

# Developing a multicultural teacher education curriculum using a collaborative-participatory approach

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Through a collaborative participatory process, in addition to the expected voices of administrators as curriculum developers, other important stakeholders including faculty and students were actively involved in making curriculum decisions. The innovative process of curriculum development reported in this paper entailed reversing the usual approach, from top down to bottom up; an approach consistent with decentralization initiatives and programs presently being implemented in Philippine education, particularly the localization and indigenization of curricular programs.

Generally, the Philippine Normal University (PNU) Agusan campus teacher education curriculum was patterned to the main PNU campus, catering to mainstream students. In this study, the multicultural curriculum outcome was designed to be relevant and responsive to the needs of the local schools in the Agusan community, comprising people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The initiative to deviate from the PNU main campus curriculum aimed to prepare pre-service teachers who could promote educational equality for students with different ethnic backgrounds in the local schools.

A participatory action research model guided the curriculum development process and qualitative data analysis was informed by grounded theory. Four administrators, four faculty members, three students and the researcher were purposively selected to form the curriculum team. The team collaboratively identified the multicultural curriculum focus through a series of curriculum development meetings. Ten (10) meetings with focus groups and workshops were held over a semester from June to October 2008. Meetings were audio and videotaped and documented by fieldnotes with the assistance of two local process observers for local language translation. Verbatim transcriptions of data and individual interviews were coded and analyzed using NVivo software.

The active involvement of all stakeholders particularly the faculty and indigenous students in curriculum making led to the successful creation of a multicultural curriculum. Multicultural contents were identified for infusion in the three components of the teacher education program. The indigenous students contributed much to the multicultural content. Faculty members contributed in the content, pedagogy and assessment. The administrators contributed to curriculum decision making for implementation.

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The purpose of the larger study on which this paper on stakeholders' voices draws, was to introduce an innovative approach to teacher education curriculum development in the Philippines. A collaborative participatory approach aimed to reverse the prevailing top-down model of curriculum making to a bottom-up approach by giving 'voice' to faculty members and students in curriculum decision-making.

### **Giving Voices to Curriculum Stakeholders**

In the Philippines, curriculum development usually uses the top-down approach. More often than not, faculty administrators are the key curriculum decision-makers, appointed by the Central government to curriculum committees to revise or craft new programs. However, curriculum outcomes could be better achieved when the curriculum is contextualized to the needs of its beneficiaries. Curriculum development should involve the voices of all curriculum stakeholders, including teachers and students, to achieve desired curriculum outcomes (Henson, 2006; McNeil, 2006; Oliva, 2005; Wiles, 2009; Wiles & Bondi, 2007). However, in actual practice, it is more often the dominant administrators' voice that feeds important curriculum decisions. This reality is shared across different countries where centralized curriculum making has traditionally been a practice; following a top-down approach (Kelly, 2004).

However, in the real sense of how the curriculum in university actually works, it would be the faculty members and students who should have stronger voices as the implementers, and end users respectively, of the curriculum. One aim of the research reported in this paper was to include the voices of the faculty members and students in curriculum development alongside the significant contribution of the administrators.

Teacher education in the Philippines is primarily offered by the Philippine Normal University, a specialized chartered university established in 1901 after the American occupation. The University has four campuses across the regions in the Philippines (Lopez and Isabela campuses in Luzon; Cadiz campus in Visayas; and Agusan campus in Mindanao). The teacher education curriculum in all campuses was patterned to the PNU Manila campus, catering to mainstream students. In this study, the multicultural curriculum outcome was designed to be relevant and responsive to the needs of the local schools in the Agusan community, comprising people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The initiative to create a multicultural curriculum for Agusan campus aimed to prepare pre-service teachers who could promote educational equality for students with different ethnic backgrounds in the local schools.

### **Research Aim and Question**

This research aimed to explore a collaborative participatory process in the development of a multicultural curriculum that would be suitable to its local context. The main feature of the collaborative participatory process was to directly involve faculty members and students alongside the administrators in curriculum decision making to give them 'voice' and a sense of empowerment. This paper addresses the question, "What are the significant contributions of the stakeholders particularly faculty and students which gave them "voice" in achieving the desired multicultural curriculum outcome?"

### **Methods and Procedures**

The curriculum development process was guided by the following collaborative participatory action research principles (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2001):

- **Collaborative** – Collaborative research encourages the commitment and dedication of the target participants to achieve the common goal, i.e. to create a multicultural curriculum for the social improvement of the local community
- **Participatory** – Participatory research involves the full and active participation of the local university campus (faculty, students, administrators) in the entire research process as curriculum developers. In curriculum planning and implementation those who are affected by curriculum changes must be involved in the process (Oliva, 2005). Thus, the exploration of the collaborative-participatory approach in curriculum development identified three representative groups of participants on the curriculum team.
- **Action-Oriented** – Action-oriented research requires team members to put their institutional vision into practice, such as the advocacy for multicultural education in the classroom and the implementation of the multicultural curriculum in the whole local campus. In this study, it is part of the institutional vision of Agusan campus to cater to the multicultural needs of the students in the local community particularly the marginalized (indigenous) group of people. In order to translate this vision into practice, the pre-service teachers should acquire the necessary multicultural perspective in teaching students in the local schools. A concrete action to achieve this is to infuse multicultural content in the teacher education curriculum.
- **Empowering** – CPAR processes can create a greater awareness among the participants involved of their own problems and mobilize them to make their own initiatives for their own local community development. The strong involvement of participants in the curriculum decision-making process may lead to the successful creation of the desired curriculum outcomes.

