A Personalized Competency-Based Program for Curriculum Leaders

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Described here is the genesis of a competency-based doctoral program for curriculum leaders. The principles followed and the processes used are given in helpful detail.

THIS article describes the development of a doctoral program for curriculum leaders, a personalized competency-based program which bases further study and experiences on the student's previous experiences and future goals. The program was planned cooperatively by specialists in general curriculum, educational technology, and library science in the Department of Administration, Supervision, and Curriculum at the University of Maryland. Certain applications of its principles are also being made at the United States International University.

The definition utilized by the faculty was different from the one typically found in undergraduate competency-based programs. It is based on competencies defined by the faculty, refined by experiences of students and faculty working together in the program, serving as a basis for assessment and program planning as opposed to a course-based, credit-counting program. Requirements are in terms of common learnings with programs planned for the individual to include independent study, internships, seminars, individualized instruction, and other experiences as well as courses that can serve to develop the desired competencies. The length of time taken to complete the program would depend upon the attainment of the competencies as determined by adviser and doctoral candidate.

Features of the Program

The principles upon which the program planning is based further delineate its nature.

1. Competency identification is an open system, that is, all possible competencies will not be defined; they will be changed with experience in the use of this system; some can only be vaguely defined.

2. Competencies are stated in rather general terms [1] (such as, "to define and refine one's own value system," "to demonstrate leadership in international, national, state, and local profes-

[1] "Report of the Committee To Develop Guidelines for Graduate Programs in Curriculum." College Park, Maryland: Department of Administration, Supervision, and Curriculum, College of Education, University of Maryland, 1971. (Mimeographed.) pp. 34, 38, 39.

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sional groups," "to carry out systematic problem-solving analysis in developing a solution to a school situation," "to design instruments to assess and define program needs").

3. More specific definition of competencies takes place in the teaching process.

4. Competency assessment at the performance level is a part of the competency attainment process.

5. Common learnings can be identified for the competencies listed by the major areas of the Department; these learnings can be built into core courses or modules, or learning packages into which students are programmed depending upon the competency assessment.

6. Assessment is a thorough process of discovering a candidate's background, knowledge, competencies, and attitudes related to the individual's personal and professional goals, in order to plan an individualized program of study and professional experiences for attaining those goals.

7. The assessment process is formative in nature in that it continues throughout the doctoral program and relates to the total evaluative process of the student's performance.

8. Process data are more useful than product evaluations for indicating how the individual's goals can be improved and modified.

9. The interactive process between the evaluator and the evaluated ensures helping the student to succeed.

10. An essential element of a competency-based program is that a candidate's rate of progress is determined by demonstrated competency rather than by time of course completion.

11. Competency specification should permit flexibility through continuous assessment, evaluation, and adjustment rather than lead to a rigidly structured program.

12. Through cooperative planning by faculty members, practitioners in the field, and the doctoral candidates, constant improvement and setting of standards of competencies should occur.

13. A competency-based program is viewed as an alternative to a traditional course-based program.

Toward a Competency-Based Approach

Phase One was a year's study by a committee of all graduate faculty in curriculum in the Department of Administration, Supervision, and Curriculum. The group was broadly defined to include specialists in educational technology, library science, and curriculum development. The committee produced a report that outlines the rationale, the nature of the competency-based program, the competencies related to content and experiences, and future steps to be taken.[2]

Working independently each of the three groups of specialists first identified the competencies needed by a doctoral candidate in their own field. A discovery was made that the far greater proportion of competencies identified were common to three fields of specialty included under the rubric "curriculum." These common learnings were categorized as follows: field of inquiry, communication, understanding the nature of man, valuing, professional services, teaching and advising, leadership, management, research and development, evaluation, organi-

[2] *Ibid.*

zation of knowledge, dissemination, and utilization. Specialized learnings for the two fields of (a) curriculum generalists and professors of curriculum and (b) media specialists were listed under further development of the above categories and the categories of program design, production, selection, and systems evaluation.

The competencies were checked tentatively against existing courses and, as a result, two omnibus-type courses were approved: individualized instruction and the doctoral seminar.

