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A Model for Developing International Education: Bringing It All Together

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Abstract

There are numerous influencing factors to be considered when developing international education. This Model for Developing International Education was designed to articulate these factors and how they impact on each other. The factors have been grouped into 3 main components: Instructional Design, Communication, and Culture. The model reflects the dynamic, fluent interaction between these components. It is based on a review of the literature, informal collegial discussions, and personal experiences. Formal feedback of the initial model was gathered from colleagues with considerable expertise in international education. Minor revisions to improve clarity were then made to the model based on the feedback.

A Model for Developing International Education: Bringing It All Together

There are many opportunities to be involved in international education. Institutions are often involved in providing programs to enhance competencies for internationally educated professionals, integrating international students into programs, and developing courses and programs for delivery in host countries. Bates (1999) identified altruism, targeting a need in the other country, financial gain, and internationalizing the curriculum as reasons for institutions participating in global education. Additional benefits to involvement in global education opportunities include enriching perspectives at home (Styles, 1993), intellectual stimulation, creativity, understanding, and increasing global awareness (Goldberg & Brancato, 1998). There are numerous influencing factors to be considered when developing international education. The Model for Developing International Education was designed to articulate these factors and how they impact on each other.

The Model

The model consists of three separate circles (See Figure 1). Broken lines surround the inner two circles to depict the synergy and free flow of information back and forth between all circles. Circles are used, rather than a linear model, to demonstrate that the components do not have a definitive beginning or end, but reflect a dynamic, fluent interaction between the three main components: Instructional Design, Communication, and Culture.

Figure 1: Model for Developing International Education

Instructional Design

A systematic approach is needed to meet the challenges associated with the development of effective learning materials for an international audience. The instructional design (ID) process, as seen in the innermost circle, provides this. Instructional design is the systematic approach to the analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation of effective learner-centered instruction. ID includes the following phases: needs assessment, learner analysis, task and concept analysis, instructional goals, teaching-learning activities, resources, support services, and evaluation (Kemp, 1985). Integration of adult learning processes and pedagogical issues are inherent. The underlying premise is that the overall process for effective instructional design is universal and the process does not change whether the audience is local or international. However, the key for international education is the consideration of each phase within the cultural context. Communication is recognized as an essential feature to ensure effective outcomes from this process.

Needs assessment. A comprehensive needs assessment is the basis of the ID process. The program developer's perceptions of what is needed may be quite different from the client's belief of what is needed. Avenues for input from stakeholders and focus groups should be provided. For international education, it must also reflect the cultural perspective. A cultural profile, a market analysis for the proposed program, and a stakeholder analysis are strategic inclusions. Ideally, the needs assessment is completed during an on-site visit to the host country. According to Thiele, Higgs, and Busch (1993), true appreciation of the cultural differences is provided by experiencing the culture firsthand. The in-country visit provides an invaluable opportunity to experience these cultural realities.

Learner analysis. To ensure that the international education program/course is aligned with the target audience's mental processes and learning styles, a thorough learner analysis is crucial. Again, this is best carried out during an in-country visit. It is important to determine the motivating factors for students to enter the program or course and what personal or professional issues could impact their studies. The learner analysis reflects the learners' previous educational experiences, past educational successes and failures, learning styles, familiarity with and attitudes toward specific teaching-learning strategies, and cognitive skills. Some learners may not have access to textbooks and references or they may have little or no access to and ability with technology. Rote memorization is important in some cultures, whereas problem solving is important in others. Learners from other cultures may not feel comfortable with collaborative learning and evaluation techniques. North American courses encourage critical skills, debate, and discussion; learners' views are important; and teachers' views can be challenged. In some international audiences, this would be viewed as a sign of disrespect and poor academic quality and learners are hesitant about expressing

an opinion. Another important consideration is language. Some institutions may expect students to learn in a second language; therefore, their proficiency with this language must be determined.

