



Toward a model of curriculum analysis and evaluation – Beka: A case study from Australia



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SUMMARY

All curricula vary in the way that it is constructed, implemented and experienced. Regardless of the context, ongoing evaluation of learning objectives, processes and content within curriculum is critical. Based primarily on the work of Glatthorn (1987), Print (1993) and Reid (2005), this paper describes a case study of an undergraduate nursing curriculum. The analysis described in this paper forms the basis of a process incorporating four key steps: benchmarking, evidencing, knowing and applying (BEKA). By critiquing the literature, and explaining the merge of others' processes and models of curriculum analysis, it is argued that the BEKA framework of curriculum analysis forms a useful and powerful tool enabling understanding of the actual process of teaching, coverage of curriculum content and assessment, and demonstrating linkages between theory and practice.

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Introduction

Nursing curriculum must be contemporary, relevant and responsive to practice realities (Dignam et al, 2012 p 65). Curriculum can be described as a deliberate set of planned learning opportunities offered by an organisation to learners as an interactive event with the experiences learners encounter when the curriculum is implemented (Print, 1993). Irrespective of the approach being taken, curriculum requires scrutiny and evaluation of learning objectives, processes and content. This paper describes a case study of university curriculum evaluation developed and defined in Australia in collaboration with external stakeholders. Based primarily on the work of Glatthorn (1987), Print (1993) and Reid (2005) the curriculum analysis described in this paper forms the basis of a 'process' incorporating four key steps: benchmarking, evidencing, knowing and applying (BEKA). Using the law component of a pre-registration nursing curriculum as a guide, this paper will describe the development of the BEKA framework, its conceptual foundations as well as the process itself. The aim of the analytical process is to enable in depth analysis either related to a particular content area or for a whole curriculum, and it is envisaged that curriculum planners and writers will be the users.

Before examining the BEKA process in detail, the Australian higher education system is described, and then it will be possible to examine more deeply elements of contemporary curriculum evaluation and analysis, leading to the development of the BEKA framework.

A Brief Survey of Higher Education in Australia

The Australian higher education system incorporates 39 universities (37 public and two private); one Australian branch of an overseas university; three other self-accrediting higher education institutions; and approximately 150 higher education private providers accredited by state and territory authorities. While the Australian Government has the primary responsibility for public funding of higher education, decision-making, regulation and governance for higher education are shared among the federal, state and territory governments and the institutions themselves. Higher education quality is assisted and managed via two inter-related systems, the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). Australia's universities have a relatively high level of autonomy to work within the legislative requirements associated with their government funding (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, DEEWR, 2011; TEQSA, 2011). There is no national curriculum for undergraduate nursing in Australia. Instead each programme or courses' curricula that leads to qualified registered nurses must be accredited by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia.

Curriculum Evaluation and Analysis

It is within an Australian University that the BEKA process was first developed by the author. Working within this context developing and using various curricula the author was acutely aware that a range of issues and processes influencing curriculum coherence and evaluation exists. How performance of students meets stated objectives, comparing performance of students with specific standards,

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and describing and judging a curriculum are all measured with curriculum evaluation.

Curriculum evaluation is needed for decision making around curriculum. It is difficult to over emphasise the inter-subjective nature of problems associated with processes and products, outcomes and the issue of value judgements – all are of critical interest in curriculum decision making (Brady and Kennedy, 2010). In global higher education, process versus content is a genuine tension and outcome-based education is being championed within assorted professions. Outcomes may now be considered more in favour than 'objectives'; notwithstanding the contribution that Biggs and Tang (2007) have made regarding objective and assessment alignment at the classroom level.

Curriculum evaluation is also about assessing the nature, impact and value of a curriculum through the systematic collection of evidence, analysis and interpretation of that information with the intention of making a decision. A variety of techniques such as questionnaires and interviews are useful to provide the comprehensive collection of information to aid curriculum evaluation.

An in-depth systematic curricula analysis using sound principles and pedagogical concepts was required by the author, hence the merging of others' models and processes to create the BEKA process. The critique of models and processes found within the literature will now be explained.

