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An Analysis of Course Requirements and Action Plans within Doctoral Curriculum Departments

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ABSTRACT. There is a paucity of research concerning the knowledge base requirements for curriculum specialists enrolled in programs of professional preparation. However, curriculum specialists are frequently responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating the curriculum. Understanding the relationship between the relevance of what is taught in higher education curriculum programs and school-based curriculum processes can be explored in part by assessing the relationship between course requirements in doctoral curriculum departments. The purpose of this study was to determine the degree of correspondence within course requirements among curriculum departments in the United States and to assess what steps are being taken to ensure that curriculum specialists are being trained to meet the challenges associated with increasingly diverse student populations. A summary of the course requirements in curriculum programs and an analysis of the thematic content of action plans that universities had written is reported. Overall, the findings suggest that there is little evidence to support the existence of a core of courses that characterize doctoral programs.

Curriculum specialists can be described as individuals who perform consultative or supervisory roles confined to functions particular to a subject matter area or specialty (Bartoo, 1976), that are critically important to the students' education (Pajak, 1989). Frequently responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating the curriculum, curriculum specialists analyze and determine the effectiveness of school curriculum. In conjunction with guiding the effectiveness of curriculum delivery, they also provide leadership to ensure that schools offer curriculum that acknowledges student diversity. Fulfilling the

complexity of these responsibilities and performing tasks with expertise, requires adequate training in related skills, an understanding of knowledge base components, and an ability to develop curriculum that acknowledges the diversity of student learning styles, attitudes, and cultural mores that characterize our nation's schools (Behar, 1994; Behar & Ornstein, 1992).

Trends in contemporary education are influencing the role of the curriculum specialist including demographic changes in our school age population (Hodgkinson, 1991), school reform movement initiatives (Deal, 1990; Eisner, 1992; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Glickman, 1990), and efforts to restructure education (Cuban, 1984; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Newman, 1993; Ravitch, 1992; Shanker, 1988). Each of these factors has implicitly influenced the nature of responsibilities that curriculum specialists usually assume. How are these concerns influencing the design of doctoral curriculum programs? Are universities responding to contemporary educational needs? If so, are these concerns being reflected in either program requirements or training experiences?

To identify course requirements for curriculum directors, Sturges (1975) surveyed professors in 78 selected state universities, asking them to indicate required courses. Fifty professors listed 15 courses in curriculum, administration, educational psychology, research, and evaluation. Elementary curriculum was cited by 48% of the professors while secondary curriculum was cited by 44% of the professors. Other mandatory curriculum courses listed by the professors were: curriculum development, 40% (N = 20); curriculum construction, 30% (N = 15); curriculum design, 28% (N = 14); theories of curriculum, 28% (N = 14); theories of instruction, 24% (N = 12); and instructional systems, 18% (N = 9). In a random review of 50 graduate departments in curriculum, Ornstein (1986) found that 40% used only the word curriculum in their department name, 30% referred to curriculum and instruction, 25% used the term curriculum leadership suggesting a curriculum-supervision-administration program, and 5% used the term curriculum and supervision.

Overall, little research has been conducted regarding knowledge requirements that directly relate to curriculum programs in higher education. This lack of empirical assessment is particularly ironic, since the field of curriculum guides school-based processes such as learning, teaching, and instruction. The paucity of research regarding doctoral curriculum education raises questions about both accountability and effectiveness of programs in higher education settings. Given the influential role of curriculum specialists, an analysis of the knowledge requirements in doctoral curriculum programs

should be considered integral to quality appraisal of public school curriculum. Toward this end, this study examined the following questions. What courses are required of doctoral curriculum students? Do graduate students explore local, state, and federal policy issues that may have an impact on curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation; are they required to take a course in educational policy? Field experiences are generally regarded as activities in which students have an opportunity to practice the skills related to one's profession. In this context, is internship or practicum experience mandatory? Do universities offer training that leads to a state license as a certified curriculum specialist. Finally, is there an established core of required courses that characterizes doctoral curriculum programs throughout the nation?

