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ABSTRACT

The field-oriented, competency utilization system (FOCUS) training program attempts to specify a theoretical framework to practice utilizing a verified pool of competency statements and the assessment component of the Georgia Principal Assessment System. This paper depicts the developmental process that went into building the FOCUS instructional program. In developing the program, five steps were followed. (1) Competency was defined at a relatively high level of abstraction as the school administrator's demonstrated ability to identify and solve high priority school problems and to do so in terms of observable outcomes. (2) A theoretical framework for developing competency was selected. The framework involves initiating structure for school problem-solving, developing a problem definition, charting alternatives in terms of their consequences, stating objectives, and intervening for problem-solving. (3) The observable consequences of competency were identified. (4) Functional alternatives for the production of the observable consequences of competency were developed. (5) Operational definitions to substantiate the existence of these observable consequences in the field were specified. (Author/IRT)

UTILIZING THE GEORGIA PRINCIPAL'S ASSESSMENT SYSTEM AS A RESOURCE IN CONSTRUCTING AN INSTRUCTIONAL COMPONENT FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

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In the May issue of the CCBC Notebook an article by Ellett, Payne, and Perkins described the development and validation of the Georgia Principal Assessment System (G.P.A.S.).1 As the article pointed out, this assessment system was developed as part of Project ROME (Results Oriented Management in Education), an E.S.E.A. Title III funded research and development project attempting to establish the foundation for a C.B.E.A. model in the State of Georgia. Concurrently with this effort, Project R.O.M.E.-F.O.C.U.S. has been developing a training program for school principals which focuses on the assessment system and a pool of competency statements classified within the system. The acronym F.O.C.U.S. stands for field-oriented, competency utilization system, hence Project R.O.M.E.-F.O.C.U.S. The paper which follows attempts to depict the developmental process that went into building the F.O.C.U.S. instructional program.

A Rationale for Program Construction

There has always been a need in educational administration for a training vehicle providing an on-the-job, operational definition for competency. Such a training program would necessarily have to be systematic rather than random in its approach to the development of competency. It would probably involve the specification of theory to practice in terms of a clearly defined means-ends relationship. In developing the F.O.C.U.S. training program, the following steps seemed appropriate:

1. Competency was defined at a relatively high level of abstraction.
2. A theoretical framework for developing competency was selected.
3. The observable consequences of competency were identified.

4. Functional alternatives for the production of the observable consequences of competency were developed.
5. Operational definitions to substantiate the existence of these observable consequences in the field were specified.

Step One: Defining Competency

Project F.O.C.U.S. defined competency as the school administrator's demonstrated ability to identify and solve high priority school problems and to do so in terms of observable outcomes. A high priority problem is viewed as one which is directly related to the goals and objectives of the school organization. The functional area of curriculum and instruction seemed to most closely meet this criterion.[2]

The G.P.A.S. classification model specified seven functional areas of responsibility for school principals: curriculum and instruction, staff personnel, pupil personnel, support management, school-community interface, fiscal management, system-wide policies and operations. The problem solving perspective seemed to provide a conceptual framework for competency upon which program development could be based. It was posited that competency is problem solving, and that a competent school administrator can identify and solve problems in any of the functional areas. The F.O.C.U.S. staff selected curriculum and instruction as a pilot area for initial program development. However, using the problem solving definition of competency, any of the seven areas would have fit. The following figure depicts the relationship between the definition of competency and the various functional areas of responsibility.

Step Two: Selecting A Theoretical Framework

Having defined competency in school administration as effective problem solving, it seemed necessary to specify a process which administrators might logically use in solving school problems. Many approaches would have been acceptable: the scientific method, a management by objectives scheme, or possibly a conflict resolution model. Each theoretical framework would have provided a logical, clearly-defined, step-by-step process for attaining competency. The theoretical framework finally selected, called consequence analysis, is a five step problem-solving model which bears some similarity to Merton's functional analysis.[3] The five phases are as follows:

1. Initiating Structure for School Problem Solving
2. Developing a Problem Definition
3. Charting Alternatives in Terms of Their Consequences
4. Stating Objectives
5. Intervention for Problem Solution

An original framework-like consequence analysis seemed to provide certain advantages over well-known, problem-solving models. First, in terms of the opinions of our clientel, we avoided any negative sterotypes they may have held for other models, and capitalized on the newness or novelty perception. Second, since the instructional staff participated in its development, commitment engendered by a feeling of ownership was gained. Third, consequence