Task/concept analysis and instructional goals. Completing a concept and task analysis and determining the desired outcomes is another important aspect of planning international education. Cognitive, psychomotor, and attitudinal competencies may differ in different countries. There can be varying professional classifications with different roles and responsibilities. For example, Canada and Chile have different classifications for levels of nursing. The scope of practice of technical nurses in Chile overlaps some roles and responsibilities of licensed practical nurses in Canada as well as some of those of registered nurses (Bolan, 2003). Differing educational standards can result in varying prerequisite knowledge and skills between countries. Instructional goals are then developed based on well articulated competencies expected of the graduate.

Teaching-learning activities and resource development. Teaching-learning activities should be determined based on the findings of the learner analysis. This does not preclude introducing new strategies, but additional preparation of the students and teachers might be needed and orientation and development for students and teachers should be factored in. Existing materials cannot be simply translated for a new audience. They require adaptation for the cultural context. Content may need to be adapted to reflect desired outcomes and competencies. The selection of media is influenced not only by the learner analysis and instructional goals, but by the accessibility and sustainability of communication and technology infrastructure. Resources must be available in the required language. In one project in Pakistan, technical service manuals for a linear accelerator were supplied in Chinese. If learners are second language speakers and they are expected to study in the second language (such as English), the level of English in existing resources should be considered.

Evaluation. Ensuring educational standards are maintained when a course or program is being delivered by another country that may have differing educational standards becomes a major challenge. Maintaining accreditation can be a significant consideration for a program being offered to a global audience. Detailed evaluation plans are needed, which include formative and summative evaluation strategies, to determine the extent of mastery of the desired outcomes by the learner. Creativity and thinking outside the box may be needed for evaluating second language learners. Inclusion of a Program Evaluation Plan, with accompanying tools, can facilitate determining overall program effectiveness and adherence to educational standards.

Communication
A flexible, creative, respectful working relationship of team members participating in international initiatives facilitates the development process. Communication leads to trust and a higher commitment

between partners, and reduces misunderstandings. Having an understanding of cultural similarities and differences promotes readiness and preparedness for future discussions.

Partnerships. Having a local partner who believes in the international initiative is strategic for program development. The local partner facilitates local organization and coordination, as well as provides insight into the cultural context. Heffernan and Poole (2005, p. 227) state, "Among the challenges for international education managers and practitioners, developing and maintaining effective relationships between partners is arguably among the most important." Partnerships should aim for win-win situations and the development of a program that facilitates learner success. Partners should be enthusiastic and committed to the project. An atmosphere that is conducive to team building and collaboration is essential.

Roles & Responsibilities. Good planning is crucial. Clear objectives and goals are essential and should be clearly articulated. Roles and responsibilities of all partners and stakeholders should also be clearly articulated. What is the financial arrangement – who pays for what; how are profits distributed; who administers the finances? Who supplies the study location? Who is responsible for teacher and learner development and support? Who is responsible for marketing and promotion? Who is responsible for curriculum development? Who supplies the teachers?
One cultural aspect that can impact on communication is the interpretation of time and attitudes toward adhering to timelines or schedules. Clear timelines are very important along with the consequences if timelines are not adhered to. However, timelines should not be too rigid and should be able to accommodate reasonable delays. All Memoranda of Understanding, contracts, and agreements should be in writing and clearly document objectives, goals, roles, and responsibilities. Deliverables, financial responsibilities, and quality assurance strategies should be integrated into the documentation.

Decision making. Clear lines of decision-making need to be determined. A person for each partnering institution must be delegated the capability of making decisions for that partner. The role of stakeholders in decision making should also be decided. A process for solving problems and resolving disputes should be delineated. While a win-win strategy for conflict resolution will be the aim, it must be decided which partner has veto power.

Communication channels. Differences in languages can obviously be a major challenge with communication. Translation can often affect the flow of a discussion and it may be difficult to ensure accurate translation, particularly of complex subject matter. Deliberations should address who regularly speaks for each partner and situations that require communication with other officials. The infrastructure that supports communication channels should be evaluated. The reliability of the infrastructure will impact the reliability of communication channels and will influence how partners communicate. The length of

time to send and receive something through the postal service, the length of time it normally takes for items to clear customs, and the availability and reliability of email are considerations. Large variances in time zones and differing work weeks and holiday schedules can also be issues that impact communication.

