

Responsive Community development curriculum as a pathway for transforming local communities

Topics: Curriculum development

Authors: Grey Magaiza, Nomcebo Dlamini, Rosaline Sebolao

Abstract

As an emerging professional occupation, community development requires a series of certified qualifications to support its growth. The development of these qualifications needs to be embedded in not only a transformative curriculum framework but also one that is responsive to the ever-changing student profile, theory-practice gap, legislative-professional needs and increasing relevance of the university to local communities. This article focuses on the processes of responsiveness a rural higher education institution undertook to develop a series of postgraduate qualifications in community development, particularly the Master of Community Development and the Postgraduate Diploma in community development. Using a transformative learning paradigm underpinned by inclusivity, communicative learning, social justice, and curricula contextualization, among others, a team of six academics from the University of the Free State (UFS) and Appalachian State University (USA), the teaching and learning manager (UFS), and distance learning team from UFS South campus sought to create a responsive community development curriculum. Over 36 months of extensive consultations with Community development field supervisors, Department of Social Development national and district offices, South African Council for Social Service Professions, and the civic sector, a qualification need was identified. The need to create a responsive curriculum sought to align with professionalization requirements, as per the Social Service Practitioners Draft Bill, 2019, which requires all community development practitioners to hold relevant community development qualifications. The overarching question this paper seeks to answer is not only about the scholarly meaning of responsive curriculum, but how in our context, we designed a responsive community development curriculum to transform local communities. Responsive curriculum design is a contested concept with multiple meanings and intentions, especially within higher education. By teasing out these contestations and illustrating the process followed to outline how a responsive community development curriculum was created, this paper reflects the process by a team of academics and academic developers at a rural university in South Africa. By embracing an epistemology of reflection in action, the team sought to evolve a curricular praxis that engenders the public good and pedagogic efficiency. The article further analyses the importance of engaged scholarship in higher education. As institutional strategies of universities evolve, the higher education sector is increasingly required to improve societal well-being, which is especially so in the social services programs such as community development. This entails practicing engaged scholarship to intentionally inculcate community realities in the curriculum to directly relate teaching to the experiences of communities and frame solutions to improve the lived realities of communities. The curriculum can be a powerful vehicle to engender positive community change in an increasingly plural and diversified world.

Keywords: Responsive curriculum, community development, curricular praxis