

# Profiling the Latin Missionary: A Report of Contextualized Curriculum Research

■ One of the keys to reaching the goal of "A Church for Every People by the Year 2000" is effective training of new missionaries worldwide. How will they be trained? Who will train them? What must these missionaries learn to know, to be and to do? Examine this article and see if you agree with the curriculum development process and product.

By Jonathan P. Lewis

*Editor's note: Jonathan Lewis has provided an excellent model of the kind of assessment he advocated in his October 1991 IJFM article entitled, "Contextualizing Needs Assessment for Third-World Missionary Training."*

Any effort to create a curriculum for training Two-Thirds World missionaries must take into account contextual realities. Simply cloning or adapting training from another part of the world will not effectively address the needs of the candidate or facilitate the institution(s) providing it (Lewis, 1991). The rising tide of missionaries being sent from former missionary receiving countries is driving efforts to design effective training which truly meets the needs of these new envoys.

This researcher's field of operation has been the "Southern Cone" countries of Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay). With the professional input of Dr. Gary D. Geroy of Colorado State University, a research process was designed to identify a contextualized set of competencies missionary candidates from the Southern Cone region should exhibit upon taking a cross-cultural assignment. This process was then conducted with stakeholders in missionary training from that region. The following summarizes this investigation and reports its results.

## Research Summary

The purpose of this investigation was to identify a set of missionary competencies to use in determining training objectives, and to conduct a verification study to decide the validity of these competencies and their generalizability to missionary training contexts around the world. Specifically, it was expected that the results of the investigation would begin to address the gap in knowledge regarding essential competencies required by missionaries trained and sent by churches in the Southern Cone countries of Latin America.

The case was presented in an earlier article (Lewis, 1991) that contextualized training in the non-western nations of the world might best be undertaken through competency based education. It was also deemed important that the curriculum research, in identifying these competencies, allow for a high degree of involvement by institutional stakeholders in missionary training. This group includes theological schools, mission agencies, and churches. Only by involving a wide representation from each of these groups, was significant ownership of the output expected to be achieved.

## Defining the Missionary Training Profile

This study was conducted in two phases. The initial step, the identification of the missionary training competencies, was carried out in Cordoba, Argentina. The DACUM (Developing a Curriculum) process (Mitchell, 1983a; 1983b; 1983c) was selected on the basis of its suitability for achieving the stated purposes of the study. It was adapted for use with a large group representing stakeholder institutions involved with missionary training in the southern cone countries of Latin America. The outcome of the exercise was a missionary "profile" listing 128 competencies in 14 major training areas (see Table 1 following page).

Missionary training, as defined by this profile, was considered to be the dependent variable for the rest of the study. Based on this and other information to be gathered through survey means, the investigation posed three questions to be answered empirically:

1. To what extent will the competency profile produced in Latin America be validated by the verification study?
2. What differences exist across western and non-western constituencies in the relative acceptance of competency area clusters?
3. To what degree can intra-group (western and non-western) differences

be attributed to other demographic variables including (a) country of origin, (b) country of service, (c) kind and degree of professional training, (d) context of professional training, (e) training experience, (f) age, and (g) gender?

## Verifying the Missionary Training Profile

In order to answer these questions, a verification study was designed and conducted with missionary trainers around the world. An instrument was developed which listed each of the major training areas and their competencies as defined by the Latin American DACUM process. This was mailed to directors of 107 training institutions listed in the World Directory of Missionary Training Centres (Windsor, 1990). Respondents were asked to rate each competency on a five-point Likert scale from "unimportant" (0) through "indispensable" (4). Each respondent was also asked to provide personal demographic information.

## Initial Findings

As stated, the first phase of the research produced a Latin American missionary training profile containing 128 specific competencies in 14 major training area clusters. The second phase, the verification study, used the compiled data from 89 respondents in 65 training centers around the globe (61% response rate).