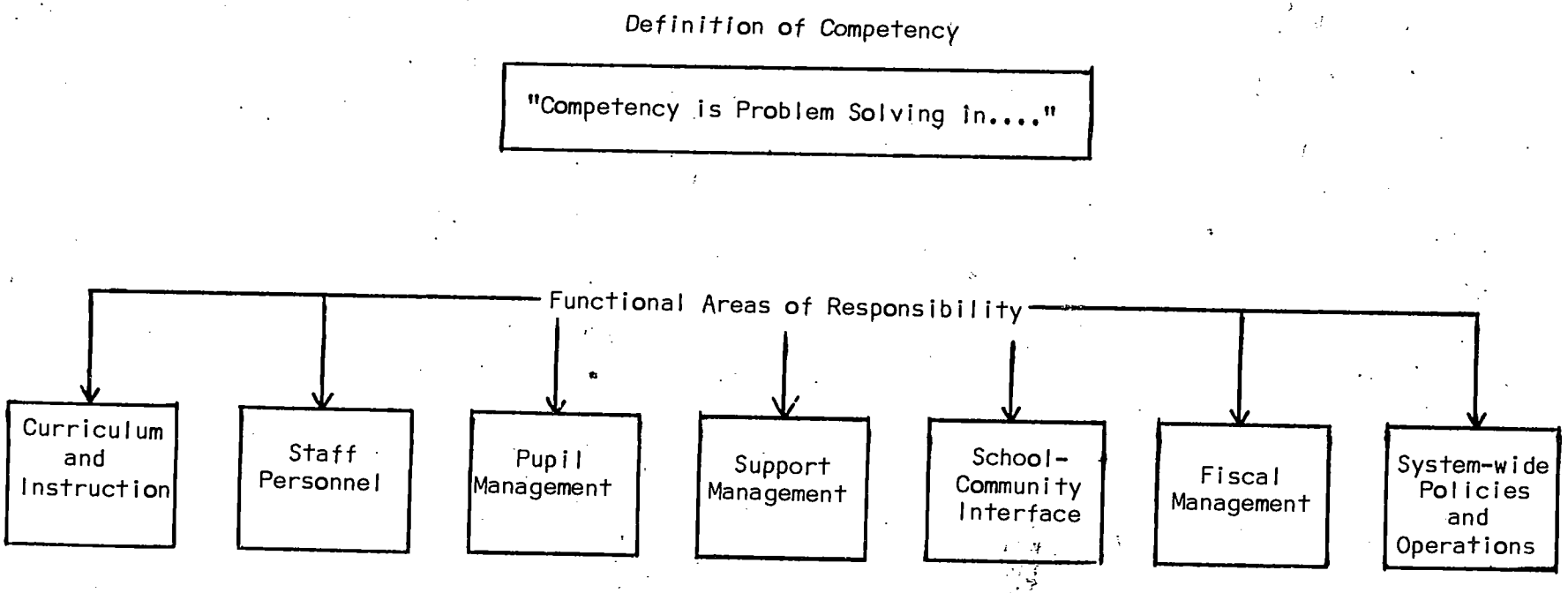

Figure 1. The Relationship Between the Definition of Competency and R.O.M.E. Functional Areas of Responsibility.

analysis, a model which uses the consequences of administrative behavior as its units of analysis, proved to be a workable model for a program aimed at generating desired outcomes or consequences in the field.

Step Three: Identifying Observable Outcomes

Given a theoretical framework for attaining competency, the next step in program development appeared to be the identification of the consequences or outcomes of competency. That is, the instructional program must articulate performance indicators which can be specified as consequences of implementing each step of the problem-solving model in the school organization. A pool of performance statements validated against school outcome measures probably would provide the ideal resource for specifying these outcomes. While validated performance indicators were not initially available, the refinement of the G.P.A.S. did provide 338 high-priority performance indicators surviving a statewide survey of 290 school principals in the State of Georgia.

The classification model for the G.P.A.S. presently lists 80 competency statements by functional area of responsibility. These statements are called Functional Area Category Titles (F.A.C.T.). For instance, under the functional area of responsibility known as curriculum and instruction, there are 21 F.A.C.T. statements and under each statement is a set of performance indicators which survived state-wide verification surveys. Below is F.A.C.T. IX from curriculum and instruction.

FACT IX: Teacher Instructional Problem-Solving Skills

1. Plans inservice training to help teachers develop skills necessary for solving instructional problems.
2. Observes teachers in classrooms in order to identify instructional problem-solving skills needing improvement.

