



Proposal for the Establishment of
A College Centre
for Personal Achievement



Maurice Gibbons & Milton McClaren

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Executive Summary

We propose the establishment of a college centre that offers personalized learning to the large population that academic higher learning leaves behind. This centre will admit adults of any age or educational background who express a desire to learn. Participants will learn how to focus on a field of interest and then design a personal program to attain competence in it. During this one year process, they will compile proof of their achievements in portfolios which they will present to a review committee for Certification.

Faculty will create a community of practice in a stimulating learning environment, and will guide students through the three stages of the program. They will teach students the skills of self-direction in the Apprenticeship phase, mentor students through the Practitioner phase and coach students through the **Expert** phase to completion. This centre, its clientele, its program and process will combine to create a new focus of higher education for everyone, a concept **replicable** in colleges throughout the country.

The Proposal

We propose the establishment of a Centre for Personal Achievement (CFPA) at the college level. The Centre will enable adults of any age and with any background to pursue their personal interests and achieve a level of competence worthy of certification at the end of the Centre's one year program.

This proposal is designed to meet a significant need in our educational community by inviting many who find themselves outside the educational system back into it. Many people are left behind when they are screened out in the competition for higher education. Men and women who abandoned education to work and raise families, people who want to make a change in what they are doing, and people who once weren't ready to learn but are now, will find the opportunity they need in this proposed centre. People in transition from high school to work, from marriage to single life, from one job to another, or from work into retirement, for example, will find the training they need to refocus and move forward in their lives. This Centre will open the door to higher education for a significant population and will provide participants with the skills, environment and opportunity they need to be successful. Their portfolios which they can continue to enhance and refine, will be testimony to their achievements and capabilities, a testimony they can attach to any application they make.

This unique centre will offer an innovative program which will be self-directed, oriented to action projects, and focused on everyone finding and mastering a field. Such a program requires faculty members suited to it and trained to meet its' special demands. These include teaching the skills of

self-direction, guiding individual practice and coaching independent activities. All of these features stand in sharp contrast to traditional programs which offer a single content taught to all students through presentations and tested for right answers. Students must make a **paradigm** shift in thinking and practice and faculty must be prepared to guide them through these rough waters successfully.

The institution that establishes this centre and its' program will enjoy many benefits, it will...

1. open certificated higher education to a very large new paying audience.
2. offer a unique program that enables participants to focus, manage and develop their abilities in a field of their choice.
3. provide a teaching opportunity for faculty committed to empowering students with the skills, environments and experiences they need to engage in a lifetime of learning and achievement.
4. attract grants and other development money from businesses and celebrity supporters.
5. become a model that other institutions will want to investigate and emulate.
6. fully democratize what has been a very selective education process.

These are a few of the many benefits that the founding institution will enjoy by deciding to establish this Personal Achievement Centre. Other benefits will emerge as we describe the process.

Primarily, however, the Centre has the potential to empower people who have lost their way, been left behind or have suddenly awakened to education. It offers them a passageway to advancement in a new format designed to maximize their success.

The Success of Every Participant

This Personal Achievement Centre is founded on the principle that everyone has the right to learn at the highest possible level in a program designed to offer every possible opportunity for success. The second principle is that everyone has significant undeveloped capacity that we can help them to

discover and develop. The third principle is that finding out what we can do and who we can become is a central human task.

The fourth principle is zero-impediment teaching, that is every activity and all aspects of instruction and program structure must be designed to enhance learning and achievement. The faculty must be committed to the success of every participant.

The fifth principle is achievement focus, that is, the intent of the program is a range of achievements centering on productivity not a study of content leading to tests. The sixth principle is disappearing instruction, which means that initial instruction is designed to foster independence and a shift from instruction to coaching, guiding and otherwise supporting participants in their enterprises.

The final principle for now is “stacking”; organizing instruction, experience, contacts, technology and environment for multiple beneficial achievement outcomes. These concepts, taken together, outline the underpinnings of the program described in the following sections.

A Program in Three Stages

Participants will move through this program in three stages: Apprentice, Practitioner and Expert. They announce when they are ready to move from one stage to the next and then enter the Passage Process.

The focus of the **Apprentice** stage is on mastering the skills and processes required to manage one’s own learning, achievement and personal development. Participants learn to identify their interests and abilities, to design plans for activities and implement them, to assess and revise the processes they have used, and to develop the other skills and process required for successful productivity.

In the **Practitioner** stage participants identify and pursue a field on interest. They learn to study the field, generate observations and ideas, conduct a challenging project and to make major achievements in personal and social growth. The object is to know the field and be able to conduct the basic operations in it.

In the **Expert** stage participants make a commitment to master their fields of choice, then they develop their plans to master it. This mastery includes a study of the field and practicing and producing until an expert level of performance is achieved. As they move toward completion, participants will be displaying a professional attitude in assessing their productivity and improving themselves and their performance.

Each person decides when to move from stage to stage. The final Passage is to completion and certification, which involves a panel review.

The Four Dimensions of Accomplishment

Four dimensions of accomplishment run through the three stages of the program (see Diagram #1 on the following page). They are performance, growth, relationships and service. Imagine that these are four columns that rise through the Apprentice, Practitioner and Expert stages, each dimension reflected in the competencies participants are required to fulfill.

