



Reimagining pedagogy for theological education at a South African University: An ethnographic exploration

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Curriculum transformation within Higher Education has been an ongoing process within South Africa Universities. For a long time, apartheid and the conception of race have shaped the education framework. Recently, decolonisation discourses have led to a rethinking about Curricula of Higher Education. Theological Education has been highlighted, as theological faculties within Universities perpetuate European epistemologies. In order to contribute towards curriculum transformation in South Africa, pedagogy for theological education within South African Universities is explored in this article, and a new praxis theory for a reimagined pedagogy is presented. This article presents only part of the research conducted within a South African University. A description and analysis of the empirical research are provided together with a reimagined pedagogy for theological education at a South African University.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The research was performed within the field of Practical Theology with a special focus on pedagogy; however, inter-disciplinary insights were gained from fields such as Education and History, and on an intra-disciplinary level, the research used qualitative methods from Cultural Anthropology and Rituals Studies to empirically study pedagogy as a practice.

Keywords: pedagogy; theological education; coloniality; reimagine; South Africa.

Introduction

Since 1994, a democratic South Africa has seen many positive changes towards transformation; however, 'exclusion, marginalization and social injustice' are still prevalent (Buitendag 2017:65). As part of the overarching transformation processes, in general, and in institutions of higher education, the transformation of the curriculum has been a slow process (Bunting 2006:35). Theological education has also been highlighted as having a continuation of a Eurocentric mode within previously white Afrikaans Universities and resembles that of a 'little Europe' (Buitendag 2014:1). The research gap for the work presented in this article was discovered, whilst the researcher herself was in a lecturing role teaching theology. The Curricula and Pedagogy (Freire 1970), in other words both the content she had to teach and the ways in which she had to teach it, were not conducive for learning in a multicultural and multi-denominational setting, as it was just perpetuating a Western paradigm without taking cognisance of the South African context. The researcher addresses the gap, but specifically the gap pertaining to research regarding the pedagogy of theological education in a Faculty of Theology and Religion within South African Universities and not curricula, in general.¹ This article only presents the empirical research conducted, which forms part of a greater study carried out by Denny (2020).

Osmer's (2008) approach to Practical Theological research was used as the framework for this study by taking cognisance of the recent contributions of practical theologians, such as Browning (1991), Miller-McLemore (2012a, 2012b) and Lartey (2013). This research project will, therefore, follow the guidelines of what Richard R. Osmer presents in his book, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (2008). Osmer presents four tasks of Practical Theological Interpretation as a foundation for research (2008:23):

- Descriptive-empirical Task – what is going on?
- Interpretive Task – why is this going on?

1. Denny (2020). The first author mentioned in this article performed the research, and the second author acted as a supervisor to this project.

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- Normative Task – what ought to be going on?
- Pragmatic Task – how might we respond? (Osmer 2008:23)

An ethnographical thematic phenomenology was used as the framework for fieldwork. With all the data gathered, the empirical research provided themes that are incorporated into a reimagined pedagogy, an intercultural pluriversal² (Mbembe 2015) pedagogy.

Empirical research conducted at a Faculty of Theology and Religion

In order to understand the current pedagogy of theological education at a South African University, fieldwork was deemed to be needed to explore how lecturers and students place themselves. Permission and ethical clearance were received from the University of Pretoria in order to conduct research within the Faculty of Theology and Religion. In 2019, the researcher started on a journey of participating in one module from each of the five theological departments.³ Each Head of Department was emailed, and permission was requested to conduct research within modules in the first semester of the new calendar year of 2019. These modules would include a module from each year group. Five modules were then observed by participatory observation

(Wepener 2005). The scholar of Ritual Studies Ronald Grimes' (2010, 2014) methods for studying rituals were used to observe and describe pedagogy, as rituals are similar to pedagogy in its performance oriented (Cahalan & Mikoski 2014:2) and repetitive nature. The fieldwork also consisted of open-ended interviews with the five lecturers of each module, as well as included open-structured group discussions with students from each of the respective modules (Creswell & Creswell 2018; Strauss & Corbin 1998). Interviews and group discussions were transcribed word for word (Morris 2015), and then arranged systematically, organised and interpreted in order to gain insights into the pedagogy

(Creswell 2014; Mills, Durepos & Wiebe 2010). Pieterse's (2011:100) coding process, 'open coding' was used to analyse the data. Concepts were built from the collected data by abstracting concepts and naming the type of data and describing it with words used in the interviews, group discussions and participatory observation. All the data were analysed, and the following themes emanated from the data.