Other important parts of the planning were conducting a retreat for the Department, school administrators, doctoral students, and a consultant; developing a student-advisement form based on the competencies; further validation of the competencies through a questionnaire to former curriculum majors; outlining a procedure for selection of an adviser (an open system in which the specialties and interests of advisers were described in order that the candidate might interview more than one and select the adviser); devising of an assessment procedure; and making plans for future work, appraisal, and improvement of the program.

Making Assessment Work

The concentrated work of Phase Two continued the work of Phase One. Participating were faculty and students who had more than two years experience with the successes and difficulties of implementing the guidelines for this competency-based program within the framework of a more traditionally-structured course-based program of a university. The second phase was the spelling out of a rationale and procedure for assessment of the competencies, usually the weakest part of any competency-based program. Packets of materials received from other institutions on the basis of a letter of inquiry revealed this weakness to be true.

A further document was written by one of the authors serving as consultant to the Department. The rationale and principles for the assessment process, the procedures for needs assessment and for resources assessment, the possible instruments to use or construct for assessment purposes, a bibliography of resources, issues to be solved, and recommendations and next steps for further work were included in this document.[3] Only a few of the statements of rationale are given here as an example of the direction taken:

1. All of the data gathered at time of admission, including information secured through the interviews, become a part of the assessment.

2. Both the candidate and adviser participate in the assessment process in gathering information and in evaluating that information in terms of the candidate's goals.

3. As a part of their learning experiences in courses, in consultancies, in research, or in projects, students will usually create good ways of collecting data.

4. Assessment considers all facets of a candidate's educational, professional, and community experiences, as well as his personal qualifications.

5. In initial and continuous assessment, one needs to examine more than student data in order to document progress rather than failure.

6. Assessment procedures and performance criteria are consistent with the competency objectives.[4]

7. The assessment process should be considered a part of at least a three-year evaluation program of the doctoral student's progress toward his goals.

Procedures in Student Assessment

The student is one of the most frequently neglected sources of data about himself. This humanistic, competency-based model demanded the use of self-report information as one means of the adviser's making an entry level assessment of the student. As a part of the procedure of assessing entry

[3] Vernon E. Anderson. "Toward a Competency-Based Program for Curriculum Leaders—Assessment Prospectus: Rationale and Process." College Park, Maryland: University of Maryland, College of Education, 1974. 23 pp. (Duplicated.)

[4] Gordon Lawrence. "Delineating and Measuring Professional Competencies." *Educational Leadership* 31 (4): 300; January 1974. Lawrence found in an analysis of over 200 modules that two-thirds of the procedures were inconsistent with competency statements.

level competencies for a doctoral program in curriculum, the student was requested to give the following information to the adviser:

1. Submit a personal vitae of his professional background. Include a statement of his professional goals

2. Write a statement on a controversial curriculum issue of his choice, in order to indicate his ability to:
   a. Analyze an issue
   b. Communicate ideas in writing
   c. Apply basic writing skills
   d. Select significant curriculum issues.

3. Fill in the open-ended sentences on the "General Educational Philosophy" form.

An adviser-advisee relationship is of paramount importance in determining the success of this program. The advisee identifies the professional experiences that he has had and the competencies that he has gained through those experiences. Both adviser and advisee assess the experiences in terms of where, or if, they are applicable in the competency-based matrix. This assessment of the responses to the "Planning Guide for Doctoral Programs in Curriculum" becomes the jumping-off point for program planning.

Where are the gaps in the student's background? How can these gaps be filled? What are the proficiencies needed in relation to the student's stated career goal? Can he obtain these experiences through reading and discussion, seminars, workshops, or the traditional course structure? Which approach does the student prefer and find most beneficial to him? These are the kinds of concerns that the adviser and advisee explore as they try to personalize program patterning and to select areas that will enhance the doctoral student's curriculum leadership skills.

