

research in brief

Dacum

An innovative occupational training model for curriculum development, which combines individualized trainee involvement and instruction, has been produced by Nova Scotia New Start. They call it DACUM (Developing A Curriculum).

Initially a curriculum is charted by a committee of experts. They begin by describing the requirements of the occupation in terms of observable skills required. Each contribution is lettered on a card by the committee coordinator and fixed to the wall. These cards are then grouped into general areas of competence and ordered into a desired sequence within each area. This then is the DACUM chart.

Each skill on the DACUM chart is defined in terms of observable behavior and the trainee rates himself and is rated by his instructor. A 7-point scale from level "0" (can't perform this task satisfactorily for participation in work environment) to "6" (performs with more than acceptable speed and quality) is used. Level "3" is the baseline indicating performance comparable to that of a new journeyman in a trade.

The trainee enters the program in a work environment. He's introduced to the chart and rating scale and must then identify the skills he already possesses in some measure and rate himself on these skills. The instructor and trainee review these, agree on ratings, and get a clear picture of what remains to be done to give him occupational competence. The trainee, with the instructor's help, then selects the first skill he wants to develop and begins the task. When the task has been performed at a higher level, the trainee records the appropriate rating and date and confirms it with the instructor.

The cycle of events recurs until the trainee has satisfactory ratings for most or all of the skills defined on the chart and the training ends. A diploma is awarded, which contains a copy of his DACUM chart on which is recorded the highest ratings he obtained in each skill (a skill profile useful to prospective employers).

Principles of Model

The model incorporates several principles desirable for optimal learning:

Simulation of the job situation in which trainees encounter "real" problems and have the material

available to solve them.

- Curriculum that's a description of behavior after completion of training.
- Self-directing attitude toward learning.
- Program individualized to accommodate individual differences in adult learners.
- Trainee selection of goals and sequencing of activities.
- Trainee evaluation and promotion of confidences by avoiding imposition of instructor's evaluation.
- Evaluation based on performance rather than on retention of information for test purposes.
- Avoidance of necessity to continue program learning for skills already acquired.

Editor's Note

Although primarily developed for occupational training, the DACUM system seems relevant for many literary and in-depth Extension programs (for example, farm management training).

DACUM—Approach to Curriculum, Learning, and Evaluation in Occupational Training. R.E. Adams. Ottawa: Canada NewStart Program, Department of Regional Economic Expansion, August, 1973.

Donald Blackburn