Language

Language emerged as a strong theme and is focused on power. A strong theme is noticeable from students when

2. Mbembe (2015) defines pluriversity as follows: 'By pluriversity, many understand a process of knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity. It is a process that does not necessarily abandon the notion of universal knowledge for humanity, but which embraces it via a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions' (p. 19).

3. The five departments include Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament and Related Literature, Practical Theology, Religion Studies, Systematic and Historical Theology (refer to the website, <https://www.up.ac.za/faculty-of-theology-and-religion>).

language was discussed. Responses from students included the following:

'For me, it is much better in Afrikaans. I feel much more comfortable. We are all Afrikaans and share the same culture and can speak more openly.' (Afrikaans student, module 1, date unspecified)

During my discussion with the English group of students from Module 2,⁴ to my question pertaining to language, the students responded that language does play a role. An English student mentioned that she prefers English, whilst another student revealed that her native language would be beneficial for learning. This highlights the earlier observation of native language as medium and how learning in one's own language is beneficial:

'I prefer being taught in English.' (English student, module 2, date unspecified)

'But if you have someone who can speak your language, like the Afrikaans students have, that will be beneficial.' (English student, module 2, date unspecified)

'But that is not going to happen. It is ideal.' (English student, module 2, date unspecified)

Another student from module 3 mentioned that she prefers to be taught in her first language. She admits that it is beneficial to all students to receive tuition in theology in their own language for better understanding:

'English is the middle ground. But it will be great to be able to go to someone who speaks your language, if there is something you don't understand. It would be great to have someone for each language.' (Afrikaans student, module 3, date unspecified)

Lecturer D commented on the importance of language, which, to him, plays an integral part of learning. The lecturer sees English as the middle ground, but he responded that being taught in one's own language is better. He further responded that for him, a special connection is present when someone speaks your first language. His response connected with what other students had also mentioned. It is, therefore, a very strong theme and renders it a moot point when designing a reimagined pedagogy. The following is the lecturer's response:

'English is the best language for learning and the common one, as most people can speak and understand English. But being taught in your own language is always better.' (Lecturer, module D, date unspecified)

'I think there is a special connection when engaging with someone from your own race or language, or whatever. So if a lecturer is not necessarily the same race or language as the student, I feel that even in the approach to create a comfortable space, it would be different, and not productive.' (Lecturer, module D, date unspecified)

Denny (2020:120) describes how language is a form of power and was used as a tool of oppression in South Africa (cf. 2000; Madadzhe 2019). In these discussions with students,

4. Modules are presented in both Afrikaans and English separately, and these modules take place in different space and time slots. The University finds itself in a transition phase as modules presented in Afrikaans are being phased out.

it became evident that they all preferred to be taught in their native language. Although students understand that English is the medium and are content with that, it did not stop them from raising their desire to be taught in their own language. Many students reveal the main reason as being better understanding. Afrikaans and English students had the privilege of communicating in their native language. Many students commented about their experiences in the lecture space where in a module presented in English, Afrikaans students could ask questions and get answered in Afrikaans. Many students felt it to be unfair, and thus, language is a core variable element that needs to be addressed in a reimagined pedagogy.

Inclusive, safe space

Most of the students communicated that they considered the responsibility for creating an inclusive space as residing with the lecturer. Students wanted to feel like they were not just a number. Students commented that a lecturer who is transparent and honest about his or her views and lives, who can come into the space of the student and get to know them as students, is ideal. Two students responded to this observation:

'I am not against a white lecturer or saying they should be black, but as long as the lecturer knows about my background and has the right qualifications, then it doesn't matter, he needs to benefit the students.' (English student, module 1, date unspecified)

'It is not about the colour of the lecturer, but the lecturer needs to understand others. The lecturer also needs to learn from you. Inclusive lecturers.' (English student, module 1, date unspecified)

Freire (1970) suggested that it is impossible for students to dialogue about any subject if the educator does not create pedagogical conditions that will accommodate the student in discovering new knowledge.

Student responsibility

The lecturer, however, wants the students to participate, ask questions and raise important cultural issues for discussion. Lecturer A depicts his responsibility:

'Students also have a responsibility. If we can keep communicating, then it is good. Then it is also, cultures should also accommodate to the other side. Yes, we as lecturers should accommodate cultures, but then they should also accommodate us.' (Lecturer, module A, date unspecified)

The lecturers felt that students have the same responsibility within the pedagogical space to accept and understand their culture. Hence, a mutual responsibility for forging an intercultural space is needed from both the student and lecturer.

