

Developing a student-centered learning outcome-based curriculum in nursing



Desenvolvendo um currículo de enfermagem baseado em resultados de aprendizagem centrado no estudante

Desarrollando un currículo de enfermería basado en resultados de aprendizaje centrado en el estudiante

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In the context of higher education, fundamental ideas regarding curriculum are not always shared or knowingly negotiated⁽¹⁾, thus in this editorial we want to enhance the importance of curriculum development and its role to educate future graduates. The curriculum can be defined to be a tool for the university, education and the development and management of teaching as well as for the students for planning their studies. It consists of the learning outcomes, structure and contents of education and degree programmes. The curriculum is also a plan for the accumulation of students' competence. It describes the teaching that enables the students' learning, supervision and assessment, and illustrates the principles of learning, teaching and the supervision of education⁽²⁾.

Student-centered learning outcome-based curriculum ideas were presented in nursing in South America by project Tuning Latin America in late 2004⁽³⁾, not much later than the work started in Europe by Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Phase II in 2003⁽⁴⁾. This also meant a shift in thinking, when the students' creditation changed towards student workload. The main idea of the Tuning project was to develop a methodology to design and deliver degree programmes on the basis of well identified profiles, translated into learning outcomes expressed in competences and linked to ECTS (European credit system) based on student workload⁽⁵⁾.

Following the Tuning project⁽⁵⁾, the following main steps of the curriculum development were recognized:

1. Discussing the basic conditions. eg. 1. Is there a social need for the programme on a regional or national level? This could be done by consulting the stakeholders: employers, professionals and professional bodies. Is there agreement with regard the length of the programme to be designed in terms of student workload?

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2. Definition of the degree profile.
3. Description of the objectives of the programme as well as the learning outcomes that have to be met. The learning outcomes can be defined as the knowledge, skills and autonomy. Desired learning outcomes of the process of learning are formulated by the academic staff, but also involving student representatives in the process and using input of the internal and external stakeholders.
4. Identification of the generic and subject-related competences, which should be obtained in the programme. The competences for nursing have firstly been defined in the Tuning Latin America project⁽³⁾ and updated in ACE project (Student-centered learning)⁽⁶⁾.
5. Translation into the curriculum: content (topics to be covered) and structure (models and credits).
6. Translation into educational units and activities to achieve the defined learning outcomes.
7. Deciding the approaches to teaching and learning, such as types of methods, techniques and formats, as well as the methods of assessment.
8. Development of an evaluation system intended to enhance its quality constantly.

For example, at Tampere University at the end of the curriculum development process, the obligatory information regarding study modules and each course are checked for the formal approval of the curriculum design committee and the final approval comes from the University's management board⁽⁷⁾.

If one participates for the first time to the curriculum development process that follows the Tuning methodology, there are several matters that need re-thinking. Firstly, to change the content based curriculum to outcome based – one needs to change the thinking from what content teachers are responsible to provide in the classroom to that what students are supposed to have learned eg. What will be the learning outcome after the student has studied the course.

Secondly, when calculating the credits the course gives to students – before we calculated the lecture hours, but in the student-centered workload, we calculate all the student work, whether it is participating in the lecture, self-studies for an exam or preparing and writing a seminar paper. Also the clinical practice for nursing students is calculated based on the student work, which means that not only the hours at wards, but also preparation of reports is calculated. In Europe, we use ECTS as an hour credit unit. One ECTS is about 30 hours of student work, and annually students are calculated to make 60 ECTS worth of studies. The credit unit is used when the structure of the programme or even each course is decided. Based on the own experience, not everything was easy or the definitions were perfect the first time, but gradually the new thinking comes naturally. It also helps, when you understand the advantage for the student or graduate, as they transfer from one country to another, they can transparently provide what they have learned – and what is needed to be able to work in another country.

In the Undergraduate Nursing program at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), the participation of faculty, students, and administrative staff in the Tuning Latin America Project contributed to a systematic analysis of the current curriculum, providing insights into its potentials and limitations. For example, by identifying the skills, approaches, and learning outcomes required for professional nursing practice.

We recognize that the UFRGS Nursing Program, throughout its 75-year history, has trained nurses of excellence for their professional roles. Accordingly, the approach fostered by the Tuning Latin America Project proves to be a powerful alternative, aligned with the program's new national professional curricular guidelines, to strengthen the development of competencies contextualized to the realities of individuals, communities, and society.

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