Methodology

Using *Peterson's guide to graduate programs in business, education, health, and law 1992* (Peterson's Guide, 1991), 79 colleges and universities [1] representing thirty-six states offering doctoral degrees in curriculum were identified. Department chairpersons at all the colleges and universities were sent the Survey of Graduate Curriculum Programs [2]. Data from this survey is valid through the end of the 1992-1993 academic year. The initial mailing and follow-up questionnaires yielded a response rate [3] of 65% ($N = 51$). The data were analyzed using inferential and descriptive statistics. Across group analyses were conducted to ascertain the potential of significant relationships between the program types and course requirements for curriculum graduates. A descriptive assessment was conducted to analyze the thematic content of action plans that universities had written. Program types were classified by the respondents into one of the following five categories: curriculum; curriculum and instruction; curriculum and teaching; teaching and curriculum; or all others [4]. Several questions asked respondents to "indicate if students are required to complete a course in the area listed, e.g., curriculum evaluation, by placing a check next to the appropriate response." Responses concerning whether students were required to take specific courses including curriculum evaluation, curriculum theory, and curriculum design, among others, were tabulated. The respondents were asked to indicate if the their respective states had established procedures for curriculum specialist certifications. In an open ended question, participants were asked to describe the changes their department had made or planned to implement that focused on integrating practical applications of course content taught in higher education courses.

Results [5]

The results of this study are reported in three parts. The findings regarding program types are reported first and are followed by the findings related to the required courses. Third, the results pertaining to the action plan responses are reported.

Overall, the sample was comprised of eight programs (16%) with a major emphasis on curriculum. Thirty two universities (64%) reported that their program focus was curriculum and instruction. Programs designated as all others included ten of the universities (20%).

Required Courses

Figure 1 presents the findings regarding courses that doctoral curriculum students were required to take. In rank order of frequency, the results revealed that a course in curriculum theory was required most often and cited by 72% (N = 36) of the colleges and universities. Courses that were ranked two through four respectively were: curriculum development, 60% (N = 30); curriculum research, 56% (N = 28); and curriculum design, 52% (N = 26). Other required courses were curriculum evaluation, 48%, (N = 24) and supervision of curriculum, 36% (N = 18) which were ranked fifth and sixth. The practicum or internship was required by thirty-two percent (N = 16) of the doctoral curriculum programs and ranked seventh. Curriculum implementation was ranked eighth and required by 22% (N = 11) of the colleges and universities. Both curriculum history and educational policy were required by 18% (N = 9) of the doctoral programs and tied for rank order 9.5. Less than one third of the universities, 28% (N = 14), reported that they offered training leading to state licensing as a certified curriculum specialist. Universities reporting the availability of a curriculum certification included two each in Illinois, Massachusetts, and Texas. Doctoral curriculum programs in Arizona, California, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Montana, Ohio, and Wisconsin also reported that their programs led to state certification.

Related to the frequency of courses, it was observed that 22% (N = 11) of the colleges and universities required that students take the top five most frequently cited courses (curriculum theory, curriculum research, curriculum development, curriculum design, and curriculum evaluation). Twenty-six percent or N = 13 of the colleges and universities were observed to require courses which were ranked one through four including curriculum theory,