Each performance indicator represents a verified outcome statement for principals which can be used to structure F.O.C.U.S. program objectives. Since the commitment to work in the area of curriculum and instruction had already been made, each F.A.C.T. statement in that functional area was inspected to determine its congruence with each step of the problem-solving model. The performance indicators from four F.A.C.T. statements were selected to provide the outcome indicators for each of the five steps of the problem-solving model. These F.A.C.T. statements were: FACT IX, Teacher Instructional Problem-Solving Skills; FACT XVI, Evaluation of Students' Progress Toward Instructional Objectives, FACT XIX, Teacher Input and Design of Curricula; and FACT XX, Modification of Curriculum Content and Organization. Following is a presentation of the five problem-solving objectives developed from selected F.A.C.T. competency statements.

Initiating Structure

Initiating structure refers to a leader's behavior in delineating the relationship between himself and members of his staff, and in endeavoring to establish well-defined patterns of organization, channels of communications, and methods of procedure.[4] In terms of Project R.O.M.E.-F.O.C.U.S., initiating structure is operationalized with respect to F.A.C.T. number twenty, indicators two, five, and seven stated as follows:

Objective

Conditions: Give two seminars concerned with problem solving and initiating structure, and supplementary reading in the first chapter of Consequence Analysis,

Outcomes: each participant will be able to demonstrate the following observable outcomes in his school:

1. The participant has scheduled released time during the regular school day for teachers and administrators to work on an instructional problem. (20.2)

2. The participant has scheduled regular committee meetings to discuss an instructional problem. (20.5)

3. The participant has appointed a faculty committee to review an instructional problem. (20.7)

Defining the Problem

This phase of consequence analysis is concerned with providing an accurate answer to the question, "What is the problem?" As simple as this question appears, it is basic to rational problem solving. Otherwise, an inaccurate estimate of the problem would result in wasted effort. In terms of Project R.O.M.E.-F.O.C.U.S., defining a problem is operationalized in terms of F.A.C.T. number twenty, indicators six and four.

Objective

Conditions: Given two seminars concerned with developing a problem definition and supplementary reading in the second chapter of Consequence Analysis,

Outcomes: each participant will be able to demonstrate the following observable outcomes in his school:

1. The participant has worked cooperatively with teachers in defining an instructional problem relevant to students, teachers, business, and community members. (20.6)

2. The participant has defined and ranked instructional problem definitions for action. (20.4)

Charting Alternatives

Considering alternatives for the solution of a high priority problem is the second phase of the problem-solving process. This phase should involve various professionals helping in the production of alternatives, and especially those directly affected by the problem being studied. In terms of this project, charting alternatives is operationalized with respect to F.A.C.T. number nineteen, indicators one and two.

Objective

Conditions: Given two seminars concerned with problem solving and charting alternatives, and supplementary reading in the third chapter of Consequence Analysis,

Outcomes: Each participant will be able to demonstrate the following observable outcomes in his school:

1. The participant has encouraged teachers to generate new curriculum ideas for solving the instructional problem. (19.1)

2. The participant has determined desirable instructional alternatives based on interaction with teachers and the application of the charting process. (19.2)

Implementing Objectives

Stating a selected alternative in terms of its consequences, and planning the reduction of the alternative's negative consequences is the basis for this phase of problem solving. The project operationalized this phase in terms of F.A.C.T. number sixteen, indicators one through five.

Objective

Conditions: Given two seminars concerned with problem solving and implementing objectives, and supplementary reading in the fourth chapter of Consequence Analysis,

Outcomes: each participant will be able to demonstrate the following observable outcomes in his school:

1. Through discussions with teachers, the participant has developed objectives for evaluating both short and long range outcomes of the proposed alternatives for solving a specified instructional problem. (16.1)

2. The participant has decided what methods are to be used in evaluating progress toward outcomes specified in the objectives. (16.5)

3. The participant has planned a system for evaluating progress toward outcomes specified in the objectives. (16.3)

4. The participant has planned a system for continuous recording of achievement test data, grades, and other criteria used in evaluating progress toward outcomes specified in the objectives. (16.2)

5. The participant periodically evaluates progress toward outcomes specified in the objectives. (16.4)

Intervention

Intervention is simply the process involved with adapting and applying a particular problem solution in the school. It may involve training teachers in new ways of doing things. It may involve going into classrooms and helping teachers adapt to new ways of solving instructional problems, or it may involve regularly discussing with teachers the consequences of what is being done. Probably the most important feature of intervention is the reduction of the negative consequences inherent in the selected solution. This project will operationalize the intervention process in terms of F.A.C.T. number nine, indicators one through three.

