Interdisciplinary curriculum design: a case study from a module on gender, culture and religious diversity

Anita Jonker

Extended Degree Programme

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Stellenbosch University

A special word of welcome

Format of Extended Degree Programme (EDP), Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

1st academic year over 2 years

- **1st year:** 2 mainstream subjects + 3 EDP support subjects
  - (i) Information Skills (12 credits),
  - (ii) Texts in the Humanities (12x2 credits) &
  - (iii) Introduction to the Humanities (24 credits): **consists of 4 different term modules**

Recognition and thanks

- **Prof Christine Anthonissen**

- **EDP colleagues and tutors: from 2010**

- **Our guest lecturers: different faculties and disciplines**

Topics and educators (1)

Theories about origins of the universe, the earth and humanity.

- Prof Henk Geyer, Theoretical Physics

- Prof Shaun Wyngaardt, Nuclear Physics

- Dr Jurie van den Heever, Botany and Zoology

- Prof Louis Jonker, Old & New Testament, Faculty of Theology.

Topics and educators (2)

Gender, culture and religious diversity: interdisciplinary approach.

- Prof Xolile Simon, Intercultural Theology, Missiology and Science of Religions

- Prof Dennis Francis, Sociology and Social Anthropology

Topics and educators (3)

Ancient African civilisations / Mythology

- Prof Sakkie Cornelius, Ancient Studies

- Ms Carina Malan, Ancient Studies

- Prof Annemare Kotze, Ancient Studies

Topics and educators (3)

Visual art and culture

- Dr Sophia Sanan, Visual Arts.

- Dr Karolien Perold, Visual Arts.

Student activism

- Ms Vanessa Mpatlanyane

Theme 6: Contemporary SA politics

- Anita Jonker

Topics and educators (4)

Gender, culture and religious diversity: interdisciplinary approach.

- EDP English & Afrikaans language support lecturers (Shona Lombard: Afrikaans & Anita Jonker: English)

- **EDP tutors** (Earl Basson: Kaaps & Afrikaans); Busiswa Sobahle: isiXhosa & English)

The case for the Humanities (1)
The Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences in SA (June 2011)

Recommendations of report:

- the formation of an Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, the establishment of an African Renaissance programme and a national Centre for Lifelong Education.

- dilemmas, such as the encroachment of **managerialism** at universities, should be countered

- "de-territorialisation" of the university student is proposed, by increasing continental and **international** student exchange & holistically trained global citizen

"Consensus Study on the State of Humanities in South Africa: Status, prospects and strategies".
(The Academy of Sciences of SA) (August 2011)

- The report declares the humanities to be in **a state of crisis**. It recommends idea of a broad-based Humanities curriculum...in an interdisciplinary core study programme for undergraduates, which exposes all university students to some study in the Humanities.

- It asks: "What is the purpose of higher education?"..."In recent discourse...the purposes of higher education are taken to be entirely economic and instrumental to the economy'..."[some] universities emphasise applied research and believe that universities should equip the graduate for the job market"

Redesigning the Humanities curriculum: Key theoretical assumptions

1. **Central concept / core value: one common humanity & one common destiny.**

2. **Critical questioning of orthodox thinking and everyday opinions & assumptions about religion and culture.**

3. **Appreciation of complex world and alternative worldviews.**

4. **Humanities offer a bridge between dynamic pasts & present.**

5. **The importance of trans-disciplinary cooperation between Science & Humanities to solve complex real world problems.**

6. **Striving for a balance between the whole and the parts.**

7. **Emphasis on African heritage & Renaissance.**

What is curriculum design?

- "Curriculum is what is successfully conveyed to different students by committed lecturers using appropriate materials and actions…" (Schwab, 1983)

- Critical engagement between students and lecturers around the subject matter appropriate for a specific place and time.

- How should student & lecturer **interact** so that the education process equip the student with critical thinking and appreciation for the value of civilisation?

7 elements of curriculum design (adapted from Dillon, 2009)

1. Who are the students? (situatedness in SA history; their dispositions, learning styles, cultural differences)

2. Who should be the educators? (educators' personalities, cultural & disciplinary backgrounds)

3. What should be taught? (nature, content & format of subject matter)

Elements of curriculum design (2)

4. What is the context? where & when?

5. What is the educational purpose?

6. How should student & lecturer interact for optimal learning?

7. What will be the result?

The extended degree programme (EDP) at FASS

1. **Students' profile:**

- **historically & educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.**

- **Extra-curricular challenges.**

    - **culturally & linguistically diverse group English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, Xitsonga, Sepedi, Setswana, Shona, isiZulu.**

Students' profile (2)

➢ Some **African mother-tongue speakers** speak only African languages before school. Some are taught in their mother languages for their first 3 school years, are then forced to switch to English.

➢ Some **Afrikaans students** speak **Kaaps** at home, but must speak Standard Afrikaans at schools,

➢ Some **Afrikaans students** sent to **English** schools; difficulty to command one language.

➢ Students' technical and academic vocabulary and academic writing skills are limited.

The nature, content & format of subject matter

- **The central question of curriculum:** What knowledge is worth most / what should be taught?

- **Teaching format to optimalize learning:**
  - ➤ **Monday:** key concepts taught & tested
  - ➤ **Tues/Wed:** lecture 1 Friday: lecture 2
  - ➤ **Wed, Thurs, Frid:** tuts (application of knowledge)

The nature, content & format of subject matter (Part 1)

Guest lecturer: Prof Dennis Francis, Sociology and Social Anthropology.