Trust. Trust is established via a flexible, creative environment; mutual respect; mutual goals; clear roles and responsibilities; and good communication. In-country visits enable face-to-face interactions that facilitate the development of interpersonal relationships. According to Gruendemann (1999, p. 614), conveying an understanding and knowledge of local manners, customs, and attitudes facilitates trust. "Often, it is the traveler's sensitivity to local traditions and practices that makes a visit successful."
A flexible, creative environment is needed that can cultivate an attitude of accepting that not everyone works the same. There must be mutual respect and differences should be embraced. Articulating mutual goals and clear roles and responsibilities will reduce misunderstandings that can negatively impact on trust.

Culture
A thorough cultural analysis and identification of cultural differences is crucial to the development of effective, sustainable programs and learning materials within a global environment. Sensitivity and understanding of the cultural context facilitate the development of effective relationships and preparation for in-country visits and meetings with local stakeholders. Completion of a generic profile of internal and external cultural elements is included as part of this assessment and ensures that there are no preconceived notions. It is strategic to complete the cultural analysis as part of the needs assessment as this analysis impacts the entire design/development process.

Infrastructure. Infrastructure encompasses communication and transportation networks. Current status, stability and dependability, plans for development, and sustainability for new initiatives are determined. For example, if e-learning is planned as an educational resource, can the current bandwidth support it? If infrastructure will be developed to support this resource, can it be sustained? Physical development of housing for developers and teachers who will be living in the host country is also assessed.

Technology. The availability, accessibility, and reliability of technology are important to note. Again, the current status, plans for development, and sustainability are determined. The familiarity of users and the need for personal development of instructors, learners, and technical support people if technology is incorporated into an educational program is important to timelines and financial planning. The costs for upgrading technology are also included in the assessment.

Institutions. The institutional environment may include healthcare facilities, educational facilities, and industry in general. "Industry"

reflects companies involved with oil and gas, electricity, telecommunications, forestry, agriculture, and civil engineering to name a few. The assessment includes resources, stage of development, and the overall management of day-to-day operations. The K-12 and post-secondary education systems have key significance in determining prerequisite skills and knowledge and past educational experiences. For health programs, the healthcare facilities are of prime importance. Industry involvement is secured in two ways: focus groups and advisory bodies. Focus groups are created when a new program is to be developed. A panel of industry experts is tasked to generate specific requirements that must be met by this new program to assure that it meets the needs of industry. Advisory bodies are established to ensure that developed programs maintain their relevance to industry. Both of these initiatives are means of establishing public-private partnerships.

Specific program-related considerations can be accommodated within these factors. For example, the development of nursing programs would consider nursing-related issues as a component of the institutional assessment. This would include the basic nursing education, scope of practice, presence of regulatory bodies, and unique ethical-legal issues. These aspects impact the task/concept analysis, instructional goals, and clinical teaching resources and activities.

Institutional factors affect not only the development of the educational program, but are also considered in relation to developers or teachers who may move to the host country with their families.

Politics. The political stability of the country must be assessed. Political stability is crucial because a new political administration may not agree with the new program being developed. Policy shifts can impact the program being developed. Even differing political views within the country can affect goals. Political unrest can cause recruitment problems for instructors and developers to visit, teach, and/or live in the new environment. Efforts to improve social, educational, and health conditions provide insight into the future directions for the country.

Economics. Closely related to political stability is the economic status of the country. Current economic status, potential for growth, and confidence from domestic and foreign investors will impact on resources that can be available for new programs. Economic recessions can cause funding problems for a program under development. Working with a developed versus a developing country will influence the availability of financial and other resources, not only for the development and implementation of the program, but for the sustainability of the program.

