

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM?

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Abstract: Six questions are presented, the answers to which will enable program administrators to gain valuable insights to their current or proposed teacher education program. Consideration of program aspects as perceived by participants at all levels can assist in the planning of appropriate interventions to mitigate complications. The questions were used in a recent study of the alternative vocational teacher education program at Temple University, known as VITAL. Responses to the questions revealed a cluster of themes that converged to form a concept identified as “generative” leadership. Generative leadership appears to be a major influence in the success of that program. Program developers will find that considering these six questions will facilitate the planning of an effective and successful teacher education program.

INTRODUCTION

Questions for Program Administrators:

- What are your program goals?
- How would you describe your attitude toward your program?
- How does the structure of your program affect its coherence?
- How is research employed in your program?
- How do you arrange for passage through your program?
- What expectations do you have of your program participants?

Many questions beset program developers as they pursue the initiation or revision of a teacher education program. To produce an effective program, developers should have some degree of predictability as to how participants at all levels might function in the system. One may ask how this important information can be obtained? A recent inquiry into vocational teacher education programming reveals that six simple questions can produce surprising insights.

While program developers consider many things when initiating a new venture, program administrators can review past performance to project future trends and possible program revision. Employing the six questions in the planning phase can enhance aspects of an existing situation and identify potential pitfalls in a future endeavor. Obviously, answers to the questions for a potential program must be of an anticipatory nature. Using the questions as a basis for a planning framework can assist developers in the identification of a desirable result. They can then move forward to design suitable interventions to achieve that outcome.

Disclosures, some of which may be surprising, can be of great assistance to program administrators

and developers as they strive to achieve program success. Answers to the six questions can be gathered from a variety of sources. In a study of Temple University's Program VITAL (Vocational Intern Teaching/Applied Learning), five research questions were designed to elicit oral and written views of program aspects (Howey & Zimpher, 1989). However, as past and present program participants discussed roles and experiences, repeated themes converged to pose the possibility of yet another question worthy of consideration. Indications are that the use of the six questions in a planning and/or research framework can be the key to successful modification of an existing program or an aid in the development of a new program.

The categories of goals, attitudes, structure, research, and passage represent the initial five questions. Disparate responses from the original work exemplify the variety of responses and illustrate the range of perceptions on the part of individuals in all levels of a program hierarchy.

Goals

Question One. How do participants describe the goals, expectations, or outcomes of the program?

The response from a program administrator was succinct and straightforward, "The goal is to offer each learner an individualized program having flexibility in delivery, but the outcome is teacher competence." However, some students offered these comments, "I need a clear understanding of what is expected." And "There is a complete breakdown of communication."

Attitudes

Question Two. How do participants express their attitude and identification with the program?

One administrator stated "It is challenging to constantly train new teachers, but it is part of being dedicated to one's profession." But some students commented, "I just wanted to get it over with."

Structure

Question Three. How do participants describe the structure and coherence of the program?

Program framers described the program as "A closed loop, based on validated competencies." Some students saw it as "Confusing."

Research

Question Four. How do participants perceive external and internal research in the program?

Administrators see external research as "A means to keep the program current." One student saw it as, "One more thing to throw at us." Staff members saw internal research as ". . . providing needed information." However, some students tried to manipulate the process with remarks such as, "My instructor is unfair."

Passage

Question Five. How do participants view their place in the program?

Program developers see the passage as, “A process to assist students in their transition to educators.” Some students commented, “Every time I turn around, something changes.”

Commentary

Obviously, the selected responses represent extremes. However, arbitrary comments during conversations revealed unanticipated perspectives within the program being examined. For example, early in the study, one fact that could not be ignored was that views formulated over time. Also, evidence of planned intervention to facilitate positive impressions began to emerge. It became evident that positive personal characteristics permeated the program in thought and action. As the study progressed, those characteristics which appeared at first to be individual, i.e., altruism, vision, dedication, and persistence, blended to form a sixth concept that is identified as “generative” leadership. Thus, we have one more descriptor:

Generative Leadership

Question Six. How do participants manifest generative leadership?

The notion of generative leadership began to unfold with comments such as this from one administrator, “It’s my job to provide renewed energy and move people on.” This is reinforced by the words of one student, “The most valuable thing was the care and direction that made me comfortable forming and expressing my own views.”

DISCUSSION

The research introduces the phenomenon of generative leadership and emphasizes its influence in program planning, revision, and development. Evidence indicates that generative leadership is self-renewing, inspiring participants to move forward and motivate those in all directions of the hierarchy (Heberley, 1999). Clearly, it is advantageous to employ a philosophy that is multidirectional and comprises specific attributes such as the desire to be an agent of change, the acceptance of challenge, the allocation of time, and attention to ongoing research. These characteristics combined with those listed earlier, make generative leadership a winning stratagem for any program. How does it come into being? In the program studied, the originators were highly motivated, and cognizant of the importance of imbuing participants with the shared vision. Those who followed have been able to carry on that vision and through careful planning, keep the phenomenon viable (Walker, 1997).

Why is this valuable to planners of new or revised programs? Generative leadership is not an accident. It is deliberate, planned, and properly executed. It generates enthusiasm, creativity, and promotes a positive work ethic. It produces an energy that is transmitted through the faculty to prospective teachers who go on to inspire their own students.

A primary benefit of generative leadership is the advancement of positive convictions in program

participants. Secondly, participants and those who move on are infused with the ideology of self-renewal and revitalization. Its manifestation throughout the hierarchy of a program appears to be essential to the longevity and success of that program.

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