

PROCESSES, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: WRITERS' EXPERIENCES OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN A DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Ferreira, R, Ebersöhn, L, Coetzee, S, Olivier, H, Mampane, R & Mohangi, K
ronel.ferreira@up.ac.za & hermien.olivier@up.ac.za
University of Pretoria, South Africa

PURPOSE OF THE PRESENTATION

- Reporting on the experiences of five module writers involved in the re-curriculum of a teacher distance education programme
- Contemplating lessons learnt for the purpose of similar future curriculum development initiatives

BACKGROUND ON THE CURRENT PROGRAMME THAT IS BEING REVISED

- Advanced Certificate in Education: Special Needs Education
- University of Pretoria, South Africa
- Mode of delivery: Distance
- Prepares educators to assist children with special needs (emotional, behavioural and/or learning difficulties)
- SA Policy on Inclusive education

STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAMME

- Six modules
- One programme co-ordinator, 3 module co-ordinators
- Three blocks of two modules each
- Minimum 2 years, maximum 4 years
- One contact session per block, 5 days each
- Two assignments + examination per module

CURRENT MODULES

- Theoretical Framework for Learning Support
- Classroom-Based Assessment
- Professional and Social Context of Education (generic distance education module)
- Learning Support Programme
- Learners with Problems
- Practical Experience

WHY RE-CURRICULATE?

- To incorporate the underlying philosophy of the programme (asset-based approach/Positive Psychology) as part of the learning content
- To align modules in a more appropriate manner
- To revise study material based on feedback
- To implement new policy documents (e.g. Inclusive Education)
- To align programme outcomes with national standards in terms of outcomes and required qualification standards

IMPLEMENTATION

- Planned date for implementation: April 2010
- Phase-in phase-out model for implementation
- Module writers have completed writing phase

ROLE-PLAYERS INVOLVED

- Unit for Distance Education
- External curriculum specialist (SAIDE)
- Department of Education Innovation
- Department of Educational Psychology
 - HOD
 - Module co-ordinators
 - Module writers
 - Previous presenters
- External reviewers: national and international

HOW? THE PROCESS OF RE-CURRICULATION

- Initial workshop (facilitated by SAIDE):
 - All role-players
 - Reflecting on present curriculum
 - Brainstorming possibilities, module names, curriculum and broad outcomes for revised programme
- Two follow-up workshops (facilitated by SAIDE):
 - Key role-players
 - Refining curriculum
 - Supporting module writers

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED ALONG THE WAY

- Time-consuming process of finalising curriculum
- One of the textbooks developed during the process of writing
- Change in managerial structure

AT THE END OF THE WRITING PHASE... EXPLORING WRITERS' EXPERIENCES

- Qualitative methodological approach
- Instrumental case study design
- Five purposefully selected module writers:
 - all female registered educational psychologists
 - each developed one module

METHODOLOGY (continue)

- Phase 1 of data collection: Open-ended questionnaire (reflecting on experiences, potential value and frustrations of writing process)
- Phase 2 of data collection: Focus group discussion
- Thematic analysis of completed questionnaires and transcripts of focus group:
 - Separately done
 - 4 researchers conducting independent analysis (2 in each phase)

RESULTS ~ THEME 1

PROCESS-RELATED LESSONS LEARNT

- Academics should determine the subject content and outcomes of modules at the start of the process
 - *There were too many people involved*
 - *The co-ordinators should have a meeting and in-depth discussions on the content and outcomes before we start writing*
- Academics should specify the structure and writing guidelines
 - *I didn't always know what was expected of me...*
 - *The co-ordinators can decide on the outcomes and assessment and then give us clear guidelines, for example guidelines on assessment*

THEME 1 (continue)

PROCESS-RELATED LESSONS LEARNT

- Pre-writing (planning) and writing phase
 - *time consuming workshops ...*
 - *It was a very long process... it feels as if we didn't have any momentum for the first ten months of the process*
 - *I think the last workshop was most useful ... that was the first time I really understood what I had to do*
- Editorial phase
 - *Some of the comments was not relevant so I just ignored it, but a lot of the stuff did make sense*
 - *There were too many people involved*

RESULTS ~ THEME 2

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ACADEMICS

- Planning
 - *I think we were all a bit in the dark*
 - *There should be better planning ...*
- Unambiguous and accessible communication
 - *...frustration, if they don't answer your emails*
- Timely access to relevant resources
 - *We don't have access to the library*
- Consistent leadership
 - *They should determine who should take the lead at the beginning of the process*

RESULTS ~ THEME 3

DEVELOPMENT OF WRITERS

- Career development
 - *The value lies in it that you as a person can grow and develop*
 - *It added to my CV – It was a learning experience*
- Knowledge renewal in subject area
 - *I updated myself with the latest research in my field, and that is what I enjoyed*
- Supportive collegial relationships
 - *I developed great relationships with the other module writers ... we supported one another*

RESULTS ~ THEME 4

FRUSTRATIONS EXPERIENCED BY WRITERS

- Extended timeframe
 - *It was such a long and tedious process...*
 - *We are working with contracts, ...it says if you are late you are going to be penalised, but people did not come back to us and they didn't keep to the timeline*
- Blurred expectations and duplication
 - *It's not my job ... (referring to the inclusion of study skills in the module) ... they can include that in a newsletter*
- Resources
 - *It would have been easier if we had a textbook...*
 - *We only got draft copies*

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE INITIATIVES

- Writers prefer not to be part of the theoretical grounding or planning phases of curriculum development
- Writers would therefore prefer that academics complete the theoretical grounding of a module, as well as structure the schedule of writing before collaborating with them

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS
(continue)

- Writers require clear guidelines in terms of structure, content, outcomes, procedures and timelines
- Writers would prefer a condensed structured process over a limited period of time
- Writers would appreciate a process where timelines are met
- Writers would appreciate open communication channels and regular updates

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS
(continue)

- Writers appreciated the opportunity for career and personal development. Accordingly, the selection of writers for curriculum development could include subject specialists and recognised scholars
- Based on the identified frustrations an appropriate project leader for curriculum development is crucial for effective partnerships with module writers
- Supportive measures should be put in place to support writers – amongst themselves but also from co-ordinators' side

Thank You!