Online learning

Online lecturing, according to the analysed data, is conducive for learning. The one lecturer who gave an online lecture felt that it had been positive, and that an intercultural pedagogy

was attainable in that setting as students felt freer to bring themselves onto the online platform. Online learning was also discussed with students, according to whom it has advantages and disadvantages:

'[Y]ou can go back and listen to it again and you feel freer to ask questions.' (English student, module 1, date unspecified)

It has to be noted again, as in the description of the pedagogy, that within the five modules that I attended, only one lecturer used the online platform. This lecturer seemed to be keenly interested in online learning as he wanted to take initiative and try different methods to see which worked best with the students. He commented on online learning lectures:

'[A]nd that is exactly what was interesting about the first online lecture, there was much more interaction than what you find in the class ... In the online class, one student actually said he disagrees with me, and that was so interesting, and he had more guts to do it online than in class, so Yes.' (Lecturer, module B, date unspecified)

The lecturer found online learning conducive for communication between himself and the students, and the online platform proved to be a safer space for students to voice their opinions. An online space can be conducive to intercultural pedagogy when students and lecturers might feel freer to respond. The limitation might still be that students do not see and hear each other physically, which might have the opposite effect.

The mixed group of students for Module D also spoke about their experiences with online learning and mentioned that an online lecture had taken place in this module, but that they were not aware of it. The students responded with their experiences:

'We had an online class for this lecture, but no one knew, and nothing happened ... So at this stage, hybrid lessons have been, "read this lesson" and that is it ... But if it could be an online class, that will be so much better, and interactive.' (English student, module 4, date unspecified)

'The network and the Wi-Fi are a problem. Many students don't have access to that, and all the privileged students can remain at home or their private residence and partake of the class. But the rest of the students need to come here, because they want to have access to Wi-Fi.' (English student, module 1, date unspecified)

As we were discussing the pedagogy of Module 2, one student interrupted and commented positively about online learning, whilst highlighting some pitfalls:

'The online class, I loved it.⁵ I am a really shy person and I felt free to interact. I wouldn't want it permanently, maybe 50% online and 50% live, as it is nice to see everyone. Online you can ask your questions, but sometimes you want that personal interaction. It is also easier to give your attention in class than in online. You can rewind the class in the online site.' (Afrikaans student, module 2, date unspecified)

Students felt freer to express themselves on an online platform and could learn from the recording of the lecture for

⁵The student is referring to another module that had an online lecture, as this specific module did not include an online lecture.

better understanding. Some students felt that although they liked the online platform, they also wanted to personally interact with other students of the lecture space. Some students raised concerns about their ability to connect. Another group voiced their view of their online experience as a joke as nothing had happened, and it was basically read-at-home time. The potential of online learning clearly warrants further research.

Intercultural ability

Four of the lecturers showed willingness and understanding for the need for cultural inclusivity, but their comments demonstrated that they simply did not know how such a pedagogy should work. Some responses from lecturers highlighting this theme were the following:

‘But, I don’t know what the difference should be, other than you knowing that you have students that don’t have access to all the things you think they have access to, and that can’t read and write well, but that is socio-economic.’ (Lecturer, module B, date unspecified)

‘So, I think it should play a role, but it isn’t clear to me what it should look like. I don’t know how.’ (Lecturer, module B, date unspecified)

‘... but it isn’t always so easy, because if you aren’t part of that culture, then you are a bit of an outsider, you aren’t a native.’ (Lecturer, module A, date unspecified)

I asked the lecturer whether there was an interaction during the lecture and whether students felt comfortable in asking questions or commenting. He said the following:

‘It doesn’t happen often enough ... But maybe it is me?’ (Lecturer, module A, date unspecified)

‘But maybe, if again, it is my way of handling students, that it makes that students don’t want to give of themselves, then I would like to, so that I can change. If it’s the case that I may be domineering, then I want to change the way I teach.’ (Lecturer, module A, date unspecified)

A clear willingness from lecturers to learn is evident, and therefore, an opportune time to create a framework for a reimagined pedagogy.