Objective

Conditions: Given two seminars concerned with problem solving and intervention, and supplementary reading in chapter five of Consequence Analysis,

Outcomes: each participant will be able to demonstrate the following observable outcomes in his school:

1. The participant has planned and begun inservice training to help teachers develop skills necessary for solving an instructional problem. (9.1)

2. The participant observes teachers in classrooms in order to identify problem-solving skills needing improvements. (9.2)

3. The participant periodically discusses classroom problem solving goals and objectives with teachers. (9.3)

Step Four: Developing Functional Alternatives

Having defined competency, specified a theoretical framework for attaining competency, and begun structuring program objectives based on verified outcomes of competency, the next step appeared to be the development of functional alternatives for the production of these outcomes in the field. That is, given a set of instructional objectives, an instructional strategy needs to be developed to help the learner achieve these objectives in the field. The learning activities and experiences offered in such an instructional program can be seen as functional alternatives for the facilitation of competency in the learner. Following is a description of the F.O.C.U.S. training program.

The F.O.C.U.S. instructional program extends over a five month period, encompassing two consecutive academic quarters at Valdosta State College. Each participant may earn ten quarter hours of graduate credit toward the sixth-year degree in educational administration. Only practicing school administrators may participate in this training program. In addition, the participant must hold a masters degree, an administrator's certificate, and secure the permission of his superintendent and local board of education. In the past, the project staff obtained the initial cooperation of superintendents and local school boards. The school district must provide each participating principal with the equivalent of two days of released time during each month of the training program for seminars and other activities. This released time is usually justified in that the participating principals use the time to solve actual, on-the-job problems.

Program activities are structured so that the project supervisor may help project participants identify and solve a high priority problem in their own schools and to do so in terms of observable outcomes. The basic structural features of the training program include:

1. Participants attend two problem-solving seminars a month. Usually these seminars last approximately two to three hours. They are located in a convenient field-based location, i.e., a central office meeting room, a conference room at a participating school, or a conference room at a local library. The seminars involve participatory lessons presented by the project supervisor. The aim of the monthly seminars is to help the participants accomplish a particular core problem-solving objective in their respective schools. For instance, during the first month participants work on the objective for initiating

structure, during the second month they work on the objective for defining a problem, during the third month they work on the objective for charting alternatives, during the fourth month they work on the objective for implementing objectives, and in the fifth month they work on the intervention objective.

In each of the participant's schools, the principal works with a problem-solving committee composed of various staff members. Each principal is asked to tape record his meetings with his school problem solving committee. Often the second seminar of the month is used to critieque the tapes brought to the meeting by participants. Each participant plays all or part of a particular tape and under the leadership of the project supervisor the group attempts to provide constructive feedback for the purpose of helping each other improve their administrative b havior.

2. Preassessment is implemented by the project staff at the University of Georgia. The purpose of this phase is threefold. First, data are produced which help participants identify problems in their schools. Second, data are produced relevant to the competencies of each participant as perceived by an external observer, teachers, and self. Third, pretest data are produced for the external evaluation of the total program.

The following instruments are seen as resources for identifying problem areas in schools participating in this project. Teacher variables are operationalized in terms of The School Survey, a fourteen-dimension measure of teachers' perceptions of the school and its environment, generally referred to as "work attitudes." Data from students are derived from the Learning Environment Inventory applicable to secondary students, and the My School Inventory applicable to elementary students. The Learning Environment Inventory is a fifteen-factor instrument that measures students' perception of climate, a variable known to be related to school achievement. The My School Inventory is an elementary school adaption of the Learning Environment Inventory. The lowest obtained scores for various factors measured by these instruments are suggestive of problem areas needing improvement within the school. From these data, each participant is to articulate a high priority school problem upon which to base his individualzied instructional program.

The second application of preassessment data is the assessment of participant competency. The Principal Performance Description Survey; the self-assessment form, the teacher form, and the external observer form are used to yield data allowing for a contrast between participants' self assessment in a variety of competency composite areas, and assessment by other rating sources. This procedure might be called "discrepancy analysis." Data are generated for each participant that point to the largest discrepancies between "self" and "others" perception of competency. Derived from this discrepancy analysis is an individual diagnostic profile from which each participant can plan a program of study.

The third application of preassessment data is as a pretest for the external evaluation of the project. Positive modification of both problem variables and competency variables is predicted. This improvement in the project variables is to be substantiated by a postassessment using the same instruments and reference groups involved in preassessment.

