

Chapter 21

Transformative Curriculum Design

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the principles of transformative curriculum design to include: curriculum models, objective outcome creation, scaffolding of curriculum, curriculum mapping, linkage of assessment to objectives and objectives to program outcomes, program evaluation and strategies for curriculum design including technology. In addition, some recent best practices in health program curriculum design are presented as well as emerging models. Last, some specific designs related to health sciences curriculum and programs are presented.

WHAT IS TRANSFORMATIVE CURRICULUM?

The definition of transformative education described in Chapter One by Stevens-Long, Schapiro and McClintock (2012) noted in order for metamorphosis in learning to occur, there must be “an educational program or event designed to foster learning experiences that result or catalyze a transformational outcome” (p. 184). Stevens-Long et al. also point out transformative education is a “planned educational program, experience, intervention or set of pedagogical practices” (p. 184). Essentially, transformative education cannot occur without transformative curriculum design.

WHY TRANSFORMATIVE DESIGN?

In the past, universities created curriculum for the specific population of students that selected to attend that institution. Today online learning opportunities have taken the focus from one limited by geography to a more global perspective. Diamond (2011) noted globalization has changed the American university and has caused it to respond with changes in curriculum because of the following factors:

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- Education is now without borders.
- Universities are less of a physical presence and more of a virtual one.
- Increased competition.
- Blurring of state and private institutions in regards to fundraising.
- Decentralized decision making.

Diamond posits many organizations and faculty find it “less risky to do nothing than to try and change” (Loc 276). He notes technologies impact on teaching and learning is very significant. The convergence of these factors requires careful planning and development of faculty in curriculum creation, teaching and technology. In addition, university curricula often do not produce the intended results. Although highly valued, in some cases faculty autonomy has resulted in programs where intended outcomes may not be achieved. This is particularly true in the United States where faculty independence is the rule rather than the exception.

Curriculum is a “key driver” in student engagement and retention according to Bovill, Bulley and Morss (2011, p. 197). It is cheaper to keep a current student than it is to recruit a new one. Current U.S. college dropout rates are higher than ever. Harvard University in 2011 conducted its “Pathways to Prosperity” study and found only 56% of students complete a bachelors’ degree within six years of starting school. This is not to infer that curriculum needs to be less robust; rather, it means curriculum must be designed with the learner rather than the teacher in mind.

Developing a quality curriculum initially is an extremely time-intensive task. This can also be daunting to faculty. After it is completed however, the content can be used in the future to significantly decrease faculty preparation time. Faculty also must be sure to continually improve and update their courses as changes occur. This should be done when there are significant changes in the field, in response to student feedback, in response to industry standards and in response to programmatic evaluation. Ultimately, although the process is time consuming, in the end it is worth it since the curriculum that is created is robust and will enhance rather than possibly detract from student learning.

One thing that prevents faculty from intentionally designing their courses is lack of knowledge about pedagogy, andragogy and heutagogy. Most faculty members are experts in their field, but are not necessarily experts in creating content to facilitate others in the learning process. Most teach the way they were taught; many learned what they did not want to do from teachers who did not deliver material in a way that facilitated their own learning. Many universities are responding by creating centers for teaching and learning to provide information for faculty content experts to learn how to deliver information effectively to students. This includes information on both face-to-face and online course design through faculty development opportunities and training. In essence, someone can be an expert nurse, physician or pharmacist, but may very well not be an expert in educational methods. This is not due to intentional wrong doing on the part of the faculty members; instead, it is lack of knowledge of how the brain works and what enhances and detracts from student learning. Faculty development can help fill these gaps.

Lecture is still the most commonly used educational practice in the United States. However, lecture is a passive activity rather than an active one. To promote transformative learning, active assignments should compromise a significant portion of the learning process and lectures, although still needed, take a back seat. Students need to interact and develop a sense of how to obtain information and use it in order to transform from memorization of facts to a quest for knowledge and application of knowledge to acquire critical thinking skills. Students are not empty vases to be filled; instead, they are intelligent beings who

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