Inadequate communication

During many discussions with students, it surfaced that communication in-between the lectures and outside of the lecture space was just as important as communication within the lecture space and during the pedagogy. Some comments from students regarding this communication were provided below:

‘If some lecturers could just learn how to effectively communicate with us, so that we know what is going on. I really feel, yes, they are busy, but sometimes the info is not available.’ (Afrikaans student, module 1, date unspecified)

‘One person could not even speak English. You would write your assignment in English and he would mark you wrong because he doesn’t even understand the terminology.’ (Afrikaans student, module 1, date unspecified)

Although these comments were elicited from the group discussion about other experiences in other modules, it provided insights into what they saw and experienced.

Other students also responded:

‘As you can see, the majority in the class do not take notes, I don’t take notes, because I don’t see what we are taking notes on or for what purpose.’ (English student, module 4, date unspecified)

‘There is no communication on click-up and we haven’t received any material. I have not received any notification, zero. There has been nothing from him.’ (Afrikaans student, module 4, date unspecified)

Effective and prompt communication from the lecturer to the students, regarding the curriculum, affects the way students receive the pedagogy.

Socio-economic disadvantages

Insufficiently schooled students and previously disadvantaged students place strain on the pedagogy, according to both lecturers and students. One of the students pointed this out:

‘With the presentations and material, it shouldn’t be so expensive. We cannot keep up with the other things we need to also do and pay for.’ (English student, module 1, date unspecified)

This emerged as a very strong theme as one of the five lecturers also commented:

‘I think the bigger issue is, you sit with people in front of you who can’t necessarily read, and also who cannot write, so it isn’t really a cultural thing but more a socio-economic situation, with kids that come from weaker schools. But that cannot be my work, to teach them to read and write. Understand? I think what helps is the hybrid thing of the university, that you do a few things beforehand, the methodology of the quizzes, that forces them to read beforehand. So I think the model that the university is striving towards (the picture on the door), the one I don’t really understand, hybrid learning, it helps to catch some of the shortcomings, but it is socioeconomic issues and not cultural, students from weaker schools that don’t have the necessary skills.’ (Lecturer, module B, date unspecified)

A reimagined pedagogy should, therefore, be aware of different levels of proficiency in the lecture space. The lecturer cannot be held responsible for this; however, the lecturer could assist towards students in finding the right guidance. This also includes finances to buy expensive books or to engage in online learning. Some students felt that their socio-economic disadvantages limited their learning experience as they could not afford expensive books and material. When we spoke about online learning, students raised issues about finances and being disadvantaged because white students apparently found it easier to connect and have the necessary equipment.

Theology as a steppingstone to an academic career (Ship Jumpers)

A major issue within the lecture space that puts strain on the pedagogy is the students who use theology as a stepping

stone to another academic career. Lecturers faced students who were not committed and did not want to interact in the lecture space but were merely using theology⁶ as a stepping stone to an alternate academic discipline. Comments from one lecturer highlights this theme:

‘Our problem in the theological department is also the students who only do theology as a bridge towards somethings else, the ship jumpers. We are their point of entry and from here on they go somewhere else, to something else. So some sit here without really wanting to do it, then that just becomes a major problem.’ (Lecturer, module B, date unspecified)

‘According to the system, our theology department, the standards are the lowest of low for entry.’ (Lecturer, module B, date unspecified)

Lecturer A echoed these sentiments on this theme: He said:

‘They come, not really knowing what they want to do and not really committed, and then maybe see theology as a steppingstone towards somethings else.’ (Lecturer, module B, date unspecified)

This is a strong theme and was borne out by students who had only enrolled for theology because they could not get admitted into another faculty. One student also commented that the one theology subject was only for credits. The low level of commitment of such students renders the drive towards an intercultural pedagogy meaningless.

Intercultural interaction

Various students revealed how the first-year camp⁷ had brought them closer together, as it had made them to understand each other better and realise that they are all equal. Some lecturers set compulsory group work:

‘But still last year, when we had Afrikaans and English classes, there was a huge divide. The majority speaks English, and that stays the middle Language. In the class, you can see the different cultures/languages sit together. But I think the theology 1st year camp, brought us much closer to one another.’ (Afrikaans student, module 2, date unspecified)

‘If they include more debates and group assignments, then we will maybe be more comfortable around each other. Then we can learn from one another. You find many white students actually scared to talk to us, I don’t know. you just find they are not comfortable. But when we get into a group, they get more comfortable. Everyone starts talking about their own opinion and you see who they are.’ (English student, module 2, date unspecified)

‘It only happens when we do group assignments or debates and [are] forced to work together.’ (English student, module 2, date unspecified)

‘On the camp we talked, we slept in the same room and it was so comfortable. It was really nice. If they do more group work, that will happen, because there is no way they can combine us.’ (English student Module 2)

6.The admissions requirements of the department of Theology and Religion can be viewed in their yearbook on their website. <https://www.up.ac.za/faculty-of-theology-and-religion>.

