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Certification

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Associations

Certification

AL P. MIZELL

IS CERTIFICATION COMING? *This article is presented to clarify the concept of certification and to alert you to current activity which may soon lead to a formal certification process.*

WHAT IS IT?

Certification is the testing and formal approval given to an individual by a professional association which attests to the individual's competence in a specific area or areas and adherence to a stated code of ethics and standards of behavior. To complete the certification process, the individual generally must pay a fee to cover the costs of the process. S/he must submit to a series of tests, be evaluated in a formal interview and submit a portfolio for examination.

Certification is not accreditation! In contrast to certification, accreditation involves a rigorous examination of an institution or a single program by fellow professionals; accreditation is awarded if it meets the specific standards of the accrediting group.

Neither should licensure be confused with certification. Licensure is a legal process which is established by a political body and it is illegal to practice without this license.

WHY IS IT?

As professions develop, the members take upon themselves the responsibility to certify the competencies of those who practice in the profession. This is done to assure clients that the practitioner subscribes to a code of ethics, possesses certain minimal skills and has been examined by competent professionals in that field who attest to the individual's abilities.

The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), with some 8,000 members, has devoted considerable attention to certification. William Grady chaired the Task Force appointed in 1971 to study problems in certification. Hearings held by that task force attracted representatives from public schools and training directors from industry. It was clear from the comments of these representatives (including those from Bank Americard, Xerox, United Airlines, etc.) that there was a need to identify competent people. In 1974, that task force provided a certification model which listed the skills of competent workers. When Minaruth Galey became chairperson of the AECT Certification Committee, that committee conducted a feasibility study which showed that more than 412 professional associations provided certification for qualified members. A task Force on AECT certification is currently working with several AECT divisions to develop the AECT Certification program.

WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH POD?

The Division of Instructional Development (DID), within AECT, shares many of the interests of the members of the POD Network. Therefore, POD members were made aware of this movement at the 1978 POD Annual Conference in Shangri-La. At that time, a brief description of the project and a list of tentative competencies were distributed to the conference participants. All of the POD members' responses were summarized and sent to Minaruth Galey and the AECT Certification Committee for their consideration.

The POD Core Committee then appointed a task force to work with DID. This group consists of Lance Buhl, Claude Mathis, Bob Diamond, Gene Rice and Al Mizell, Chair. The offer of cooperation from POD was conveyed to the DID Board of Directors at the March, 1979 annual conference in New Orleans. DID and the AECT Certification Committee were pleased to find that other professional organizations were interested in these efforts to investigate the process further and welcomed the offer of additional help. This offer by POD neither expresses approval nor disapproval of the concept of certification, but is intended to help further the investigation of this concept in the interest of all professionals in our field. The DID Board responded with a motion to make liaison between POD

and the DID Certification Committee a high priority item in recognition of the need for this type of interaction.

WHEN IS IT?

The AECT Certification Committee has recommended a pilot, non-threatening test of the certification concept; thus, when the initial data have been collected and summarized, the membership and other interested groups can help evaluate its potential. So far, general reactions may be summarized as supportive; however, these reactions are accompanied by comments which indicate that this support of the concept of certification is conditional. The respondents generally express concern that the concept must be thoroughly investigated, analyzed and given reasonable time for investigation and try-out along with the provision of sufficient resources for a thorough pilot test.

The DID Certification Committee has suggested a rather lengthy timetable to pursue the concept. Their recommendation includes input and help from other groups which are likely to share their interest in this concept. Obviously, POD is a group which should be actively involved in this process and needs to work closely with AECT to help shape the development of this concept.

Three evaluation teams are to be established to recommend the specific evaluation procedures to be used in each of three major areas of certification (i.e. instructional development, media management, and material design and production). Each team will then field test their proposed evaluation process; following further discussions and revisions a workable process will be recommended. Several thousand dollars have been requested from the AECT Board of Directors to finance part of the cost of the continuation of this project.

WHO IS TO BE CERTIFIED?

The area of instructional development includes two separate areas for certification: instructional development per se and the management of instructional development. The November, 1974 issue of *Audiovisual Instruction* contains an early version of the proposed competencies for certification. A current version may be obtained from any member of the POD Task Force.

HOW WILL IT BE DONE?

Although the actual testing process is not yet established, preliminary suggestions include three sequential parts: 1) paper and pencil tests, 2) portfolio reviews and 3) performance tests. Professional recommendations will also be part of the process. A "Certification Institute" will have to be designed with representatives from industry and the profession to manage the actual certification process.

Testing could be conducted at a regional center, in conjunction with a national conference or in some other way. Testing fees of currently existing certification organizations seem to range from about \$25 to \$250; candidates also pay their own travel, room and board expenses if these are needed. Of some 17 associations surveyed by the AECT Certification Committee, one has been offering their certificate for 43 years; many have revocation clauses; typically 50–75% of the candidates pass the exam on their first attempt. Many groups also provide continuing educational materials or courses which lead to the certification exam. The new *Journal of Instructional Development* (JID), published by AECT, will devote a section of the journal specifically to continuing education. This may be a viable way to help members of the profession remain up-to-date.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

By sending your comments and suggestions to a member of the POD Task Force on Certification, you can be a vital and important participant. It would be especially helpful if you reacted to these specific items:

- 1) Who should be eligible for certification? AECT members only or any qualified professional?
- 2) Should the certificate be renewable every three to five years?
- 3) How much should the individual have to pay to go through the certification process?
- 4) Can core competencies be specified and evaluated?
- 5) Is there justification for a "grandfather" clause or must everyone go through the certification process?
- 6) Will professionals in the field actually apply for certification or will they ignore it? Will employers look for certified individuals?

Will industry be more likely to hire “educator-types” if they can certify their competencies?

- 7) If we decided that individual certification was inappropriate and we relegated the responsibility to an accreditation committee for program certification, would other organizations assume that they should move ahead with the certification concept anyway?
- 8) What will the effect of certification be on schools preparing professionals?
- 9) Will the testing be able to avoid racial, sexual, etc. bias?
- 10) Is a sufficiently valid and reliable evaluation process possible?
- 11) Since anyone can now be an instructional or faculty developer, does a professional field currently exist? Is certification a start toward professionalism?
- 12) Could the concept of certification be a positive influence on the growth of our field? Will it help our profession?

In addition to discussing the concept of certification with the members of the POD Task Force, you may wish to write a reaction in the form of a Letter to the Editor for possible publication in the POD Quarterly. In either event, the Task Force hopes that this review of the current status of certification has served to stimulate your thinking and that it has helped you to become more knowledgeable about the future of certification. In addition to the Task Force, you may write Dr. Barry Bratton; AECT/DID Certification Committee Chairperson, W-16 East Hall, Division of Instructional Design, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242, (319) 353-5685.