assumption that the evidence supplied through grades, student teaching "ratings," and character references is both sufficient and acceptable as a predictor of subsequent performance as a teacher.

As a consequence of this point of view, a state or teacher education program that chooses to pursue higher order definitions of teaching competency faces a number of problems in relation to certification. First, there are no structures or procedures established to handle evidence of demonstrated teaching skills, or demonstrated ability to bring about expected outcomes of teaching, as part of the certification process. Transcripts or profiles that portray competency demonstrations have not been invented and performance standards for competency demonstrations at various levels of certification have not been specified.

Moreover, kinds and levels of competencies to be demonstrated at various levels of certification have not been agreed to and the kind and number of contexts in which com-

petencies are to be demonstrated have not been defined. These are all matters that have to be attended to if higher order definitions of competency are to be adopted. They are complex, demanding matters, however, and the designers of CBTE programs need to be aware that in all likelihood a tension will exist between higher order competency definition and certification procedures for a considerable period of time.

### **Implications for Improving the Quality of Education**

In addition to affecting instruction, assessment, program governance, and certification within the context of teacher education, it can be argued that competency definition has a direct bearing upon the quality of education provided for children and youth. The argument takes two forms. The first is embedded in the assumed relationship between quality of teaching and quality of learning. Defining teaching competency in terms of being able to bring about the outcomes expected of a teacher in a certificated teaching position should do much to enhance the overall competence of teachers as they enter the teaching profession. Such a definition should also enhance the general quality of persons in the profession by keeping from it those who are not able to demonstrate such competence.

While there is as yet no evidence to support the validity of such an argument, it carries the weight of sensibility. It requires a level of performance on the part of prospective teachers that would appear, on the surface at least, to be a better predictor of ultimate teaching success than course grades, global ratings of performance in student teaching, and character references.

The second argument that can be made

for the contribution of higher order definitions of teaching competency to the improvement of education is embedded in the assumed relationship between quality of teaching and quality of research on teaching. Much of the disappointment that has occurred historically with respect to the results of educational research can be traced to the inadequacy of the dependent or outcome measures used in that research.

The definition of teaching competency in terms of teaching outcomes would not only ensure the development of strong educational outcome measures but would provide a ready-made laboratory for research on factors relating to those outcomes. Both circumstances would represent major gains, for through them it should be possible to improve the quality of research on education in a way that has been unknown in the past.

This article has held that choice of definition for teaching competency is the single most important decision a designer of a CBTE program can make, for it influences powerfully all else that he does. If carried to its logical conclusion, such definition should also affect the quality of teachers that teach and even perhaps the quality of research that is done on teaching.

While some states and programs have moved to define teaching competency as the ability to bring about the outcomes expected of a teacher in a certificated position, most have defined competency as the mastery of knowledge and skills that relate to teaching, or have left competency undefined. It is held here that as the definition of teaching competency increases in complexity, the task of teacher education becomes more difficult. It is also contended that, as this occurs, the benefits of teacher education become greater. □

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