As Table 2 demonstrates, there was high agreement from all training contexts on the importance of thirteen of the fourteen major competencies clusters. Only in the area of "Practical Abilities" did the respondents give a composite rating of lower than "important" on a five-point Likert scale (see page 85).

## Research Design—The DACUM Process

If thirteen of the fourteen competency cluster areas can be said to be valid for the context under consideration,

**TABLE 1 - MISSIONARY COMPETENCIES PROFILE**  
 First Southern Cone Consultation of Mission Trainers  
 July 18-20, 1991 - Córdoba, Argentina

TRAINING AREAS		COMPETENCIES								
CHURCH RELATIONS	committed member of a church	maintains a good testimony	knows how to subject himself to church authorities	knows how to inform the church on the missionary task	understands vision of the church	support of the church to go as a missionary	exercises an approved ministry in his church	maintains communications with the church	knows how to relate to other church bodies	
CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY	able to analyze his own culture	conscious of his own ethnocentricity	informed on ethnic groups within the country	respects other cultures	knows biblical anthropology	able to contextualize biblical principles	creates a kingdom culture	has short term missionary experience	can see with anthropological eyes	can adapt to another culture
INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	applies biblical principals to interpersonal relationships	knows how to manage interpersonal conflicts	maintains good family relationships	looks for relationships with others unlike himself	maintains good attitude when criticized	has a basic understanding of psychology	knows how to listen to others and to respond appropriately	experience in community based living	knows how to relate on intimate terms	
CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS	knows the host culture	willing to identify with the host culture	knows communication skills	knows how to manage culture shock	values all without racial prejudice	is willing to incarnate himself	confronts communications problems	interprets verbal and non-verbal messages	distinguishes biblical principles and customs	detects cross-cultural bridges for evangelism
LINGUISTIC ORIENTATION	disciplined and persistent	knows language acquisition	is willing to learn	is humble and uninhibited	can laugh at his own errors	knows the rules of phonetics	recognizes idiomatic gestures and terms	experience with language learning		
BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE	convinced that the Bible is the Word of God	knows and loves the Bible	knows how to conduct exegesis and interpretation	knows biblical geography, customs, history, etc.	knows that it contains the solution to human problems	knows how to teach the Bible using various methods	applies the biblical message to his daily life	knows the biblical basis of mission	habit to memorize Scriptures	knows inductive Bible study method
THEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE	knows God, His person and His work	understands God's mission	knows the doctrine and plan of salvation	knows the function and mission of the church	knows the concept and scope of the Kingdom	knows church growth principles	knows systematic theology	knows contemporary theological currents	knowledge of different religions	knows how to defend authenticity of the Bible
LEADERSHIP	sensitive to the voice of God	knows how to work with a team	knows how to delegate responsibility	makes plans and establishes objectives	encourages, motivates, transmits vision	knows his/her limitations	experience as a leader	discern and use other's gifting	serves with renouncement	show flexibility
DISCIPLESHIP	has been discipled himself	shows sensitivity to the newly converted	is a model disciple worthy of being imitated	transmits life as well as knowledge	knowledge of pastoral counseling, healing	shows love for his disciples	knows strategies and methods for discipleship	is able to mentor	forms disciples who in turn disciple	
EVANGELISM	evidences a strong spiritual life	knows the message	demonstrates a passion for souls	knows how to communicate adequately	practices personal evangelism	knows how to prepare evangelistic sermons	knows methods and techniques of evangelism	identifies with the person with whom he is sharing	respond to problems and objections	
EMOTIONAL HEALTH	emotionally psychologically approved for the field	has resolved significant emotional problems	open to receiving counsel for emotional health	demonstrates an adequate self-image	maintains emotional equilibrium	constant in motivation towards what he/she begins	knows how to manage failure	is approved physically to live on the field	practices a hobby, pastime or sport	takes weekly and annual breaks
SPIRITUAL LIFE	is building an intimate relationship with God	knows the power of prayer and fasting	knows principles of spiritual warfare	studies the Bible regularly	demonstrates fruit of the Spirit	uses his/her spiritual gifts	shows an attitude of service	demonstrates moral integrity		
CHRISTIAN ETHICS	knows biblical ethical principles	understands cultural norms as to biblical principles	shows courage in conducting himself according to his values	can facilitate the adoption of an indigenous, biblical ethic	is honest, just and upright	respects established laws and regulations	knows the difference between ethics and doctrine			
PRACTICAL ABILITIES	knows how to take advantage of the situation	knows how to "grow, raise and repair"	knows how to apply community help	has working skills	knowledge of crafts and recreation	knows how to perform household duties	knows how to operate electronic equipment	has knowledge of first aid	knowledge of preventative medicine and hygiene	has musical knowledge