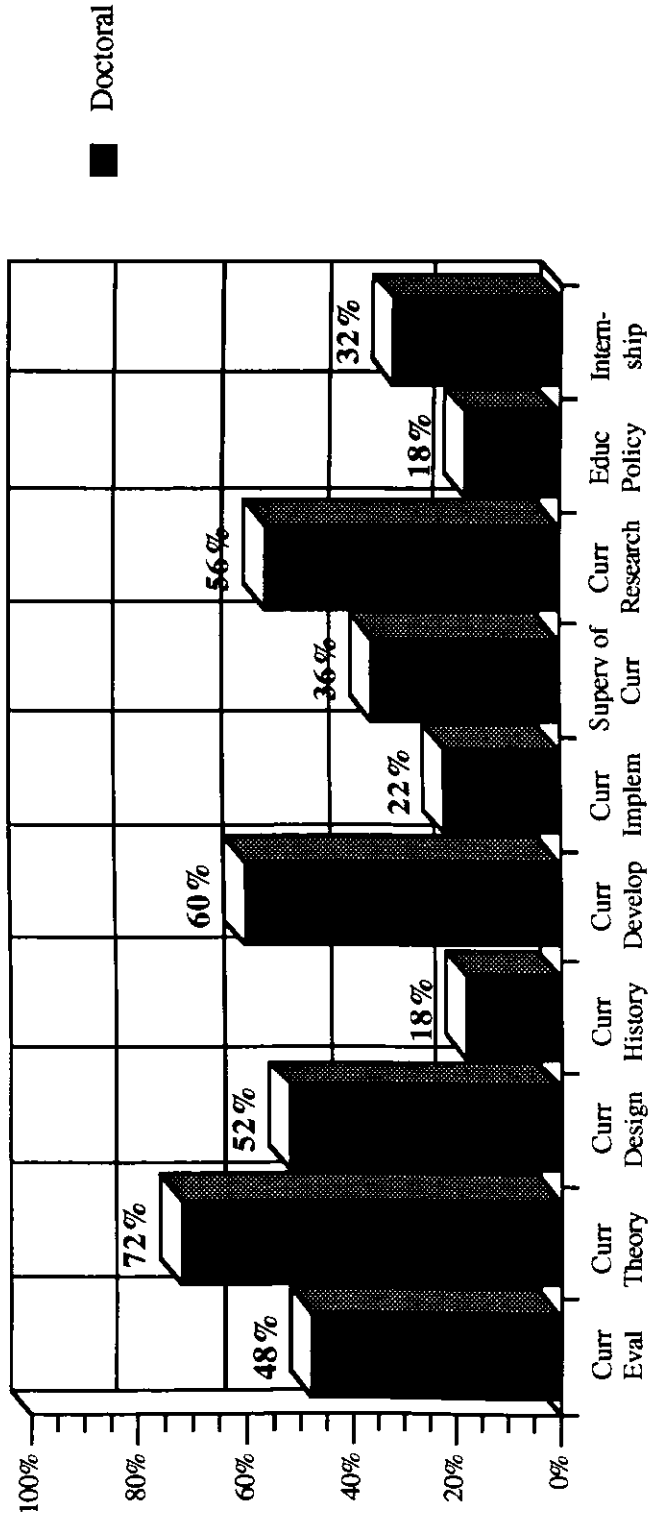

Figure 1. Required Courses within Doctoral Curriculum Programs by Percentages

curriculum research, curriculum development, and curriculum design. Thirty-two percent or $N = 16$ of the institutions were observed to require the three most frequently cited courses (curriculum theory, curriculum research, and curriculum development).

Contingency Analyses. Table 1 shows the percentage of universities that required students to take specific courses by program types. As shown in Table 1, a significant relationship was demonstrated between program types and two required courses. For the item "requires a course in curriculum theory," curriculum and instruction programs tended to require that course more frequently than other program types. The contingency coefficient was .537 ($df = 5$, $p < .001$). Related to program types, it was observed that 48% of the total sample of doctoral programs, or ($N = 24$) of the curriculum and instruction programs, required a course in curriculum theory while all of the curriculum programs, that is, 16% of sample, required curriculum theory. Among the all others programs, 8% ($N = 4$) of the total sample of doctoral curriculum programs required a course in curriculum theory.

For the item "requires a course in educational policy," programs in curriculum and instruction tended to report more frequently than other program types that they did not require educational policy. The contingency coefficient was .437 ($df = 5$, $p < .05$) Related to programs types, 29 of the curriculum and instruction programs (58% of the sample) did not require a course in educational policy, and six of the curriculum programs (12% of the sample) did not mandate this course.