7.This camp was, in the beginning of the year, as an introduction to the year ahead. All students were invited to attend as it was for all first-year students from the faculty of theology and religion, irrespective of denomination.

It became clear from my numerous discussions with students that some lecturers (although none whom I involved in my research) had attempted to introduce compulsory group work. Some students found it beneficial, but there were those who had found it awkward. Debates can also play an integral part to reimagine pedagogy:

‘[Y]ou constantly engage and debate and bring yourself. Everyone gets to know each other. So that was interesting and diverse. I would love to interact more in class.’ (English student, module 3, date unspecified)

Although some students felt it to be difficult initially, it, in fact, created an intercultural learning space. One of the students said that it forced him from his comfort zone.

Architecture

One of the lecturers revealed that the architecture and layout of the lecture space were not conducive to an intercultural pedagogy as it failed to stimulate interaction:

‘The only problem I had was the classroom, the structure of the class is a problem. The whole building was built in such a way that makes pedagogy difficult. The rail outside ... I was teaching about the diakonia of disability. I invited clergy that was disabled or in wheelchairs, I went to the Dean and said to him, I need your help. He refused and said he was too busy, but I kept on saying he should come and help. Then I said could you help me pick up this person to get upstairs. With that, I said, if I ask you for an offramp, you would not understand. But now seeing for yourself you understand the need. Now that you carry someone, how will you correct the building? I had to do it.’ (Lecturer, module E, date unspecified)

‘The only obstacle is the structure of the classroom. The only thing you can do is bring them up front, as the chairs can’t even move. But you use the material in a way, the other way that you can do it, – based on play therapy – loosen them and learn to get to know one another. By the end of my class, all students know each other by name, by the way they respond to one another.’ (Lecturer, module E, date unspecified)

Lecturer E, however, had managed to create a different space layout, which seemed to facilitate intercultural learning. A similar theme emerged from a discussion with students, who saw the lecture space as not designed for interaction. As described in my observation, the tables and chairs were often fixed and facing forward. Students from Module 5 experienced the Module’s layout as positive and conducive for interaction and intercultural learning.

Lecturer’s work ethic

It is evident from the study that different cultures permeate the lecture spaces. One of the lecturers felt that the work ethic needed to change:

‘I am an old man; I came to the university as a young man. I had class the whole day from 8:00 to 17:00. You did not bunk class; if you did, it was bad for you. The lecturer didn’t ask you where you were. I learned that you need to work hard. You don’t get sick. If it is exam, your stuff is on time; it was different back then. I grew up in a different school environment. You are responsible. If you do

not hand in the assignment, you get 0. That is it. And then you come back next year. No one feels sorry for you, no one cares about the trauma you go through, you just get 0.' (Lecturer, module A, date unspecified)

A critical insight is that the lecturer seems to feel disappointed. Similar insights were gained from my discussions with Lecturers A-C. They explained that they were not receiving back what they were putting in. They felt that the students were not bringing their side. This feeling can dampen the desire to change their pedagogy and that would defeat the effort. In the conversation with Lecturer A, he constantly referred to his hard work and attempts to change students but saw little to none from the students' side. Lecturer B referred to his own background in the same manner as Lecturer A, revealing that he had become accustomed to a certain work ethic. He seemed to be tired and overwhelmed by students who showed no interest in their academic studies or who were incompetent:

'[W]hen I was a student in the 90s, with only white students, and some of them were also useless, and that isn't a cultural thing, I don't think. It is just how students are. Now you sit with students that come from bad schools and they don't have the necessary skills, or never learned a certain work ethic.' (Lecturer, module B, date unspecified)

The lecturers' frame of reference was a high work ethic learnt during their own university careers, and this standard was the same to which they want to hold the students. In three of the five lecturers, the pedagogy had been set in a certain mould, which demanded more from the students.

