TEACHING ADVANCEMENT AT UNIVERSITIES (TAU)

TAU3 Fellowship Programme (2021/2022)

Curriculum Development Matters: From Paper To Persons

Final Individual Institutional Project Report

Submitted by Dr Amina Jakoet-Salie

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The word curriculum can have different meanings to various scholars based on their understanding of the concept, however, for the purpose of this project, the researcher will refer to the definition of Tanner and Tanner (2007: 12) who describe curriculum as :

That reconstruction of knowledge and experience that enables the learner to grow in exercising intelligent control of subsequent knowledge and experience.

Curriculum development can be defined as "a kind of step-by-step process used to create positive improvements in the courses offered in higher education" (Roode,2019). Pinar (2004) states that curriculum development is concerned with reviewing, planning, developing, implementing and maintaining. The Diploma in Public Management qualification at the Nelson Mandela University has not been recurriculated in over 20 years and there is a concern that the curriculum is not responsive to what happens "on the ground" and what is happening in the public sector. The new curriculum that being (re)designed is the Diploma in Public Management and the Extended Diploma in Public Management and as Programme Co-ordinator for this programme, I realised the urgency to (re)design a curriculum that was locally and globally relevant. Since the Faculty of Humanities was encouraging curriculum conversations, focussing particularly on "Revitalising the Humanities", I recognised that it was important for me to start the curriculum (re)design process.

The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 requires that all higher education curriculum must provide education and training to develop the skills and innovation necessary for national development and successful participation in the global economy (Department of Education,1997). Blizer (2015:3) state that globally universities want to ensure that they are offering their students the skills that will be required of them in the labour market by ensuring that there is an alignment between the qualification and the world of work. The Council on Higher Education's (CHE) review of education programmes from 2006–2007 was a major move towards some form of 'standardisation' of teacher education (Singh, 2015:3). Generally, recurriculation in South African institutions of Higher Education has been an on-going process since then. Despite this need to review education programmes, there were some challenges that I encountered when proposing necessary curriculum changes to staff members.

It was therefore that I decided , as a TAU fellow and in consultation with the Head of the Department, departmental staff members and other role-players that the curriculum needs to change in order for it to be more relevant and that the qualification is aligned with what the public sector and government require. Nkomo (2000:14) affirms that a curriculum should transform and redress the legacies of inequality by ensuring that the curriculum is economically and socially productive in producing specifically and professional people. The Diploma in Public Management curriculum was outdated and did not respond to the demands of the global economy. According to Badat (2010:3), "the core roles of higher education of are disseminating knowledge and producing critical graduates, producing and applying knowledge through research and development activities and contributing to economic and social development and democracy through learning and teaching, research and community engagement". Ogude, Nel and Oosthuizen encourage (2005:1) the "need for globally equivalent skills raises the debate about curriculum relevance". In addition, Higgs (2016:93) states that there is an emphasis to create curricula that will enable students to develop the necessary proficiencies that will empower graduates with the necessary abilities and skills.

As a result, I engaged with various role-players, such as departmental staff members, members of the Faculty Management Committee, Systems Office, Timetable Office, Academic Planning

Office, the Curriculum Co-ordinator and Learning & Teaching Collab: Teaching Development. Voogt et al. (2016:123) point out it is necessary to co-design new curricula to collaboratively produce new knowledge by creating a community of enquiry. These role-players were consulted so that the necessary procedures were followed that resulted in a successful curriculum (re)design. Furthermore, the various stakeholders provided their expertise and valuable feedback necessary to (re)design the curriculum. There were many critical, yet positive interactions between institutional curriculum advisors and departmental representatives that took place between 2021 & 2022. According to Voogt et al. (2016: 124), the "cyclic and iterative nature of the learning process takes place through the interactions with peers in design teams and the external stimuli". The role-players were asked to provide input and guide me in making informed decisions about the proposed new curriculum design, but there were challenges that resulted in a delay in the process. I encountered numerous constraints in (re)designing a curriculum, the enablers motivated me to complete the project and as Programme Co-ordinator I was institutionally obligated to re(design) curricula and Revitalise the Humanities so that it was responsive to the African and global context.