Performance is the central dimension and the main emphasis is on action, process and productivity. It includes becoming focused and intentional, gathering information and ideas, laying plans and seeing them through to completion, reviewing performance and designing steps forward in an upward spiral of achievement.

The second dimension is **Personal Growth**. All of the activities in the Centre require a significant level of self-awareness and self-management, which amounts – basically – to assuming responsibility for ones' self and ones' performance. Success in any work is inseparable from success as a person. Assuming responsibility for oneself, developing competence and becoming productive are all value laden, such performances require character and performing them develops it.

The third dimension, **Relationships**, refers to the many connections with others involved in a productive life. This involves being able to establish and maintain relationships, being able to work in groups and being able both to seek help from others and to offer it. This is the development of social intelligence.

The fourth dimension, **Service**, is the most difficult to define. It refers to the pursuit of productivity and excellence for something other than self – for others, to make a difference, to contribute. Underlying this is the development of a world view, a sense of ones' place in the larger framework of things and ones' responsibility to it.

Students progress through the three stages and develop in the four dimensions by achieving the competencies that outline the path of progress.

A Program of Competencies

The program is outlined in competencies – what participants have to be able to do, and have to demonstrate that they can do. Participants can achieve the competencies and demonstrate them in the ways that suit them best. Every competency is a skill that everyone will be able to use repeatedly throughout their lives.

One competency, for example, requires the participant to be able to state and achieve a personal goal. This is a life skill, in fact, goal setting is at the core of both this program and an intentional life. Each participant will have a different goal and may approach the task of choosing and pursuing their tasks **differently**. Here are examples of the competencies that will be required in each of the three stages of the program.

Apprentice

Participants can....

1. identify their strengths, talents, desires and experiences.
2. identify a personal interest and make a commitment to pursue it.
3. state an intention, formulate a workable plan and pursue it to completion.
4. identify their resistances to work and resolve them.
5. participate cooperatively in a group.

Practitioner

Participants can...

1. gather useful information and ideas about a topic of interest, drawing on a variety of resources, including books, magazines, the Internet and authorities.
2. generate original ideas about their topic of interest.
3. set a challenging goal for a project, plan it in detail and complete the project on time by their own schedule.
4. can systematically solve the problems they meet.
5. can help others achieve their goals.

Expert

Participants can...

1. select a field of interest to pursue and describe it in detail.
2. design and execute a plan to master the field.
3. identify skills and processes needed for success and accomplish them.
4. recognize personal improvements needed and achieve them.
5. lead a group to a successful outcome.

Students design programs to achieve each of the competencies, and faculty teach them the skills and provide the support that they need to accomplish the task successfully.

The Journal, Computer and Portfolio

These instruments will provide participants with the personal tools they need for working through this program, tools they can use throughout their lives. The first, the working journal, is the book they will keep to record information and ideas – both their own and those they gather from others – as well as plans for, and records of, projects that they conduct. The journal will also contain reviews of their work and themselves to provide guidance for their future development.

The second instrument, the computer, is essential for on-line research, communication and their own productive work. It will be their primary resource for pursuing their individual interests and finding resources on the internet. Through email, chat rooms and blogs they will be able to communicate with each other, their instructors, their mentors and others involved in their fields of interest around the

world. The computer, through its range of productive programs, will also enable them to produce many of the products they design.

The portfolio will contain the best work they produce as a record of their achievement, as well as such proof of performance as statements from mentors and employers, grades from courses and photographs of completed work such as art, designs and constructions. It will also include their certification from this program and a list of their achievements.

These three instruments will not only equip them for the program, but will also equip them to continue the work they have begun for the rest of their lives.

Competencies, Projects, and Passages

Competencies state the accomplishments that participants must attain in each stage of the program. Like a rubric, they announce the requirements to both faculty and students and act as a contract between them. Participants conduct activities in order to learn and demonstrate the practices referred to in the competencies. Often several competencies can be achieved by pursuing a project which involves them. Projects are the units of this program. In them, students explore the task, immerse themselves in the knowledge and skills required, and then set challenges for the task itself.

The Apprentice Stage will usually be activities leading to a challenging project, the Practitioner Stage will usually be projects leading to a demonstration of competence; and the Expert Stage will be activities and projects within a chosen field, leading to a graduation project and certification.

Participants work to achieve the transition between stages and to become certified. When they feel ready, Participants propose advancement to the next stage. This involves three elements: agreement by their support groups that they are ready, a proposal presented to faculty, and their success when they present their proposal to a Transition Team. The team includes one faculty member familiar with the students' work, the support team and anyone else who wishes to attend. The candidate sums up his or her proposal for advancement and then answers questions. The candidate and guests leave while the others discuss the proposal and whether or not the competencies have been achieved. If "yes," the candidate advances, if "no," the shortfall in specific competencies is cited and the candidate returns to work.