Cultural divide exists

Discussions with diverse students revealed a cultural divide; bridging this in a meaningful way proves to be difficult. Some students had experienced that engagement with someone from other cultures was awkward:

'For us it is sometimes very hard to chat with other coloured students, we all have groups, they are already in their groups and we are in our groups, and friends. We are in the minority and therefore we tend to gravitate towards each other.' (Afrikaans student, module 3, date unspecified)

'It goes back to context. They have their own context and we have our context.' (English student, module 1, date unspecified)

'But there is an issue, that some Afrikaans students will only relate to you in Afrikaans. I don't see many of them associating with others. Because the lecturer is white, he has some prejudice. Because in his culture he was brought up like that, to look out for his own kind.' (English Student, module 1, date unspecified)

In another group, students pointed out that the cultural divide within the pedagogical space is a product of societal division. They seem to want the divide to be narrowed:

'I don't think that will happen soon though, that is just the way society is. But I would want it to change. More of unity.' (English student, module 2, date unspecified)

'I think society, in this day and age, we have been accustomed to separation, individuality and everyone wants to be and

make their own success. Difficult to integrate.' (English student, module 2, date unspecified)

'White and black always sit apart, it is just the way it is.' (English student, module 2, date unspecified)

Although they displayed a need and willingness to engage and learn from other cultures, society had accustomed them to a cultural divide. Some students referred to their parents as a hindrance to intercultural learning, as their parents' prejudices concerning other cultures create negativity. Deliberate engagement across cultures was an ongoing theme from various students and lecturers.

Integration of different perspectives into the pedagogy

Clearly, all lecturers agreed that African perspectives and culture should play a role in theological pedagogy. Lecturers are aware of that need and demonstrate a sensitivity towards the matter:

'The whole idea is not that we would totally remove a Western epistemology and replace it with an African epistemology, but the idea of the university is that epistemologies should be added, so we need to work more diversely in the classrooms.' (Lecturer, module A, date unspecified)

'[W]e can always improve and be more open.' (Lecturer, module A, date unspecified)

'I think it must be bad for a student who sits in class and the whole presentation is a Western presentation, and the examples that is used is only Western, so I do feel it is very important to take into consideration the background cultures.' (Lecturer, module A, date unspecified)

In the English discussion group from Module 1, students highlighted their desire for other perspectives to be incorporated into the pedagogy:

'Personally, I think the lecturer should inform us more about the hermeneutics of the subjects, especially in townships and poor living conditions.' (English student, module 1, date unspecified)

'[H]e could have brought up another perspective. It helps to give students a drive and want to learn about his own theology, and not developed by the colonial era.' (English student, module 1, date unspecified)

'We need to be taught our history, third world heroes, not Western theology. African heroes that oppose the Western. We want to find our hope and identify in our own.' (English student, module 1, date unspecified)

Given that conviction, most still felt that culture should not dominate the discourse but be integrated bit by bit into the lecture space. The theme here is different epistemologies, and thus, a variety of sources that can be used and appreciated.

Bigger picture – Responsible citizens

Regarding the cultural divide that has survived years of democracy, one of the lecturers mentioned that he considered it part of a bigger picture:

'[T]here is a bigger project going on out there, and that is our nation's project. We need responsible people, who act responsible, who obey the traffic lights, who work hard, who feels proud to be a South-African. Colour shouldn't matter at all.' (Lecturer, module 1, date unspecified)

Pedagogy can only do so much, in that students also need to become responsible citizens and contribute further to change within South Africa.

Impression of unequal standards

Some students felt irked by the unequal standards which they perceive are present in the faculty of Theology and Religion. Students communicated that they feel certain cultures or language groups were given easier assignments, lectures and exams. Their comments were as follows:

'I don't understand why their level should be so much lower than ours [referring to English students].' (Afrikaans student, module 1, date unspecified)

'We all do our assignments in English, which is our second language ... Our culture gets questioned and so should theirs. We should just be equal ... But the fact that the university and the nation treats people like children is very unproductive.' (Afrikaans student, module 1, date unspecified)

'It is difficult when we have other lecturers from Africa. They are different than us and how we do things here. They have different standards. So I would be willing to do something different. But tell us how and give us tools.' (Afrikaans student, module 1, date unspecified)

A clear difference was notable between white students from white church denominations and black students from previously excluded denominations. It was perceived by students that certain denominations with its students does not enjoy the same level of academia as others, which they feel is unfair. They feel that if a student is accepted into the Department of Theology, the standards should be the same for everyone, no matter race, language or denomination.