Several curriculum process models have been published. Robley and his colleagues used English's (1978 and 1984 cited in Robley et al., 2005a) three level map, 'declare', 'delivered' and 'learned' curriculum and added a fourth 'assessed' curriculum (Robley et al., 2005b). While considered useful, there is limited meaning of the maps in the forms used and the processes are complex. A descriptive mix of components to assist curriculum mapping is also offered by Harden et al. (2001). Ten windows are used to view the curriculum offering a transparent curriculum mapping matrix that can assist with demonstrating the links between the different elements. It is comprehensive and enables communication between all stakeholders however it also requires 'buy in' by stakeholders and institutional support, is time intensive and does not include teaching effectiveness.

A more recent conceptual mapping framework by Matveev et al. (2010) from the United States of America offers a five step process for mapping (intended outcomes, course sequence, syllabi, instructional activities and assessment of learning); while both of these processes have clear structure for mapping – with Robley's being based on benchmarking against generic skill development, it includes only four 'types' of curriculum and Matveev et al. (2010) had no benchmarking component.

Glatthorn's work with Print's subsequent development offers seven shades of curriculum (recommended, entitlement, written, supported, implemented, achieved, attained) rather than just using four maps and does include benchmarking. (Glatthorn, 1999; Print, 1993, pp3,4). Reid (2005) considers other 'types' of curriculum: for example, the null, the hidden or unintended, the covert and the overt curriculum. The null curriculum is the curriculum that is not hidden but has been omitted; it is missing. That is, when content is deliberately or accidentally not taught. The hidden curriculum may be described as influences other than the intentional curriculum that seem to produce changes in student values, perceptions and behaviours, including implicit rules to survive (Lempp, 2004).

Watchtler and Troein (2003) work (curriculum analysis using published objectives, curriculum director interviews, individual teacher interviews and focus groups with students) also consider curriculum analysis (Sweden) but is limited with only three 'types' of curriculum (intended, implemented and received) and again not addressing benchmarking. Their study however did illustrate triangulation with a multifactorial methodology leading to understanding of a curriculum especially in relation to hidden components.

Thomson's table of specifications enables investigation of objectives, is practical and easy to follow (Australia); Krathwol and Cranton's

Canadian work examines the objectives and taxonomic levels in assessment (Krathwohl, 1998, cited in Cranton, 2000) which enables a robust drilling down to detail approach.

Having considered higher education in Australia and curriculum analysis and evaluation (including models and processes), the BEKA process of development is now explained.

Method

Searches of online databases ERIC, Education a SAGE full-text collection, Informit education databases and Education-line were conducted in 2011 using combinations of the following key terms: *higher education, curriculum, curriculum mapping, concept mapping, curriculum alignment and curriculum evaluation*. Citation searches of the included articles enabled identification of other relevant papers. Following an extensive review of the included literature, several authors' work was chosen from which to develop the appraisal process and framework as none were as encompassing as required.

By choosing to use a combination of methodologies to understand law curriculum in nursing, the author wanted to include as many stakeholders as possible to examine the complete programme for law content, and use a range of methodologies for the purpose of triangulation. The BEKA process uses a concurrent strategy with converging data to provide comprehensive and sequential content analysis (some quantitative and some qualitative) and incorporates ideas from others' curriculum mapping. Fig. 1, a visual representation of the process, is now described. Moving from left to right the components of BEKA are each listed, then 'how' this is achieved, and thematic analysis is then able to be developed and synthesized into the types of curriculum listed – all to assist with answering key questions in relation to any curriculum.

Benchmarking

Clarity is needed to envisage curricula at both at macro and micro levels. Therefore establishing benchmarks is essential. Document analysis and comparison is the key focus for this part of the process.

Evidencing

Collecting and analysing evidence to compare against the benchmarks incorporates document analysis of objectives using Watchtler and Troein (2003) ideas (they reviewed published objectives, engaged in curriculum director and individual teacher interviews, and conducted focus groups). Content and resources are also mapped against the benchmarks. Further detail is established using Thomson's Table of Specifications (1986), the aim being to ascertain the relative emphasis given to each particular topic and outcome. Krathwaol (1998) and Cranton's (2000) work is also used to examine the objectives and taxonomic levels in assessment.

Knowing and Applying

Deeper mining for understanding and corroborating already collected evidence is then sought using interviewing and surveying. These two methods formed the basis for the knowing and applying parts of the BEKA process (see Fig. 1).

Conceptual Framework

The work from Glatthorn, Print and Reid form the basis for the conceptual framework for analysis. The strength of using these types of curricula is the inclusion of the recommended or entitlement curricula which is important in terms of accountability to the profession and the public. Also including an achieved curricula, addresses what students actually learn as opposed to the testing they have

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