

Abstract Title Page
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Title: A case study of assessing an international initiative on curriculum reform

Authors and Affiliations:

Roxana G. Reichman
Gordon Academic College, Israel

Abstract Body

Limit 4 pages single-spaced.

Background / Context:

Description of prior research and its intellectual context.

The globalized world we live in has forced institutions of higher education and of teacher education to deal with different aspects of diversity. More and more institutions have become involved in creating programs geared at promoting multiculturalism on campus, as well as in changing the curriculum in order to make it more relevant to students who have to be prepared to live and work in a multicultural society. Previous research has shown the importance of using diverse assessment techniques in order to make sure that the programs meet the needs of the faculty and of the students who take part in developing and teaching courses on this subject both at the undergraduate and at the graduate level (Krishnamurthi, 2003, Levitan & Wolf, 1994, Brown, 2008). There are many definitions of multiculturalism but the common denominator stresses the importance of a conscious effort to assure that all people, regardless of race, religion, gender, etc get equal opportunities to live, study and work in any heterogeneous society. Morey and Kitano (1997) stress the importance of a curriculum which prepares all students to function in a society which is more and more diverse by providing “a more comprehensive, accurate, intellectually honest view of reality” and Anderson (1987) criticizes the classical dichotomy between the cognitive and the social while promoting diversity in working teams both at the school level and at the higher education level. Banks (2007) presents the characteristics of a multicultural curriculum whose main goal is to encourage cultural pluralism by educating students to know and appreciate diversity. Faculty willing to promote multiculturalism in their teaching may face significant challenges when they try to use the curriculum or to adapt it to the needs of a student body which changes at a very rapid speed. Brown (2008) proposes meaningful models for assessing curriculum reform while stressing that all models have their own limitations and sometimes a combination of models might be needed. This paper focuses on the complex and challenging assessment process of an initiative of developing an international model for curriculum reform in multicultural education and cultural diversity training in 21 institutions in 7 countries. This assessment model can be replicated when dealing with other initiatives with similar goals as well as with different purposes.

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:

Description of the focus of the research.

The objective of this paper is to present and examine a model used for the assessment process of the curriculum which has been developed for multicultural education and cultural diversity training by 60 consortium members over a year. The model will be presented from the point of view of the members of the assessment team. The present study focuses specifically on the criteria for choosing this specific model, which borrowed from several models of assessing curriculum reform in the field of multicultural education in teacher education and in higher education. It is important to stress the fact that the curriculum developed by the consortium members does not only affect the institutions that will implement it, but it also has a domino effect because the teachers who are exposed to it will hopefully influence their schools at all levels and thus will have an impact on students of all ages.

Setting:

Description of the research location.

This study is based on the work performed by 60 participants in the process of developing and assessing a curriculum reform in the field of multicultural education. TEMPUS is a program established in 1990 by the European Union in order to encourage cooperation between institutions of higher education in the EU and partner developing and developed countries. The main goal is to improve the effectiveness of education, teacher education and higher education by enhancing the quality and relevance of these institutions. In 2011, Gordon Academic College (GAC) initiated a program whose goal was to develop an international model for curricular reform in multicultural education. This program was chosen by the TEMPUS headquarters in Brussels, Belgium and GAC was awarded approximately one million Euros in order to implement this initiative during a two year period. The consortium includes 21 institutions: 8 institutions in Israel, 7 in Georgia (the main two partner countries) and 6 others in EU countries such as Germany, England, Austria, The Netherlands and Estonia. The first year which ended in the Fall of 2013 was dedicated to the development of the curriculum for courses on multiculturalism and cultural diversity at all levels (BA, MA as well as workshops for teacher development and students activities). During the second year at least 48 courses which have been developed will be piloted in 15 of these higher education institutions. During the two year period, all the participants have been divided into several teams and they have taken part in the development and/or the assessment of the curriculum and of the teacher workshops. In addition to that, the consortium members have participated in national and international conferences for dissemination purposes and they have lobbied for curricular reforms in their own countries in order to assure sustainability after the program is officially over. In several institutions that take part in this program, the students are empowered to assume leadership roles and they organize activities which promote multiculturalism on campus.

In order to facilitate the communication between the 60 participants from 21 institutions in 7 countries, a portal was created and is used in addition to Skype meetings, video conferences, etc. Three face to face consortium meetings have been held during the first year in Georgia, Germany and Austria. Each consortium meeting consists of 4-5 days very intensive working meetings during which the participants are divided into teams in order to accomplish specific and measurable goals. At least two more consortium meetings have been planned for next year.

Population / Participants / Subjects:

Description of the participants in the study: who, how many, key features, or characteristics.

The analysis of the assessment model is based on qualitative data which has been collected during an entire year of team work. Data collection is highly sensitive and in order to minimize the resistance of the participants whose collaboration is necessary, it is crucial to create an honest dialogue among all those involved regarding the people in charge of the assessment, the methods used, the way the data is collected and analyzed and the way the conclusions will be presented. The participants were the 60 members of the international consortium. The data includes interviews with members of the consortium and the analysis of the documents which were created by them. In spite of the fact that there was an element of self selection in the program since only people who were interested in its goals chose to take part in it, the consortium is a highly heterogeneous group. It includes men and women who work in different types of

institutions (research universities, teachers colleges, private universities, NGOs), in different countries. They all come from different fields of interest, from different backgrounds, different religious faiths (Christians, Jews, Muslims, Druze, atheists and believers), different age groups (from undergraduate and graduate students till faculty members who are a few years from retirement), different points in their careers (some faculty members who are novice and others who are very experienced), different types of research background (quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods). A few members are not directly connected to the academia but are deeply involved in community work (NGOs). This very heterogeneous group had to work together, in pairs, in groups, in smaller or larger teams, over a long period, sometimes in a very stressful environment, in order to develop the curriculum and in order to assess it.