Lecturer qualities

Numerous students highlighted that they prefer a lecturer to be open, honest and able to relate on their level as students. The students also spoke about certain qualities they look for in a lecturer: transparency, personal relating and moving into the space of the student:

'One thing about him, he is honest and open and he is not offended when you disagree.' (Afrikaans student, module 1, date unspecified)

'Some are also more open to talking with you ... But with others you struggle to even get to them and then you feel like they don't really care.' (Afrikaans student, module 1, date unspecified)

'With some you know you can run into their office at 16:00 and they will be there for you.' (Afrikaans student, module 1, date unspecified)

'This lecturer is very approachable, and you are always welcome in his office. It comes back to being honest.' (Afrikaans student, module 1, date unspecified)

'Knowledge, open, honest, approachable, able and communicate admin well makes a good package.' (Afrikaans student, module 1, date unspecified)

To summarise, students appreciated the way in which this lecturer was seen to be transparent, honest and approachable. They did not feel that he was removed from them, but that he cared about their academic careers. It became obvious that the ideal was someone who relates to them in a personal way:

'One lecturer that stands out is X. She relates well, does a lot extra and makes sure you understand. If someone relates more and walks the journey with you ... Relating makes it more personal. If someone can speak to you personally, that is awesome. In a big class, it is difficult. Tutorials are smaller and helps a bit. Personal relating goes away a bit. Access to the lecture is available in the week. They can ask more questions and try to remember your name. If someone remembers your name, it is much more personal. Yes, we are a lot. But one other tutor remembered all our names and that makes a huge difference. If he calls you by name, you do your extra bit because knowing your name, he almost already has a bond with you.' (Afrikaans student, module 2, date unspecified)

'He tried to pronounce everyone's names. He really stood out.' (Afrikaans student, module 2, date unspecified)

The students wanted someone to move in their space, get to know them and walk the journey with them. They suspected some lecturers of barely concealed bias, even mentioning that the pedagogy in one module was offensive and that the lecturer was condescending towards them.

Pedagogy to promote equality and create an inclusive space

Most of the students felt that lecture spaces and pedagogy should display cultural inclusivity, as a space where all cultures are included and where they can learn from one another. Some students' responses depict this theme:

'Yes, you have to connect where you are from. We are from different communities, cities and languages. As we are here, it does need to connect where we are from and continue learning. Everything we are grasping we are taking back to our communities.' (English student, module 5, date unspecified)

'Background and culture speaks [sic] to me. It describes who I am. I am this person, because I am from this place. I am in a class from different people from different backgrounds.' (English student, module 5, date unspecified)

'Many times we get upset with one another, because we all have our own beliefs...He engages and no one gets hurt.' (English student, module 5, date unspecified)

Students desire an African perspective to be introduced into the conversations in the lecture and lecture space, rather than the situation (as they saw it) of lecturers promoting only their point of view. Students want a variety of epistemologies to be included into the pedagogy. From these discussions and from interviews with the lecturers, it became evident that they agreed that pedagogy needed to be inclusive of all cultures and should facilitate cultural interaction. The lecturers needed to move into the space of the students in order to demonstrate equality. Most lecturers were positively orientated towards the idea of an intercultural pedagogical experience.

From the data gathered from all the chapters within the greater study and the fieldwork conducted at the University of Pretoria, a reimagined pedagogy for theological education is presented as an intercultural pluriversal pedagogy.

An intercultural pluriversal pedagogy

The empirical research conducted provided key insights into the pedagogy at a South African University, with special reference to faculty of theology. These insights could possibly pertain to other Faculties of Theology in South Africa. The following diagram summarises the main themes from the empirical research:

According to Dames (2017):

An intercultural approach is a shift toward a multicultural engagement that facilitates the possibility of various cultures sharing the same social configuration and therefore the possibility of negotiating values, practices and even identities in order to live a more sustainable shared (teaching and learning) life. (p. 123)

Intercultural means that no one is left unchanged, where everyone present learns from one another as they listen and interact. It is a mutual growing relationship of deep understanding of the others background and cultural position. However, combined with intercultural, Mbembe (2015) defines pluriversity as follows:



FIGURE 1: Main themes from the empirical research.