much of the credit may be given to the stakeholder based, consensus building approach used to determine the competencies profile. The adapted DACUM procedure proved highly successful as a group process in defining the competencies within each identified training area and in drawing an overall "profile" for an entry level missionary.

The DACUM process is designed to be executed with eight to fourteen participants. The challenge for this study was in how to adapt the method for use with a large group (seventy participants). By dividing these randomly into six groups and providing trained coordinators to lead each one, the integrity of the small group process could be maintained. Since the competency identification task was broken down by training areas, it was possible to divide the work among the groups and compress the time normally required to run the process. This, however, added to the complexity of compiling the results into one coherent profile. This was done by this researcher with the aid of the group coordinators.

Of critical importance to the success of this adaptation was the training of the small group coordinators. Several hours were spent before the consultation in preparing these men for facilitating the process. Printed instructions were drafted and two seminars conducted for this purpose. The coordinator group worked as an interactive unit throughout the whole experience.

Agility in managing small group discussion is the most valuable asset to look for in the coordinator rather than teaching experience, degrees, administrative position, or other personal characteristics. This, with a clear understanding of the expected group output, combined for greatest effectiveness. Subsequent experiences with this process have confirmed this.

It is important to note as well that the process did create a sense of ownership by the participants. Interviews with the participants conducted by a person other than this researcher produced highly favorable comments. Thinking of training output in terms of competencies was a new experience for many of them, and some expressed a desire to see the process carried out with other ministerial vocations. How the competencies profile impacts existing programs in the area remains to be seen. It is, however, forming the curricular base for a new training program for the southern cone.

One of the outcomes of the process was the apparent need for interdependent cooperation among agencies and institutions in training missionaries. The rivalry which sometimes exists between ecclesiastical and para-ecclesiastical organizations seems to lessen as each one recognizes strengths and weaknesses of their particular institution in preparing missionaries. It is hoped that this realization will produce a

objectives cannot be achieved in a formal classroom setting and must be produced through non-formal or informal means. Thus, this general agreement by all trainers on the importance of the competencies seems to indicate a certain contradiction between the predominance of formal training programs and reaching training objectives which are, by their nature, produced primarily through other means.

While the formal component is indisputably important, this study seems to suggest that it would be well to consider balancing training programs with a greater degree of non-formal and informal instruction. This supports McKinney's (1991) assertion that missionary training should emphasize (a) learning in communities, (b) interactive learning, and (c) direct, purposeful field experience. The structuring of such programs will have to follow quite different patterns from those experienced by most trainers when they pursued their own missionary training through highly articulated formal education institutions.

### Conclusions

This study intended to address the gap in knowledge regarding the competencies needed by entry-level missionaries from the southern cone of South America. As such, it has accomplished its purpose. The procedure used for determining the competencies was effective and, for the most part, these have been validated by expert trainers around the world. Trainers in the southern cone region of South America may proceed with a certain amount of confidence in evaluating programs and establishing standards based on the profile produced and verified through this study.