Intervention / Program / Practice:

Description of the intervention, program, or practice, including details of administration and duration.

The program of development an international model for curricular reform in multicultural education and cultural diversity training (DOIT) aims at building international cooperation and enhancing mutual understanding between peoples and cultures of the European Union (EU) and partner countries. The curriculum of higher education in general and teacher education in particular must respond to the challenges of cultural diversity. Teachers, who are in charge of transmitting values to the young generation, must have a deep understanding of these issues in order to better respond to the needs of their students who will live in a more and more diverse society. A better understanding of ‘the other’ can prevent future conflicts and encourage peaceful resolution of problems among people and among nations and/or cultures.

This two year program includes the design and piloting of teaching and learning programs developed in educational modules for undergraduate and graduate students, as well as for pre service and in service teachers. The topics of these teaching modules include issues such as social dynamics of prejudice and education for human rights, pedagogical approaches that promote inter cultural understanding in the classroom, developing cultural specific materials for each region, curriculum development and assessment. This curriculum seeks to achieve organizational change and therefore out of the classroom activities on campus have been organized for and by the students under faculty mentoring and supervision. The new curriculum is piloted in the partner countries and quality assurance as well as quality management processes methods have been established in order to ensure adequate feedback, to make sure that all the goals that have been set are achieved and that the process runs in a smoothly manner. The consortium members are committed to the dissemination and sustainability of the program by presenting the results at national and international conferences, by offering lectures to different audiences and by being committed to a full integration of the relevant courses in the curriculum of the institutions that pilot these courses. In addition to that, the consortium members are interested in promoting the program in the national media and in publishing the results in academic journals. According to the requirement of the TEMPUS office regarding the funding of the program by the EU, the proposed results have to be achieved in the most economical way, the budget allocation among the partners must be accounted for and the financial management has to be very transparent. DOIT’s total budget is 1018183.64 Euros and it was developed in cooperation with the TEMPUS office which also advised the distribution of the funds between

the partner institutions in very specific details (staff costs, mobility, equipment, printing, translation and publishing).

Research Design:

Description of the research design.

The present study uses qualitative methodology which presents the assessment model mainly from the point of view of the members of the assessment team, including the leader of this team. However, the voices of other consortium participants are presented in order to discuss the similarities and differences between their respective points of view.

Data Collection and Analysis:

Description of the methods for collecting and analyzing data.

In order to increase the validity of this study, the triangulation method was used. The research design includes interviews with all the members of the assessment team as well as with members of the teams which have developed the curriculum. In addition to that, all the documents that the members have uploaded on the portal have been analyzed, and field observations were conducted by members of the assessment team.

Findings / Results:

Description of the main findings with specific details.

In response to the questions asked during the semi structured interviews, the participants revealed their main reasons for joining the program, the challenges they faced in developing the curriculum and their feelings and thoughts regarding the assessment process. The main findings indicate significant positive feelings related to the ability to influence the curriculum but they also indicate the frustration they faced when they had to work in groups which sometimes had conflicting approaches and conflicting interests. Some teams found it easier to work together in order to achieve the goals while others felt that at certain points they were not even certain the task could be accomplished. All the participants have stressed the important role of each team leader, regardless of what they believe about the ability of their group leader “to get the job done”. The members of the assessment team described the process they went through in order to come to a decision about a model they needed to use in order to faithfully assess as impartially as possible the materials developed by the other teams as well as the impact of these materials on teachers and students. They also explained at length the obstacles and challenges they had to face when they needed to persuade the other members to accept the assessment method they endorsed. Some of the participants have established strong professional and personal ties and they expect these relationships to continue long after the program will officially end. Still others talk mainly of the professional development for themselves and for their teams as well as about the advantages of being able to take part in such an international program. The field observations reveal yet another angle of the assessment model by showing the very candid way in which the participants talk about their frustrations and the difficulties they had to overcome. The paper will present at length the challenges of creating teams under significant time pressure and of making decisions under pressure and finally the paper will offer recommendations to other teams who might be interested in working together in order to develop and to assess curriculum.

Conclusions:

Description of conclusions, recommendations, and limitations based on findings.

Since more and more institutions of higher education and teacher education initiate programs which promote multicultural initiatives on campus, , new methods are created in order to accurately assess the effects of these changes on faculty, teachers and students. The assessment team worked closely with the curriculum developers from the very beginning, making a conscious effort to gain their trust and to minimize the conflicts related to data collection, to the criteria for assessment and to data analysis. The challenges were significant, but the first phase of the process seems to have succeeded mainly due to the fact that the leaders of these institutions (presidents, rectors, etc) were very supportive of the process and encouraged the changes in the curriculum of their institutions, sometimes even in spite of external pressures. Another success factor was due to the fact that the assessment team adopted a very open approach, didn't act top down but rather encouraged reflection and input from all the participants. The main limitation is due to the fact that this is a two year program and the findings are based only on the first year of the curriculum reform. More studies should be conducted during the second year of implementation. In addition to that, quantitative studies that assess the impact on students, teachers and faculty members on the long run are needed.

Appendices

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Appendix A. References

References are to be in APA version 6 format.

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