A Prototype Program

Of considerable interest is the fact that this personalized competency-based model for a doctoral program with a humanistic approach was tested out and developed further in a U.S. Office of Education grant under its Education Professions Development Act (EPDA), Program Grant Ref. No. OEG-0-70-4035 (725). It represented a creative use of media for curriculum development, a blending of curriculum, educational technology, administration, supervision, and instructional materials into a modern program of preparation of curriculum leaders as curriculum administrators, media specialists, and supervisors of library sciences. PACT[5] (Program for Administrators of Curriculum Technology) included curriculum and media specialists from public schools, parochial schools, community colleges, and teacher education institutions, and was staffed by curriculum and educational technology professors.

Over a three-year period, both part-time and full-time students in this doctoral program participated as a group for a full day a week in seminars, skillshops, individualized and group projects. As a part of the candidate's doctoral program, the PACT students conducted five sessions at national conferences (three at ASCD and two at AECT) and sponsored workshops for public schools in Maryland. It was unique in that many of the principles of the competency-based program described here were put into effect highly personalized in that professors and students worked together for a total day a week. This type of contact is rarely found among part-time—or even full-time—doctoral students and their instructors.

At U.S. International University, San Diego, an institution with a humanistic approach, many of the principles of a personalized competency-based program are in operation. For the first eight courses, doctoral students in educational leadership take a core of courses in human behavior. From that point on, the program is uncommonly personalized with seminars, independent study, and internships planned cooperatively by the instructor, candidate, and school system on the basis of the individual's competencies and professional goals. Situated in a School of Human Behavior, the program in

[5] An acronymn used by the University of Maryland previous to ASCD's publication entitled, *Schools Become Accountable: A PACT Approach* (Planning Accountability Team).

educational leadership (administrative and curriculum leaders) can give its students the opportunity to work with faculty, such as Max Lerner, Ashley Montagu, and others from the field of the behavioral sciences as well as with curriculum specialists.

Implementing the Program

Implementing a personalized competency-based program for curriculum leaders thrives where advisers extend their personalization into their classrooms. The authors have found that the use of individualized student academic contracts is one means of achieving personalization. Courses in curriculum and supervision gained new vitality as doctoral students selected from the *Guidelines* competencies on which they were going to work, what they would do to achieve these proficiencies, and how they wanted the end product to be measured. Students built formative and summative evaluative procedures into their contracts. They were free to work with a small group or alone to fulfill their contracts, and services desired from the instructor were specified by the students.

It has been the experience of the writers that:

1. Students frequently carve out much larger requirements for themselves, and reach them, than the instructors would require of them.

2. As students work through this open system, they tend to become more open in their relationships with others.

3. Some students prefer more traditional avenues and write-in requests for lectures by the professors, construct term papers as synthesizers of their information, and state that they want to be evaluated *via* a final examination that samples the content areas identified in their contracts.

4. Personalized contracting provides natural opportunities for the inclusion of varied instructional media, such as audio and videotape, slide-tape, 8mm film, transparencies, U film, and improved visuals.

Toward the latter point, the utilization of available University of Maryland, College of Education support services from the Curriculum Laboratory and the Educational Technology Center increased. The presence of curriculum specialists in those two centers enabled students to secure assistance from the personnel in the laboratory and the center. Students, many for the first time, became instructional developers. Instructional modules and materials that they developed became available for present and future student use and validation through a simple checkout system.

Lest the authors convey the impression that this program is a finished product, the remainder of this article will be devoted to identifying future work to be done and problems of implementation.

Work Still Needed

Further assessment instruments and assessment procedures as well as some means of validating and amending the list of competencies are needed. Just as the internship is viewed as a valuable on-site experience for the professional, so a doctoral seminar for curriculum leaders should be accepted as a clearinghouse for ideas and theory-testing by the advanced doctoral student. How are graduates of this program faring in the world of work? What insights, upon reflection, do they have to share with us? What did we do well? What did we do poorly? How can we improve the program without having it lose its freshness of approach and belief in the individuals? These are some of the questions to which the staff must address themselves.

Problem? Perhaps communicating an accurate description of the program's intent and goals to colleagues is one of the most difficult tasks for faculty engaged in this different, often little understood, approach to graduate level instruction. It would need to be accepted by a Department or School as an alternative means of developing a doctoral program. The involved professors' maintaining open doors for colleagues to share the experience and their having open minds to view fairly that which is occurring are important bridges to understanding and acceptance. □