Graduation, the final transition in the program, leads to certification and is different from the previous two. The participant still gains the support of his or her team and proposes graduation, but this time meets with a Review Committee composed of a faculty member, a participant and a specialist in the field of expertise involved. The student proposes graduation, presents a portfolio of program achievements and discusses his or her final project. The committee meets, decides, signs the creditation sheet and celebrates the candidate. A final meeting of graduates to celebrate their success with the class and guests concludes the program.

Assessment begins at the beginning and is in the hands of participants as much as possible. The requirements are announced in detail and are clear and attainable. Students judge their own progress and test their judgment in regular meetings with support groups. Major activities are proposed to a faculty member and discussed in individual conferences. When they propose advancement or graduation, success should be at hand, although suggestions for progress may follow. At graduation, display, ceremony and celebration should be the main order of business, after certificates of personal achievement are presented. The certificate describes the program, cites the candidates' achievements, and is signed by the Review Committee for the College.

The central document for participants will be the portfolio, which at graduation will contain illustrations and proofs of their program achievements.

Working Together to Help Each Other

A central theme of the program is cooperation rather than competition. (In this program everyone can be successful) Participants will compete with themselves to increase their level of accomplishment, but will help each other to succeed. Similarly, the class will be run as a support system to help every participant to achieve outstanding results; it will be a community of practice.

To this end, everyone will work in small support teams of 3-5 members. Members will hear group member's proposals, assist them in their work, and participate in their stage meetings for advancement. Small groups are the crucible in which members learn the basics of the program together and the dynamics of working with others for mutual benefit. Communication practice will be

based upon principles of appreciative inquiry. Teachers and learners may also set up working teams that cooperate to complete shared projects, especially where several people share an interest or where their skills are complimentary.

Participants will also work with other **adults**, especially in the Practitioner Stage where guided practice will be the key instructional method. The program will benefit from the large pool of retired experts who may be called upon to provide the guidance that will assist students in their efforts to achieve the basic skills of their field of interest. They may also play a role as mentors and coaches for students in their graduation projects.

Teaching for Personal Achievement

Teaching will emphasize instruction in the Apprentice Stage, guided practice in the Practitioner Stage and coaching in the Expert Stage.

As **Apprentices**, students will be learning the basic skills of focusing and directing their own learning. While this will involve instructions, it will be designed to teach skills that enable students to be mindfully independent for the rest of this program and for the rest of their lives. These skills include performance skills, personal management and development skills, relationship skills and the practice of service, each of which require the teacher to employ different approaches, organizations and environments.

In the **Practitioner Stage**, with its emphasis on achieving skilled performance, faculty will often be conducting individual conferences with students to review their proposals for projects. This requires the skill to combine encouragement, support and guidance. In this stage, instructors will also be organizing students with co-operative action teams and matching them up with mentors as they move into the more specialized skills required to conduct their more demanding projects. These interactions require organization, guidance and supervision.

In the **Expert Phase**, students conduct inquiries into the nature of their fields of study, plan and execute a personal program to develop expertise in it, or a specific portion of it, and then conduct their major project. Instructors begin this stage with instruction and then shift to coaching students to success in their self-directed activities both in class and in the community.

Instructors need to be carefully selected for a positive attitude toward such programs, and a readiness to learn the new skills that it requires. If they have been program presenters, they must be willing to make the **paradigm** shift to helping students become self-directed, teaching them the skills they need, and guiding their individual efforts. In addition, instructors must also be competent in conducting class inquiries, followed by small group practice and later individual application. Since modeling is a powerful instrumental method, instructors should also be visibly devoted to self-directed learning and its practices.

To assist new faculty in making the transition to working in the Personal Achievement Centre, we recommend that they take at least an abbreviated program of two weeks duration, or four weekends (Saturday morning to Sunday noon). The program should be launched with a cadre of about 30 students and 3 faculty.

Organization for Accessibility

The program will be offered as two two-and-a-half hour night sessions per week, plus four Saturday workshops per semester. The program will be two semesters long at the beginning, but will be assessed when the first cadre has finished for the potential to develop into a program that is three or four semesters long. Graduation, featuring presentations by all participants, will be one weekend from Saturday morning to Sunday noon. Sunday will involve all participants, faculty and interested members of the community. We suggest that CFPA begin with a cadre of 30 people in the fall of 2008.

An Organic Program That Will Grow

The CFPA, as described in this paper, is a beginning. The overall mandate is to create the success of participants in finding their field of interest and pursuing it to a high level of competence. Anything we can discover that will increase our effectiveness will be employed, and as a result, the program will develop organically, perhaps to a format that we had not even dreamed of in this formulation. To this end, we will employ regular feedback from participants, teachers, and from research studies that we will organize in cooperation with faculties and graduate students at local universities. A new program offers many opportunities for research and we will encourage professors to connect their graduate students to our work. We are open to all findings that will guide the program to greater success in this

new arena. Our commitment is to developing the most effective program possible to support people pursuing their interests to a high level of proficiency.

A Final Comment

We intend to offer new participants a new route to success in higher education. Our intention is to create a model that will be so successful other institutions will be anxious to adopt what we are doing. Our intention is replicability so that they will be able to do just that. We hope that you can see the potential of the Centre for Personal Achievement to accomplish these goals.