

Chapter 15

Quality Assurance in Transnational Education Management: The Developmental “Global Studies” Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This chapter deals with quality assessment for interdisciplinary university curricula. As a case study, it analyses the recently established “Global Studies” (GS) developmental curriculum at Graz University, Austria. After reviewing literature on concepts of quality for curricula, key concepts for multi-disciplinarity, inter-disciplinarity, and trans-disciplinarity, approaches for their monitoring, and necessary ingredients for multi-paradigmatic inputs, processes, and outputs, this chapter applies these criteria to the ethically and globalization-oriented curriculum Global Studies at Graz University, Austria. A practical set of criteria assessing quality in curricula and in courses is identified, a list of assessment exercises that have been performed so far is provided, and assessment of academic performance and suggestions for future improvements are given. Recommendations focus on the implementation of inter-paradigmatic mutual understanding and include setting up a regular, peer-oriented discourse among all stakeholders and founders of the curriculum and the inclusion of expertise into the curricula commission. All such concrete measures shall underpin the key capability of inter-paradigmatic studies, namely to see complex phenomena as perceived by other stakeholders, friend or foe.

INTRODUCTION

The worldwide integration of higher education, curricula and their quality criteria, as well as practice in international projects and experiences in academic education didactics, suggest the

necessity for transnational collaboration among universities such as clarification of success criteria and subsequently possibly even joint degrees. Higher education management involves governance, self-responsibility and courageous steps in quality assessment that may also be inspired by cutting-edge cases of already implemented developmental curricula that target ethical questions of globalization.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4458-8.ch015

This paper has a double target:

1. Explain and analyze the necessity for Quality Assessment (QA) of curricula, especially in so-called trans-disciplinary, inter-professional and multi-paradigmatic cases such as developmental and Global Studies (GS); followed by assessment strategies proposed in literature.
2. Undertake to measure practice of GS against (1) GS curriculum, (2) international practice, (3) feedback received to date.

As a basis for writing and contextualizing, this paper dwells on both

1. A theoretical literature analysis that scanned ~1000 peer reviewed articles (making use of the Scopus literature reference system) of which ~100 were taken into consideration and ~10 considered as very suitable (among which are Aboelela et al. 2007, Brennan & Shah 2000, Lantis 2004, Fischer et al. 2011, Lattuca et al. 2004, McFadden et al. 2011, Peterson & Wittstrom 2011, Ried 2011, Spelt et al. 2009, Wagner et al. 2011)¹.
2. The concrete involvement and practical experience of the author, in co-founding and implementing the GS curriculum at Graz University and lecturing in practically all courses established specifically for GS, as well as in other inter-paradigmatic curricula.

WHY QA FOR CURRICULA?

The importance of Quality Assessment (QA) during curricula development and subsequent regular quality improvement is widely debated and confirmed in literature for all modes of education (Bernhard 2011a, 2011b; 2012a, 2012b), on both national and supranational levels. On OECD level, various initiatives attempt to strengthen cross-

country compatibility of education management and QA—e.g., IHME (2012), AHELO (2012), IHERD (2012)—often promoted via large international conferences.

Reeves et al. (2012) and Vilgats and Heidmets (2011) provide an overview of key developments in the past three decades. In particular, medical and health care studies already have a long tradition in QA, for which Simmons and Wagner (2009) find that “although inter-professional education and continuing inter-professional education are becoming established activities..., assessment of learners continues to be limited.” The present paper, however, includes such initiatives of learner-centered assessment, e.g. undertaken by Bader and Zotter (2012).

The necessary broad scope of assessment for inter-professional education and scholarship is highlighted by Reeves (2009) who names seven key trends leading to higher quality: “conceptual clarity, quality, safety, technology, assessment of learning, faculty development, and theory”. Evidently, QA is more than merely counting the impact points of lecturers or the political honors of administrators. Grossman et al. (2001) propose a collaborative model of teacher community in the workplace based on mutual respect and professional criteria-orientation: such is ultimately demanded here also, both as a general recommendation and for the case study of GS after literature and bibliometric analyses.

The mentioned extensive literature analysis of hundreds of peer-reviewed papers brought the review framework for interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary curricula taken from Biggs (1993, 2003), and cited in Spelt et al., 2009 (Figure 1) that embraces input, process and output (from left to right) as suggested by practically all the in-depth papers analyzed. For quality learning at university, Biggs (2003) “analyzes the nature of good teaching and provides a framework for reflective practice”. He “proposes the ‘constructive alignment’ model whereby the curriculum,

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