Language. A major challenge to the development of partnerships, agreements, and program development is differing languages. Translations can lead to different meanings of words and messages. Non-verbal communication must also be considered. Different cultures have different interpretations of physical gestures and differing perceptions of acceptable personal space and physical

contact. For example, Latin American societies tend to require little personal space compared to North Americans (Andrews & Boyle, 2002). Physical touching is acceptable in some cultures and not others. For example, a kiss on the cheek is a normal greeting in business relationships for Chilean cultures, but not for North American cultures (Bolan, 2003). In the Middle East, cheek kissing is acceptable, but for the same gender only.

Customs. Being familiar with local customs is essential. For example, it is considered rude in the Middle East to pass food with the left hand or to show the soles of one's feet. Conventions for business and social dress and appearance must be adhered to. In some cultures, it is acceptable for visitors to wear the national dress; in other cultures, this would be considered an insult. For developers, instructors, and others visiting a host country, different food, eating habits, and housing can provide challenges in some cultures. Non-adherence to local customs can be a deterrent to the development of effective partnerships.

Time. Time orientation is another important element. North American societies are very time-oriented and aim to achieve goals in as little time as possible. Other societies are more relaxed and comfortable with a leisurely approach to business. Some cultures consider it rude not to arrive on time for a scheduled appointment, but it is perfectly acceptable in other cultures (Gruendemann, 1999). Time for socialization may be a crucial element in the development of effective partnerships. In some cultures, getting down to business as soon as the meeting begins is expected; whereas others not only take time to offer and enjoy refreshments, but would consider it rude if these civilities were not provided.

Religion. Consideration of religious norms can be fundamental. For example, in Islamic countries, special classroom scheduling is required to accommodate Ramadan. Religious mores can require accommodations in teacher-student interactions, male-female interactions amongst peers, or accommodations for dress in lab situations.

Social/Relationships. The significance of relationships with friends and family should be included in the cultural assessment. Some cultures keep work commitments and family responsibilities as separate as possible, whereas others consider family related absences and last minute meeting changes due to family commitments to be legitimate (Andrews & Boyle, 2002). Gender issues and gender related roles and expectations should be included.

Values. Values and norms, beliefs and attitudes, and work habits and practices can be quite different between cultures. Gestures to "save face" and ensuring that neither hosts nor guests are embarrassed can lead to misunderstandings. All of these factors can significantly impact on overall planning and development.

Developing the Model

The development of the model was based on a literature review, informal collegial discussions, and personal experiences. It was first presented to a group of approximately 120 nurse educators at the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing conference in 2005. Formal feedback was by using a modified Delphi technique. The model was emailed to a group of 25 experts in international education. To ensure a variety of responses, these experts were randomly chosen from Canadian universities and colleges in all geographic regions of Canada. A brief description of the model and a short questionnaire was included. Feedback was sought regarding the clarity of the model, model usability, what was liked and disliked about the model, and suggestions for revisions to the model.

There were 5 verbal responses. Verbal feedback was very positive and resulted in no suggested revisions to the model. There were 6 written responses. All written respondents indicated that the model was clear and he/she would use it. Only minor revisions to improve clarity were needed.

The comprehensiveness of integrating all of the important factors and the importance of having broken lines depicting the dynamic relationship between the components was identified. The synergy of the model was recognized. The model did "bring it all together." There were 3 suggestions to include religion as a cultural factor, which was incorporated. The need to ensure the inclusion of past educational successes and failures and the provision of opportunities for stakeholder and focus group input was also identified. Following deliberation of all these factors, the program developer has the data to effectively manage the development of international education.

Conclusion

There should be constant interaction between and continuous consideration of the three main components of the model and continuous consideration for each level. Utilizing the instructional design process while considering communication issues and the cultural context provides a systematic approach to program development that promotes the flexibility and adaptability needed for effective and sustainable outcomes. Developments in infrastructure and technology and changes to countries' political, economic, and social arenas will continue to influence education. As well, extraneous factors may interfere with the original plan. Therefore, global initiatives need to be highly flexible to adapt to these changes.

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