AIM

The aim of this TAU project was to successfully develop a curriculum that is aligned with the labour market demands in the discipline of Public Management. The project identified further identified sub-aims which included:

- To identify the constraints and enablers of curriculum development in Higher Education institutions (HEIs)
- To identify the effect of leadership in the successful implementation of curriculum development
- To provide recommendations to overcome the challenges of bringing about change in curriculum development

APPROACH AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This project adopted a qualitative approach ,through the use of narratives by examining the responses from academics in several different disciplines in five South African universities to gain deeper insights into the constraints and enablers in curriculum development including the challenges inherent with leadership.

This study adopted a qualitative approach and the TAU fellow administered an online questionnaire to five participants from different universities who are involved in curriculum development and design. These participants formed part of an Enquiry Group of which the TAU fellow is a part of. The project therefore did not use any particular method of selecting participants as the participants are already known to the TAU fellow and each participant is familiar with each other's research. There were five (5) open-ended questions as this allowed the respondents to elaborate on their responses. Since the project was not intended to include all universities, the respondents have been selected as they form part of the enquiry group for the TAU project and each respondent is from a different Higher Education (HE) institution.

LIMITATION OF THE PROJECT
The project did not include the student voice in the curriculum development. Only the academic roleplayers and professional support staff were consulted and this proved to be a limitation of the project. If I wanted to get insightful information, it was important for me to make connections with the different spaces and context in ensuring a responsive and humanising curriculum .

ACHIEVEMENTS (OUTCOMES) AND CHALLENGES

It was important for me to get the "buy-in" and trust from all relevant stakeholders as this gave me some latitude in making difficult decisions and implementing them. As a result it was therefore imperative that I had a supportive Head of Department and departmental staff members when recurriculating the programme, including the support from faculty leadership. Voogt et al. (2016: 134) assert that **involvement of leadership** is the most important contributing factor in ensuring that the desired outcomes of the curriculum design are met. The Curriculum Co-Ordinator played an instrumental role in this project as she was able to arrange meetings with all relevant role-players and assist me in structuring the curriculum development process. The Curriculum Co-ordinator provided the much-needed guidance that was critical, especially with regard to the paperwork and documentation that had to be completed and signed off by the relevant committees. Therefore, an **enabler** for effective curriculum development to take place is the **support of professional staff and colleagues**.

The **challenges** I experienced were mainly "disagreements" amongst role-players that resulted in the delay of getting the curriculum changes approved. A challenge that I encountered when engaging with the various role-players was the barrier of **tradition**; tradition that lecturers felt that "this is how the programme was for the last 20 years and it worked" and my response would be "so how are we preparing our students for the future"? This challenge was aligned with another constraint of "**status quo comfort**" where staff members felt comfortable with the way things are and may have been resistant to change

The other challenge was **time**. Since I needed Ethical Clearance (EC) for my questionnaire to be administered, I had to wait until EC was granted before I could start with data collection. Curriculum development is a timeous process and it was important for me to follow the correct channels and ensure that the approved curriculum complied with the policies of the institution and that the project achieved the aim by aligning the curriculum with the current trends in the public sector. It is therefore important that regular evaluation of the programme/curriculum takes places to ensure that the curriculum is current and aligned with the demands of the public sector and government.

Another major barrier to curriculum design was a **lack of communication.** For the duration of the project, I encountered numerous incidences of negative attitudes from certain role-players and this hindered the progression of the policy. However, I managed to overcome this barrier as I remained focus on the core purpose of the project. It is strongly recommended that the constraints and enablers in curriculum development, including leadership and curriculum design should be a collaborative practice. In response to some of these barriers, Le Grange (2017:88) states that we need to shift *blind* spots in higher education curricula to *blank* spots; blank spots are what scientists know enough about to question but do not answer, and blind spots are what they do not know enough about or care about. Having this shift would imply that what is ignored or neglected would at least become part of the conversations and discussions (amongst stakeholders) around curriculum development at Higher Education institutions.

OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW

I successfully recurriculated a programme that was stagnant for almost twenty years and hopefully this new revised curriculum will ensure that the learning and teaching environment is conducive for quality education and produce more employable graduates.

OLD	NEW
Public Self Management I	Theory of Public Administration and Public Management
Intersectoral Collaboration III	Disaster and Risk Management
Public Office Management	Public Governance and Leadership

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NELSON MANDELA

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