3. Each participant receives a programmed text entitled Consequence Analysis. The text contains five chapters. Each chapter is designed to

coincide with a particular month of the instructional program. For instance, chapter two provides a detailed explanation relevant to problem definition, the second phase of consequence analysis. This chapter is referred to during the second month of the instructional program while participants are attempting to develop a problem definition in their own schools with respect to the second F.O.C.U.S. objective. Prior to beginning the program, each participant must read the text and pass a test on its contents to demonstrate acceptable entrance behavior.

A field manual attempts to serve both project supervisors and project participants. In other words, the field manual is used to help the project supervisor train participating school administrators in consequence analysis techniques, and to help these school administrators employ consequence analysis with teachers and other staff members in the field. Audio visual materials are available to aid both project supervisors and project participants in employing the problem-solving model.

4. Each month the project supervisor makes a field visit to each participant's school to provide individualized help. The purpose of each visit can be summarized as follows:

a. The first visit takes place during the initial week of the program. The purpose of this visit is to counsel the participant about the results of preassessment. The preassessment phase produces a diagnostic profile for each participant including statistical summaries of the findings and a brief analysis of the data which identifies possible problem areas in the participant's school, and possible competency weaknesses the participant might decide to improve. The supervisor and the participant use these data in initially defining a general problem area to attack, and in planning supplementary activities to improve competency weaknesses.

b. The second visit takes place during the third week of the second month. The purpose of this visit is to make sure that participant has developed adequate initiating structure and has indeed cooperatively with his teachers defined an acceptable problem. Some principals chose only minor problems to solve, others chose problems that may be beyond their ability to solve. In either case, the supervisor needs to suggest possible problem definitions which are both acceptable and realistic. Since this meeting takes place during the third week of the second month, it is possible for the participant to work with his school committee in improving their problem definition.

c. The third visit is made during the last week of the third month. The field supervisor interviews the principal and two teachers serving on the school's problem solving committee. The supervisor attempts to give the participant direct feedback on his progress in meeting the first three F.O.C.U.S. objectives. In addition, the supervisor checks the participant's progress on supplementary activities aimed at improving diagnosed competency weaknesses.

d. The fourth visit is made during the last week of the fourth month. The purpose of this visit is to provide individual help in meeting the last two core objectives and to develop a clear understanding about what needs to be done to meet final requirements for successful completion of the problem. This is a crucial meeting and final expectations must be clearly spelled out so that the project may be completed on schedule.

e. The fifth visit should be made during the last week of the fifth month. The purpose of the visit is to conduct the final evaluation of each participant's progress toward completing all project objectives. That is, all five F.O.C.U.S. objectives and supplementary experiences must be completed at this time.

5. Participants are required to submit a final report which is simply a record of the problem-solving process applied to their schools. The final report contains six basic components: a narrative describing in detail the application of the F.O.C.U.S. problem-solving objectives in the participant's school, a copy of the diagnostic profile produced in preassessment, a daily log maintained during the first month of the program to provide additional data for problem definition, minutes of the problem-solving committee meetings in the participant's school, reports of visits made by the participant to schools operating programs relevant to the problem the participant is trying to solve, and an annotated bibliography of references used during the program.[5]

Step Five: Specifying Operational Definitions

While a definition for competency is stated at a relatively high level of abstraction, there is inevitably a need to specify an operational definition by which the existence of competency may be substantiated in the field. It is suggested that the existence of competency should be identified in terms of observable outcomes. That is, if the principal has produced the outcomes specified in the F.O.C.U.S. objectives, an outside observer should be able to visit the school, review the final report, listen to tapes of problem-solving meetings, talk with the school staff, and testify that specified program outcomes do or do not exist in recognizable form.

The F.O.C.U.S. problem-solving objectives are stated in terms of conditions and outcomes. Since in this instructional program competency is defined as the school administrator's ability to identify and solve a high priority problem in his school and demonstrate doing so in terms of observable outcomes, then it becomes essential that a clear understanding exist about the criteria utilized in substantiating observable outcomes. The criterion for all F.O.C.U.S. problem-solving objectives is a semi-structured interview methodology developed specifically for the purpose of substantiating the existence of F.O.C.U.S. outcomes in acceptable form. The instrument is called the triangulation technique.[6]

Three interviews are conducted by the project supervisor; one with the F.O.C.U.S. school administrator, two with staff members serving on the principal's problem-solving committee. Each person is considered as indicator, specifically an interpositional indicator, since together they represent more than one organizational role or position.[7] By obtaining three different perspectives, a kind of triangulation methodology is gained. Interviews are arranged in advance of the supervisor's visit with priority assigned to gaining the perspectives of three different organizational positions. The principal, teachers, guidance personnel, central office staff, health and social work personnel, parents, and students are examples of people in various positions who might be serving on a problem-solving committee.