Prescribed reading: Francis, D. A. 2017. Homophobia and sexuality diversity in South African schools: A review, Journal of LGBT Youth

Topics discussed:

1. Gender discrimination experienced by students in school context.

2. Conscientising through concept literacy

3. Application of gender concepts in tut discussions

The nature, content & format of subject matter (Part 1)

1. **Assessments**:
   - Concept quizzes in Language classes,
   - Essay on gender heteronormativity in schools.
   - Term test

2. **Tut & lecture videos**:
   - The gender revolution
   - We should all be feminists (Adichie)

The nature, content & format of subject matter (Part 2)

Guest lecturer: Prof Xolile Simon, Intercultural Theology, Missiology and Science of Religions

Prescribed readings:

- Bowker, John. 2015. *Why religions matter*

- McCarthy, Kate 2000. *Reckoning with Religious Differences: Models of Interreligious Moral Dialogue*

- Haron, Mohammed. 2006. *The Dynamics of Christian-Muslim Relations in South Africa* (circa 1960-2000): From Exclusivism to Pluralism.

The nature, content & format of subject matter (Part 3)

Topics:

- Religions in apartheid South Africa and today: the tensions between African Traditional Religions and Christianity.

- Religious diversity: the potential for dialogue

- Misconceptions about Fundamentalism (Muslim feminist, Karima Bennoune)

Out-of-class experience:

- Visit to the mosque: guided by Imam Shaakir Vermeulen

Panel discussion

The visit to the mosque

How should student & lecturer interact for optimal learning? (1)

1. **In-depth discussions** about feedback during class. Rapid reaction to feedback from students.

Student feedback inform curriculum design.

2. tutorials were redesigned to make provision for **oral discussions** of work (after written work is handed in)

3. **short videos** were introduced to allow time for class discussion

Response to challenge of multicultural & multilingual class

The use of multilingual learning material

- Bilingual terminology lists are drawn up weekly as lectures proceed. Based on

  - ➤ prescribed readings

  - ➤ prescribed subject handbooks &

  - ➤ lecture powerpoints

- 3 interpreters (Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa) used during lecturers to encourage participation.

The use of multilingual learning material

- Lecturers are requested for **bilingual powerpoints** of class lectures. Slides are translated if guest lecturer speaks only English.

- **Podcasts** are made of lectures so that students who struggle with bilingual lectures, can listen to lectures again.

- Example of English/Afrikaans glossary to facilitate understanding in bilingual lectures

biological sex/
biologiese geslag

- The objectively measurable organs, hormones, and chromosomes you possess, e.g. male, female, intersex.

- *Die objektief meetbare organe, hormone en chromosome waaroor jy beskik, bv. vroulik, manlik, interseks.*

gender identity/ *genderidentiteit*

- Gender identity is whether you identify with the gender that was assigned to you at birth. It is about who you think you are (e.g. man, woman, queer, cisgender, genderqueer, agender, third-gender, bigender, pangender.

- *Gender-identiteit is of jy identifiseer met die gender wat met geboorte aan jou toegeken is. Dit gaan oor wie jy dink jy is (bv. man, vrou, queer, cisgender, genderqueer, agender, derde gender, bigender, pangender)*

Islamophobia

Islamophobia is the fear and/or hatred of Islam, Muslims or Islamic culture. Islamophobia can be characterised by the belief that all or most Muslims are religious fanatics, have violent tendencies towards non-Muslims, and reject as directly opposed to Islam such concepts as equality, tolerance, and democracy. It is viewed as a new form of racism whereby Muslims, an ethno-religious group, not a race, are nevertheless constructed as a race.

Shi'a (party / religious branch)
Shi'ite (person)

Literal meaning: 'party' or 'partisans', but refers specifically to the 'party of 'Ali and his descendants.' The Shi'a supported Mohammed's son-in-law, Ali's right to the caliphate and leadership of the Muslim community after Mohammed's death based on some words Mohammed spoke about Ali in the Qur'an. They eventually parted ways with the Sunni on this issue in the major schism within Islam.

Feedback (1)

- There are only two options for gender on this form.
- One of the best aspects of the module was the way the lecturer described each concept, and how people included or identified with the concept, are oppressed because of society's norms and rigid structure.
- teaching us about gender identity and how we should appreciate who we are. To treat each other equally and not let other people suffer from oppression.

Feedback (2)

- It is compulsory to study terms for Monday's, which makes it easier to study and understand at the end of the module when we have to write exams.
- I really enjoyed the interaction of students during class discussions when the floor was opened by our tutor.
- the tutorials were extremely stimulating.
- The guest lecturers and their enthusiasm towards teaching the EDP students are the best aspects of this module.

Feedback (2)

- This module allowed me to see the importance of integration in all aspects of my life as well as how relevant this module is in relation to my other subjects.

- Receiving guest lecturers every week who come from different faculties and programmes.

Our central question remains:

After this module, will the student:

- Have an appreciation for different worldviews?

- Change – think, feel & act differently?

- Be more tolerant towards other cultures, religions and language groups?

- Know how to effect change in society?

- Be able to work in multicultural groups with divergent identities?

- Understand African Traditional communities better

Enkosi kakhulu

Thank you

Dankie