Action Plan Responses

Participants were asked to indicate changes that their departments had made or were planning to make regarding the integration of instruction of curriculum in their programs and the practice of curriculum in job-related settings. The action plan responses were classified as: (1) no response, (2) programmatic responses, or (3) change responses.

Sixty percent or $N = 30$ of the universities did not provide a response. Programmatic responses were reported by 22% ($N = 11$) of the universities. Regarding this category of responses, universities generally elaborated about course offerings, number of courses and/or the semester hours required for graduation. In other cases, they described the nature of their program in greater detail.

Table 1
Observed Frequencies for Program Type by Required Courses

ITEM: Requires a course in curriculum theory[a]

PROGRAM TYPE	YES	NO
Curriculum	8 (16%)	0
Curriculum & Instruction	24 (48%)	8 (16%)
All Others[c]	4 (8%)	6 (12%)

ITEM: Requires a course in educational policy[b]

PROGRAM TYPE	YES	NO
Curriculum	2 (4%)	6 (12%)
Curriculum & Instruction	3 (6%)	29 (58%)
All Others[c]	0	1 (2%)

[a] contingency coefficient = .537, $df = 5$, $p = <.001$
[b] contingency coefficient = .437, $df = 5$, $p = <.05$
[c] Denotes programs in curriculum and teaching, teaching and curriculum, or no response given. Since the *N* for at least one of these response categories was less than five, they were collapsed under one heading.

Twelve percent or $N = 6$ of the universities cited change responses and reported specific plans or intentions that focused on integrating theoretical and practical applications of curriculum. Six different types of responses were received that comprised the following concerns: (1) greater integration of cultural diversity issues; (2) program revision to "catch up with recent changes in the field"; (3) integration of curriculum, instruction, instructional design, and technology as the major program emphasis; (4) development of new courses and an increase in recruitment efforts; (5) the articulation of a program focus that integrated literacy, teacher evaluation, teaching and curriculum; and (6) the addition of a new course, curriculum history.

Summary of Results and Discussion

There has been little research since 1976 that has explored the extent of similarity among required curriculum courses in relationship to the training of curriculum specialists. Knowing the degree of correspondence in course requirements across institutions might be helpful while considering issues related to the program focus and planning within university departments of curriculum. The findings in this study might also be of interest to educational policy makers interested in establishing a curriculum specialist license or in creating curriculum certification standards.

Overall, the results did not provide evidence supporting the existence of a required core of curriculum courses among doctoral programs within the United States but rather a random occurrence of course requirements across universities and colleges. While curriculum theory was cited most frequently as a required course, based on the results reported in this study, it is difficult to determine how the content within curriculum theory courses may vary from institution to institution. An incongruity between course titles and the actual content taught may exist. Indeed this finding is notable because the field continues to have difficulty articulating an agreed upon identity much less a theory (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). Other mandatory courses, cited in descending order of frequency, included curriculum development, curriculum research, curriculum design, curriculum evaluation, supervision of curriculum, internship, curriculum implementation, curriculum history, and educational policy.

Curriculum implementation was cited as a required course by less than one quarter of the universities while supervision of the curriculum was cited by slightly more than one third of the universities. During a time when providing effective instructional leadership has been linked to students' academic accomplishments, one might expect curriculum implementation or supervision

of the curriculum to be mandatory in a majority of doctoral programs (Heck, 1992; Rosenholtz, 1989). However, given the fluidity and vastness of the field of curriculum, it is probably not surprising to find that there does not appear to be a framework that could be used to characterize doctoral programs.

One might posit that curriculum theory, curriculum research, curriculum development, curriculum design, and curriculum evaluation constitute a core of required curriculum courses. However, this is not supported by the observation in which only 22% of the doctoral curriculum departments required the top five most frequently cited courses. Furthermore, even when course titles are similar, wide differences in content, required competencies, and levels of instruction often exist (Ornstein, 1986). The results of this study seem to concur with impression that curriculum appears somewhat ambiguous regarding what knowledge curriculum programs should encompass, what content and assessment are essential and what knowledge is relevant.