Subjects are interviewed separately to provide for cross-checking of perspectives. Each F.O.C.U.S. outcome is stated as a question on the interview form. For instance, the first outcome in the objective for initiating

structure appears on the interview form as a question, "Has the participant scheduled released time during the school day for teachers and administrators to work on an instructional problem?" Note that the subject and verb of the outcome originally stated in the F.O.C.U.S. objective have simply been reversed to form a question. The supervisor is encouraged to discuss fully each question with the person being interviewed using the question as the focus of the discussion.

After each question on the interview form, there is a number "1" and a number "2" directly at the right of the question. In fact, there are three pairs of these numbers at the right of each question. One pair for each of the three persons being interviewed. See example below:

	Perspective One	Perspective Two	Perspective Three	Total
1. Has the participant scheduled released time during the regular school day for teachers and administrators to work on an instructional problem?	1 2	1 2	1 2	

Suppose perspective one is the participant himself, a teacher is perspective two, and a parent is perspective three, after talking with each person about the question, the observer must circle the number "1" or the number "2" in order to specify his perception of that person's evaluation of the outcome. Category one is given the value of one, category two is given the value of two. By adding the three circled scores, a total triangulation score is derived and the score is recorded in the blank labeled "total".

If the person being interviewed tends to predominantly use statements whose dominant intent is to criticize, fault, or otherwise negatively evaluate the observed outcome; or the person is unable to substantiate the existence of the outcome, circle the number one under the appropriate indicator at the right of the question. If the person being interviewed tends to predominantly use statements whose dominant intent is to praise, laud, or otherwise positively evaluate the observed outcome, circle the number two under the appropriate indicator at the right of the question. A total score of five or six is needed as evidence of successful completion of an outcome. A total score of three or four does not provide minimal evidence of successful completion of an outcome.

After the three interviews have been completed, a final conference will be held involving the participant and the field supervisor. Using the results from the interviews, the supervisor must agree that the outcomes exist at an acceptable level of professional quality. If the supervisor positively evaluates all outcomes, the participant shall receive full credit for their completion. If the supervisor feels remedial work is necessary, a remedial contract will be negotiated stating what the participant must do to complete an outcome found unsatisfactory.

The triangulation technique is employed after the third month of the program to evaluate the outcomes of the first three problem-solving objectives, and after the fifth month of the program to evaluate the outcomes of the last two problem-solving objectives. In field testing the triangulation technique, it appeared to be a viable mode for substantiating the existence of targeted program outcomes. For participants in the F.O.C.U.S. training program, their ability to identify and solve a high priority school problem in terms of observable outcomes is operationalized through the triangulation technique.

Some Concluding Comments

The F.O.C.U.S. training program attempts to specify a theoretical framework to practice utilizing a verified pool of competency statements and the assessment component of the G.P.A.S. Competency is viewed at a relatively high level of abstraction, and understood not in terms of isolated behavioral components, but in terms of a systemic integration of components. The specification of this theoretical framework to practice involves the assumption that competency in school administration can be facilitated and that its existence in the field can be substantiated in terms of observable outcomes or consequences.

Footnotes

1. Chad Ellet, David Payne, and Mark Perkins, "The Relationship of Principals' Competencies and Meaningful School Outcome Measures: A Field Test of the Georgia Principal Assessment System," CCBC Notebook, No. 3, Vol. 5, May 1976.

2. Ideally the most appropriate operational criterion would have been to choose the functional area most closely associated with mediating and outcome variables. Unfortunately, during the initial phase of program development, this information was not yet available. See the reference above for an explanation of the relationships between input, mediating, and output variables, pages 18-32.

3. Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, (New York: The Free Press, 1968), pp. 104-109.

4. Andrew Halpin, Theory and Research in Administration, (New York: McMillan, 1967), p. 86.

5. Among the resource materials available to program participants is a complete set of the Individualized Learning Modules produced by Lloyd McCleary at the University of Utah.

6. Howard K. Denzin, The Research Act, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1970). The triangulation strategy bears some similarity to Denzin's discussion of research techniques in Sociology.

7. Neal Gross, et al, Explorations in Role Analysis, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1966), pp. 95-163.