The qualitative data analysis was informed by grounded theory. Four administrators (Academic Director, Heads of Education, Arts and Sciences and Languages and Linguistics Departments), four faculty members (three from the Education Department and one from Social Sciences), three students (one indigenous and two with knowledge of indigenous communities) and the researcher were purposively selected to form the curriculum development team. The team collaboratively identified the multicultural curriculum focus through a series of ten (10) curriculum development meetings held over a semester (June-October 2008) at PNU Agusan campus. The topics for the curriculum meetings were made suitable to the entire process of creating a multicultural infusion in the Agusan teacher education program:

- Local Needs Assessment
- Review of Curriculum Standards
- Identification of Multicultural Competencies
- Exposure Trip to Local Community
- Identification of Multicultural Content
- Multicultural Infusion in the Curriculum
- Meeting with a Reference Group
- Identification of Pedagogy and Assessment Strategies
- Syllabus Making and Critiquing
- Presentation to the General Faculty

Audio and videotaped meetings, documented by fieldnotes, and individual interviews were transcribed verbatim, then coded and analyzed using NVivo 8 software (QSR International,

2008). Grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) procedures were applied to data analysis that proceeded according to stages of open, axial and selective coding.

## **Results and Discussion**

Participants' empowerment as a result of being given 'voice' through the collaborative participatory process emerged from the analysis as a particularly strong theme.

### **Administrators' Voice**

Exposure to and experience in the field, both inside and outside the local campus, emerged as important sources of the administrators' voice in curriculum making. It was captured in their capability to share information, to exercise professional judgement about content and pedagogy as well as assessment. During most curriculum meetings where technical knowledge such as policy making was much needed input, it was the administrator, empowered through knowledge and experience who contributed the greater share of decision-making. Proceedings of the meetings revealed the authority of the administrators' words and their power to decide over the academic matters of curriculum planning.

The collaboration of the administrators in curriculum planning further enhanced their legitimate voices as curriculum decision-makers. Their strong personality and expertise in the field contributed much to the development of the multicultural curriculum in the expected sense, but as well, the collaborative process opened up opportunities for administrators to recognise and undertake other significant roles. The collaborative participatory process allowed them to take a facilitation role and not only the traditional authoritative role. Administrators also expressed their voice in taking a mediating role. So, rather than communicating with faculty only through assertions of authority, these important (facilitating and mediating) collegial roles were incorporated into their work to influence curriculum decisions.

### **Faculty Members' Voice**

The faculty members' voice in decision-making revealed itself as an important aspect of the curriculum making process. When curriculum decisions are made locally, involving the faculty, they become more empowered. Faculty members' confidence to be heard could be gleaned from their expertise in the areas of specialization or discipline and pedagogy. All faculty members actively contributed when the topic of a meeting was concerned about the content of their discipline or about pedagogy or other technical courses where they contributed according to the specific subjects that they teach. Their competence to make teaching materials such as course modules also gave them voice to curriculum making. Ability to give critical comments and reactions on curriculum content was another indicator of faculty members' voice in curriculum making and the comments and reactions they provided in discussions about curriculum standards, syllabus making, and pedagogy were relevant inputs to the successful achievement of a multicultural curriculum.

The faculty members' voice in the curriculum could be summed up in their competency and expertise in the area of specialization, pedagogy and assessment that contributed to the creation of the multicultural curriculum. Giving faculty a voice in curriculum decisions further enhanced the competence and skills of those already empowered and provided opportunities for the less involved to also feel empowered.

## Students' Voice

Students shared more about curriculum content than the technical knowledge of the courses. They also expressed ideas particularly related to experiences from their local community culture showing confidence when talking about their way of life, beliefs, values and rituals. For instance, they talked about family clannishness, celebration of festivals in their *barangays*, (the smallest unit of political organization in the Philippines) or indigenous issues such as land grabbing and family feuds. This sharing of local cultural knowledge provided useful feedback for faculty and administrators in thinking about curriculum content. However, there were also limitations in terms of the capacity of students to contribute. They had not been afforded the technical-know-how of curriculum making. They did not have the technical skills and competence that faculty have in developing the syllabus or critiquing the content, objectives and pedagogy of the teacher education programs.

While the students' contribution might be seen as unequal to that of faculty members and administrators, they played their part to make the curriculum useful and realistic for them. Their perspectives provided a good instrument for validating what should be the multicultural content of the curriculum and how it should be relevant. The positive outcome of developing confidence through the collaborative process could be a starting point to spread their wings of empowerment when they become teachers.

## Conclusions

This paper has presented the major contributions of significant stakeholders involved in curriculum planning. The active participation of faculty, students, and the administrators benefitted the creation of the multicultural curriculum for the local campus of Agusan. The collaborative participatory process gave voice to significant people, especially faculty and students in curriculum making. The impact of faculty' and students' voices showed that a bottom-up model in creating a curriculum for a local context is feasible and desirable; a model that other universities with local campuses could use to reverse the top down approach to bottom up when addressing the needs of their own local community.

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