The Relationship between Content Standards and Curriculum, Assessment, and Core Competencies

Curriculum

Curriculum is best characterized as what should take place in the classroom. It describes the topics, themes, units, and questions contained within the content standards. Content standards are the framework for curriculum. Curriculum can vary from program to program, as well as from instructor to instructor. Unlike content standards, curriculum focuses on delivering the “big” ideas and concepts that the content standards identify as necessary for the learner to understand and apply. Curriculum serves as a guide for instructors; addressing teaching techniques, recommending activities, scope and sequence, and modes of presentation considered most effective. In addition, curriculum indicates the textbooks, materials, activities, and equipment that best help the learner achieve the content standards.

Assessment: Formal and Informal

Assessment defines the nature of evidence required to demonstrate that the content standard has been met. To ensure valid and reliable accountability, the assessment selected should test the state standards. Assessment should:

• Insure reliability and validity;
• Provide for pre-, interim, and post-testing;
• Align with, and test, the North Carolina Adult Basic Education Content Standards in Reading and Writing;
• Be criterion – or standards – referenced;
• Inform instruction;
• Serve as an accountability measure;
• Be adaptable to a variety of instructional environments; and
• Accommodate learners with special needs.

Formal assessments are the conventional method of testing, usually driven by data and include tests such as the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) and Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE). Formal assessments are generally used to assess overall achievement or find a student’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as show which lessons and types of instruction were most effective. Formal assessments usually have strict rules in their implementation and these tests must be administered under specific and similar circumstances in each instance of test taking.

Formal assessments can give instructors an overview of what needs to be retaught, relearned or reviewed, as well as show what lessons and instruction was most effective. These tests can track a student’s mastery of specific skills. As one skill is tested against a standard, the student is measured against that standard and given an appropriate score. The instructor and student are left with a very succinctpicture of whether the student has or has not mastered the desired skill level.

Informal assessments help instructors obtain a quick evaluation of student performance. Informal assessments are centered on content and the student’s ability to meet a standard related to a specific content benchmark. Informal assessments are not data driven. Informal
assessments are useful tools for evaluating students’ progress in a specific area, along with previously learned knowledge in an effort to test their overall progress. The assessment used needs to match the purpose of assessing. Formal assessments should be used to assess overall achievement or to identify comparable strengths and weaknesses. Informal assessments should be used to develop lessons and plan instruction. For example, a reading instructor may choose to use an *Informal Reading Inventory* to gain additional knowledge about a student’s reading ability so they can plan lessons and instruction for that particular student that focuses on the components of reading that student most needs to improve.

**Core Competencies**

Core competencies, the application of knowledge and skills in communication, interpersonal relations, and critical thinking, are designed as a fundamental element in the sample activities throughout the standards. **Communication and interpersonal skills** reflect the learner’s ability to engage in an interactive process while clearly expressing ideas that lead to mutual understanding. The following skill areas are demonstrated in these activities: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. A learner who communicates effectively is able to respond to an audience, demonstrate a clear sense of purpose, and organize and deliver information using appropriate language and nonverbal behaviors.

Interpersonal skills encompass the ability to interact appropriately with individuals or groups in a variety of settings. Effective interpersonal interactions require the use of **critical thinking skills** such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and application in addition to the effective demonstration of communication skills (e.g., speaking, listening, reading, and writing). The outcome of an activity is influenced by the environment or circumstances in which the activity occurs and the skills that are applied (e.g., communication, interpersonal, and/or critical thinking). Instructors should integrate core competencies throughout all content areas and at all levels of proficiency.