The finding that more curriculum and instruction programs tended to require a curriculum theory course suggests that perhaps these universities offered a program that was more theoretical in nature. It is plausible that some of these programs focused on curricular applications that were content specific (language arts, math, reading, science, social studies) or specific to grade level distinctions (early childhood, elementary, middle or secondary school). Similarly it is also possible that curriculum theory is infused in other courses.

Regarding the finding that the majority of universities across program types did not require a course in educational policy has several implications. First, universities might not consider this course to be relevant to a program of professional preparation. Second, the topics of interest likely to be covered in a course titled educational policy might be covered in other courses or students might explore policy issues through independent study. Third, since university departments typically have a finite number of faculty lines, decisions concerning what courses can and should be required are usually a based on financial resources, philosophical, and educational perspectives as well as the subject matter expertise of the faculty.

Almost every profession in education has established a required course of study which provides a program of study leading to certification. Certification specializations that have enjoyed a long standing in the field of education include teaching, administration, and supervision. Seemingly relegated to a less significant status, the curriculum specialist licensure is still not available in every state. Whether representative states have established opportunities to obtain a curriculum specialist certification, it seems that the

internship should be viewed as an essential component for doctoral study. The internship, usually one to two semesters in length, is generally designed to provide a practice-based experience for students to synthesize theory and practice into a meaningful entity and offers them an opportunity to develop their own professional identity in relationship to the field. Site field training allows students to translate textbook and classroom learning experiences into practical activity and usable knowledge. Providing students with the opportunity to integrate classroom instruction and theoretical knowledge into a practical realm is crucial to connecting textbook learning and real world curricular applications. Despite the perceived importance of field based training, about two thirds of the doctoral programs did not require a practicum or internship. This finding suggests that there may be a lack of coherence and articulation among doctoral programs regarding practical applications of curriculum if we consider the internship as the primary mode for providing practice-based experiences. However, doctoral courses may include field based projects in which students engage in activities pertaining to curriculum evaluation, such as evaluating the effectiveness of an instructional strategy in relationship to student achievement in reading comprehension, or curriculum development activities, such as designing a course. Related to this result is that less than one-third of the universities indicated that licensure as a certified curriculum specialist was available in their state. Perhaps this serves to underscore the confusion that exists in describing the role of the curriculum specialist.

One implication of the results is that a core of curriculum courses comprising university programs has not been established or accepted as a precept. This observation should revivify the concern regarding whether curriculum is really an autonomous discipline. Perhaps these findings also affirm the premise that curriculum is a collective of borrowed ideas and concepts which have just been translated to fit into a rubric so called curriculum. The results do suggest a need to expend greater efforts at program levels. Providing attention in this arena would ensure that course requirements reflect a sensitivity and responsiveness to the contemporary educational needs in school systems. The findings in this study should raise questions about the absence of mandatory courses. What does a lack of required courses mean in a controversial time? What does the lack of required courses portend during a time when greater attention is being placed upon multiculturalism and critical theory?

There can be little doubt that curriculum positions are available in schools and universities at local, state, and federal levels, but without certification someone who lacks appropriate knowledge and understanding of curriculum processes can obtain the same job. The data suggest that some

programs require students to take several courses in development, theory, design, and evaluation, whereas other programs may not require any courses in these areas. Currently, there is no standardized assessment device to help school systems or boards determine whether curriculum personnel applicants have the requisite skills and expertise to develop and analyze curriculum. However, prospective employers may ask applicants to offer samples of their expertise in writing teams, or developing curriculum guidelines, among others. The inability to codify a core of requisite curriculum courses or a knowledge base of curriculum practices that students should acquire as well as the failure to create a curriculum specialist licensure limits the curriculum specialist's influence at the school and university levels (Behar, 1993; Ornstein, 1986). Lack of certification also makes the field of education vulnerable to legislative actions that may not be based on systematic evaluation or rational choices.