Beyond this specific profile, the verification study demonstrates a vote of confidence in the use of competencies to describe the outcomes of training. That many of those trainers represented established, formal training institutions is also indicative of approval by those serving in programs which do not have this emphasis. In general, it seems safe to conclude that the use of well defined competencies as curriculum objectives will receive the support of missionary trainers in whatever educational context they are found.

The verification study may also be considered a first step in defining a universally accepted set of missionary training competencies. While this study in no way pretends to have pro-

TABLE 2  
RANK ORDERING OF COMPETENCY  
CLUSTERS BY COMPOSITE MEANS FROM  
ALL DEFINED AREAS

COMPETENCIES	COMPOSITE MEAN	%-AGE
SP—Spiritual Life	3.6194	.9049
CCC—Cross-Cultural Communications	3.3342	.8336
CE—Christian Ethics	3.3255	.8314
BK—Biblical Knowledge	3.2568	.8142
L—Leadership	3.2268	.8067
CR—Church Relations	3.2233	.8058
E—Evangelism	3.2201	.8050
D—Discipleship	3.2050	.8013
EH—Emotional Health	3.1236	.7810
IPR—Inter-Personal Relationships	3.1093	.7773
TK—Theological Knowledge	3.1071	.7768
CA—Cultural Anthropology	3.0630	.7660
LO—Linguistic Orientation	3.0450	.7612
PA—Practical Abilities	2.2757	.5689

greater degree of cooperation among institutions in achieving these commonly elaborate training objectives.

### Contextual Issues

Curriculum research can attempt to gather data on one or more facets of training or instruction (Anderson & Jones, 1986). In the case of this study, the focus was on educational objectives. However, by identifying competencies the missionary candidates are to acquire in prefield training, certain implications are made about both curriculum content and methodology.

Competency based training is traditionally the domain of non-formal education (Coombs & Ahmed, 1973). As the competency profile demonstrates (see Table 1), many of the individual

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duced such a list, the general agreement by trainers in different training contexts on the importance of the competency areas (excluding "Practical Abilities") does indicate that such a list is theoretically possible. Further research may develop such an inventory, and the competency profile produced in this study could provide an initial reference point for such an effort.

This study also added to the evidence already present in the literature regarding the usefulness of the DACUM process as a curriculum development tool. The two fairly unique contributions made regard its use with a large stakeholder group and its application in a cross-cultural, international situation. In the first of these, the integrity of the small group process was maintained while involving seventy participants. In the second, the process demonstrated its flexibility in facilitating dialogue across national and institutional boundaries.

The use of stakeholder involvement in developing the competency profile was also reaffirmed. A sense of institutional inter-dependency emerged, and a commitment to cooperation was fostered. Clear ownership of the process outcome by the participants was evident. Thus, a contribution was made to the understanding of how stakeholder involvement in curricular research can produce participation and buy-in, even in a culturally and institutionally diverse setting.

Regarding the competencies themselves in relation to demographic characteristics of the respondents, the most salient observation is that the context in which missionary training is performed does not seem to be the determinant factor in how participants rate the importance of competencies. This may be due to a high degree of homogeneity in the population in spite of its wide geographic diversity.

Of particular interest is the fact that most of the respondents (over 70%) were products themselves of formal degree programs in the west. While not clearly demonstrated by this study, this variable of educational context may be as important a factor as any in the perception of the competencies profile. The fact that as a whole, it was an experienced group (48% with eleven or more years of experience, 15% with less than three years), also indicates a "veteran" population whose perceptions have been conditioned through practice.

Beyond these empirical observations, the study seems to point towards a discrepancy between the kind of formal missionary training available in most centers around the world and what many trainers in these institutions seem to be saying is important. Through their high ratings of nearly all of the competency training areas in the Cordoba profile, the respondents have also affirmed (perhaps unconsciously) the need for non-formal and informal training programs in which to produce many of those competencies.

In a philosophical sense, this study has allowed missionary trainers around the world to voice in consensus an inner desire that their efforts produce vocationally competent individuals. May this study contribute to articulating that desire to those who need to listen. ■

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