Collaborative Development of Curriculum Designed to Foster Global Competence: A Report on Project Products, Results and Outcomes

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Abstract
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Keywords
curriculum development, global competence, learning modules

Disciplines
Curriculum and Instruction | Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Fashion Business

Comments

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Collaborative Development of Curriculum Designed to Foster Global Competence:
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The purpose of this paper is to share the products, results, and outcomes of a three-year collaborative project funded by a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Higher Education Challenge Grant that addresses the issues brought about by globalization and the challenges involved in educating students to become part of the future textile and apparel industry workforce. Understanding apparel production and distribution processes requires an in-depth knowledge and consideration of the complexities of commerce, labor, and trade practices unique to countries across the globe. The primary goal of the collaborative project, therefore, was to create learning opportunities that foster global competence and cultivate problem-solving skills among students in textile and apparel programs.

Global competence means having respect for and understanding of diverse experiences and points of view. The need for global competence does not just pertain to the process of higher education, it is also germane to its outcomes. Specifically, graduates are leaving universities to enter a workforce that is inherently global in nature. International trade agreements, coupled with increasing global competition have forced the U.S. fiber, fabric, and related products industries to re-define and reposition themselves in order to remain competitive. Over the last 25 years, these industries have globalized most, if not all of their operations in terms of manufacturing and production (Gerreff, 2000). With this shift has come the challenge of production that spans national boundaries (Taplin, 2003). As these U.S. industries become increasingly globalized, to remain competitive the face of the workforce itself has had to change, requiring professionals capable of dealing with cultural differences and diverse perspectives on a multi-national scale (Hodges & Karpova, 2006). Fostering a comprehensive understanding of the global dimensions of apparel manufacturing and distribution practices within the classroom is imperative to ensure that graduates are capable of leading the industry into the future.

The three-phased project involves partnerships forged between textile and apparel faculty at three U.S. universities and faculty in similar programs at two universities in Thailand, one university in Australia, and two universities in Russia. Phase I of the project involved data collection and analysis among and across the three U.S. institutions as well as in the three collaborator countries. Secondary data were collected on the industry within each country. The research team then traveled to conduct interviews with industry professionals and government/trade officials within Russia, Thailand, and Australia. Interviews were also
conducted with industry professionals in different areas of the U.S. Input from participants was sought regarding the issues and problems faced when working together on a global platform. Participants were also asked to share their perceptions of the skills and abilities needed by students to deal with these issues as future industry professionals. Focus groups with faculty and students at universities in each of the four participating countries were also conducted. Focus group participants were asked to share their views on the need for global learning opportunities and projects based on real-world issues and challenges faced by the industry. A total of 44 industry, student, and faculty interviews and focus groups were conducted in the four countries.

Findings from the interviews and focus groups were then used to inform Phase II of the project, which involved the development of course materials and collaborative projects for introduction into existing textile and apparel courses. Course materials included compilations of readings, videos, and case studies based on Phase I data. Collaborative projects between U.S. students and students at the partner international universities were created and tested in existing courses. Modules were then developed which integrate these collaborative projects and course materials. A total of eight modules were created, each designed to be relevant to industry needs and prepare students for globally-connected careers.

Each module targets a specific course or content area within the textile and apparel curricula, including sourcing, international trade, business strategy, branding, small and medium sized enterprises, retail development, product development, and professional development. Specific issues currently faced by the industry are dealt with through learning activities built into each module (e.g., supply chain management, manufacturing and labor laws, import and export regulations, etc.). Modules were then implemented in existing courses and tested via pre- and post-module surveys at the collaborator institutions during Phase III. The modules were found to be effective in increasing students’ intercultural communication confidence and cognitive and behavioral cultural intelligence (e.g., mean difference = 0.46, t = 4.64, p < .001). All of the modules are now complete and available for use by any interested faculty. Modules can be accessed via the web and require only basic internet technology for use. Textile and apparel faculty can use all or just a part of a module, depending on their own unique curricular needs.

References