The action plan responses were disappointing in their depth and breadth. Taken as a whole, there was little evidence suggesting that curriculum and instruction departments were planning program changes that focused specifically on integrating classroom instruction and the practice of curriculum in job-related settings. The findings also suggest that many universities lack a cohesive framework that guides program design. This observation might contribute to what has been described as a tension between theoretical curriculum and curriculum at the practical level.

It is difficult to analyze the paucity and superficial nature of the responses that were received. The responses may reflect limitations particular to the survey instrument, the use of survey methodology to explore this issue, or may be due to the nature of open ended questions. However, with an increasing emphasis on issues related to multiculturalism, student centered curriculum, and learning styles, it is somewhat remarkable that only one program mentioned that they planned to examine the emphasis given to cultural diversity issues. One university respondent mentioned the need to update the program, without indicating the program alterations that the university planned to make.

The results of this study raise additional concerns. Are universities designing curriculum programs with a vision for the complexity of tasks that emergent curriculum specialists will be required to assume? More simply, are universities providing future curriculum specialists with adequate training to deal with the diverse and perhaps complicated issues that they might need to address? These responses might be a reflection of apathy, inaction, divergent philosophical beliefs among faculty members, a lack of visionary leadership, the type of content area expertise among faculty members, or suggest that additional

planning time is needed before the implementation of program redevelopment that appears to be more consistent with public education needs can occur. Further investigation which employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches will be needed to obtain a more comprehensive perspective about what higher education curriculum programs are doing to link theoretical aspects of curriculum to actual classroom practice.

Overall, the results should raise our collective level of consciousness about the need to implement measures of program accountability and the absence of required courses. The disadvantages associated with not having state or national licenses for curriculum specialists are implicit. Based on the findings, it seems that departments of curriculum might benefit from re-evaluating the course alignment of their programs as well as contemporary educational needs at the school level. An assessment of course content, program requirements, and modes of evaluation in relationship to their departmental philosophy, goals, and expectations for student outcomes might lead to improved accountability and articulation between theoretical curriculum and practical work-related applications. Research analyzing the correspondence between course title and course content might also add to an understanding of the nature of course requirements within specific program types.

The finding that there seems to be little evidence to support the existence of a required course of courses within curriculum programs should be considered only one component in understanding the relationship between the relevance of what is taught in higher education curriculum programs and school-based curriculum processes. Further research might analyze the relationship between course content and course titles among different program types. Other research might study curriculum specialists in actual work settings and explore their perceptions of the utility of their doctoral level coursework in relationship to their roles and responsibilities through interview, observation, and survey methodology. Since the effectiveness of school-based curriculum is integrally related to the expertise of curriculum specialists, an in-depth examination of program requirements and course content is an important consideration. Understanding the similarity among course requirements within doctoral programs provides a database for further inquiry.

The field of curriculum should take a leadership role in establishing the standards for training curriculum specialists. Creating standards of scholarship that acknowledge both theoretical and applied functions of curriculum will also help to solidify the identity and the effectiveness of the field. However, it is important to identify and define current standards within university curriculum departments. Hopefully, such actions will ensure that the field is taking a

proactive stance in response to preparing future curriculum specialists for the challenges associated with educating an increasingly diverse student age population.

Notes

[1] For the purposes of reporting these results, all respondents are referred to as universities, programs, and/or departments.

[2] Graduate curriculum programs refer to any doctoral level graduate program in curriculum; curriculum and instruction; curriculum and teaching; and teaching and curriculum.

[3] One survey was omitted from the analysis because the university no longer offers the doctorate. The remaining surveys were analyzed.

[4] Programs in which the responses were less than five were designated as all others and included programs in curriculum and teaching, teaching, and curriculum.

[5] Trends due to geographical location were examined. No significant differences were observed.

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