Approaches Used and Lessons Learned in Participatory Curriculum Development with Partner Institutions in The Gambia, Ethiopia and Colombia

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Abstract  
There are numerous models of curriculum development available to guide the revision or establishment of new curricula. Ralph Tyler, decades ago, suggested four guiding questions that evolved into four stages within curriculum development: identifying the purposes, incorporating the experiences needed by the learner, the organization of learning into most appropriate sequences, and the evaluation. Kirkpatrick (1994), Frey (2001) and many others have since then expanded and added detail to these basic considerations. Curriculum development has been influenced by a focus world-wide on competency-based education (CBE) (Flowers, 1990).

This poster will present the ‘lessons learned’ from three different examples of participatory inter-country design and implementation of agricultural programs. All were seeking to develop curricula that meet the needs of their country’s specific agricultural and agri-food situation while ensuring that programs developed were internationally credible. While not specifically and universally adopting CBE, the underlying principles of outcomes, graduate competencies in both knowledge and skills, and sequencing were used. The curriculum development process used in all cases followed the basic sequence of needs assessment, identification of national program standards and norms, curriculum planning, formative evaluation, revision, support for new instructional methodologies, professional development within content areas, and final curriculum evaluation, yet there were substantial and meaningful differences.

The international partner institutions that our university collaborated on, and assisted with, the development of these agricultural curricula were in three different countries (The Gambia, Ethiopia, Columbia); each was experiencing different conditions and constraints which, it is suggested necessitated a situational, customized approach to curriculum development. One was a country experiencing dramatic political turmoil, making stakeholder meetings challenging while another institution was faced with exponentially increasing enrollment. One of these institutions had relatively little prior experience in curricular development and revision, while the other two had varying degrees of formal and informal training and experience in education program development.
Depending on external and institutional factors, the methods of needs assessment ranged from numerous, iterative stakeholder workshops to surveys and focus groups. In some cases more direct guidance and reasonably intense mentoring by the assisting country was useful while in other cases this was not needed or appropriate. A combination of comparative analysis and the pedagogical practice of critical reflection (S. Brookfield, 1995) will be used to elucidate the ‘lessons learned’. What were the challenges of both? What have we learned and applied at our Canadian institution? These are all part of the list of ‘lessons learned’ that can be divided into i) advance preparation and scanning the horizon ii) logistics and timelines iii) the need for theoretical grounding in educational practices iv) the importance of cultural context and conventions and v) that there really is ‘no one (right) way’.

The customized approaches to the general curriculum development framework will be documented in words and photos. This poster, fitting with the conference theme on innovative cooperation and collaboration, suggests that there is “no one way” but that several different approaches to the development of agricultural curricula are situationally responsive, effective and can be successful.

Keywords: Lessons learned, participatory approach to curriculum development