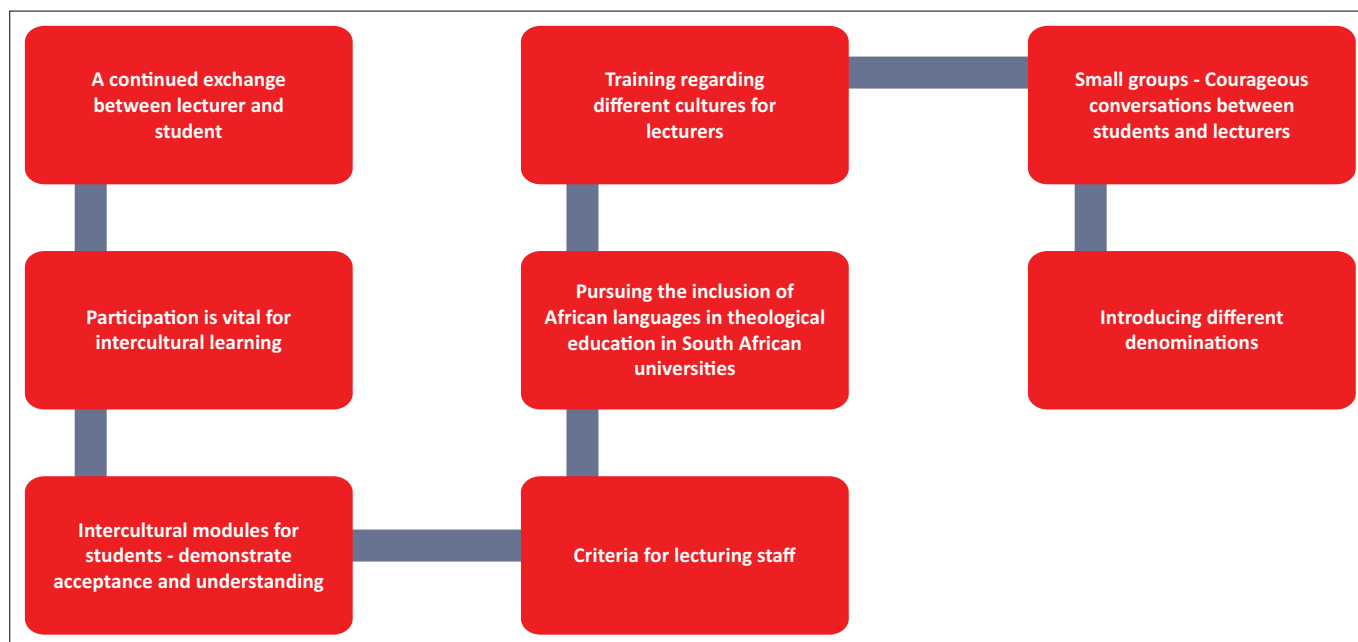


FIGURE 2: Framework for praxis.

By pluriversity, many understand a process of knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity. It is a process that does not necessarily abandon the notion of universal knowledge for humanity, but which embraces it via a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions. (p. 19)

It is, therefore, a plurality of epistemologies that is found within a university setting, and together with intercultural, forms the framework of this thesis' reimagined pedagogy for theological education within a South African University. From the insight gained from the main themes (Figure 1) of this study, the following framework for praxis is presented:

The main themes emanating from the empirical research highlight what is needed within the pedagogy for theological education at a South African university. What follows is a new theory for praxis for pedagogy, which can be implemented in theological faculties in South Africa:

- A continued exchange between the lecturer and student.
- Participation is vital for intercultural learning.
- Intercultural modules for students – demonstrate acceptance and understanding.
- Criteria for lecturing staff
- Pursuing the inclusion of African languages in theological education in South Africa.
- Training regarding different cultures for lecturers.
- Small groups – courageous conversations between students and lecturers.
- Introducing different denominations (Figure 2).

Conclusion

Pedagogy as a tool of equality – education was used as a tool of oppression (Wa Thiong'o 1993); pedagogy can be used as a tool to bring equality into the lecture space. A major

part of this study includes historical aspects of people and their cultures being oppressed. An intercultural pluriversal pedagogy bestows authority and power within the lecture space to both the student and lecturer. This new reimagined pedagogy can serve as a means of facilitating equality and unity within the lecture space. When the lecturer becomes the pedagogue (Denny 2020), the student is transformed during the process of learning, which serves the bigger picture – building the nation of South Africa.

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Authors' contributions

L.D. is the author of the PhD thesis and this research article. C.W. is the supervisor to Dr Denny's PhD thesis.

Ethical consideration

The ethics committee from the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria approved the study on 01 November 2018.

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Data availability statement

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