

Individual Project Report

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Developing a competency framework for ministerial formation from a post-colonial perspective: A South Africa contribution

Introduction and aim of project

The overarching question that lead to this research is: How well do we as lecturers prepare our graduates in a postcolonial context for the 21st Century? We do have to take the comment of Tencer (2017) serious: “Eighty five percent of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven’t been invented yet”. We therefore have to prepare our students and graduates for a world that’s essentially not possible to prepare them for. In preparing our students for these professions that don’t exist we do have the further responsibility to assess whether they will be in the position to do the work competently.

Assessment often reflects what is seen as important and focused on during teaching and learning. Therefore, the assessment of students enjoys a high priority in Higher Education institutions all around the world and there are also ongoing efforts to improve it by adopting new policies every year (Quality policy (draft), Stellenbosch University 2019). All this is related to quality assurance and control and forms an integral part of the Higher Education Qualification Framework in South Africa (HEQF 2007). At the Faculty of Theology (Stellenbosch University), we are currently in the process of going through a new phase of policy renewal in this regard and it forces every lecturer to investigate in depth his/her various forms of assessment.

Assessment of theology students for ministerial practice is traditionally done through completing assignments and oral examinations, which often only concentrates on the knowledge component and outcomes of the program. Concentrating only on the knowledge component has mimicked a view of ministerial practitioners as intellectuals preaching over the heads of the congregants and not in touch with the pastoral needs of the members. This situation normally leads to a disjuncture between knowledge and practice. This disjuncture signals a need for a broader set of competencies than just working with and analyzing texts in ministerial education (Burger & Nell 2012).

The challenge of assessment referred to in the previous paragraph also responds in part to the reality that the practice of ministry is done within a rich diversity of postcolonial settings and practices (Naidoo 2012). To resolve this dilemma a competency framework can help to translate generic graduate attributes, as well as the profiles of students that completed their studies, as developed by different

partner churches, into a set of competencies that is specific to the field of ministerial training. In the light of the argument above, the **research question** could be stated in the following way:

What are the central ingredients of a competency framework for a Master's degree in Theology at a research-intensive university from a post-colonial perspective?

The **aim** of the project is to develop, implement and evaluate a first iteration of a competency framework to facilitate the assessment of the Master of Divinity students that can subsequently serve as framework for assessment of students more broadly in Master of Divinity programs in the African post-colonial context. At a broader level, the aim of the project is to challenge the traditional ways of assessment that mostly concentrate only on cognitive (knowledge) skills.

Processes

The research approach is a design-based approach (Brown 1992). The research involved six sequential phases. At this stage I finished the first three phase and plan to work on the last three phases in future research.

1. Develop a better understanding of competencies frameworks for teaching and learning in higher education based on a literature overview.
2. Translate those generic competencies and graduate attributes identified in step 1 to the context of ministerial education.
3. Engage lecturers (and students) on the need for and experience of making use of the framework.
4. Design teaching and learning activities for the use of the competency framework in the Master of Divinity at Stellenbosch University based on steps 1 to 3.
5. Implement the designed framework.
6. Evaluate the implementation in step 5 as the final step of a first cycle of design.

Method

The research design for the empirical research that I used, works from an interpretive perspective in qualitative research, with its roots in hermeneutics as the study of the theory and practice of interpretation (Henning et al., 2004:19-21). The aim of this kind of empirical research is to provide contextually valid descriptions and interpretations of human actions, which are based on an insider's perspective of people and their world. The research was done by means of a semi-structured interview schedule (five questions), with five of my colleagues from the Faculty of Theology. The main research question was: What are the central ingredients for developing a competency framework for a Master's degree at a research-intensive university from a post-colonial perspective? This led to the following interview schedule:

Open ended-interview schedule

1. Tell me about your field of lecturing, your area of expertise?
2. In relation to what you do, what does competencies mean for you, and how does it relate to our post-colonial context?
3. You know about our Graduate Attributes framework at the University – do you see a relationship between competencies in our field and the GA?
4. Have you thought about the way in which your field of teaching contributes towards the competencies of the students?
5. If you look at the following competencies, which according to you are the most important – and how do you rank them?

Interpretation of the data

In an initial round and to come to a deeper understanding of what the colleagues understood concerning competencies, I will only look at the answers that the colleagues gave to question one and two as part of an interview I had with each one of them. Looking at the data through these bifocal lenses of expertise in lecturing combined with a post-colonial perspective some interesting data came to the fore. I just give three examples for each question.

Concerning the expertise of each of the colleagues (question 1), it was interesting to see in what ways it ‘coloured’ their way of looking at the competencies. Some examples:

Respondent 1: So, my field is Theology and Development, sometimes termed Community Development but for me there is a core theological motivation for the church’s engagement in issues of poverty and inequality. So, that’s the key focus and a lot of my research has been focused on congregations’ response to issues of poverty and inequality across denominations, across race groups.

Respondent 3: I am a lecturer specifically in Practical Theology and more so, specialization in youth work, children and faith formation. So, with that, undergrad, I teach modules like, Youth Work and Substance Dependency, Children’s Ministry and Child Theology. I teach Youth Culture, Planning and Organization of Youth Work and I teach Faith Formation.

Respondent 5: Mine is just much more in the field of Theology of Religions and that means the religious plurality and the responses of churches and also, the mission context to religious and in cultural plurality and therefore you get in the second year a kind of an introduction, an overview to religions in Africa and ecumenism or ecumenism and religions in Africa. But then applied or demonstrated in terms of two religions and that would be at least Christianity and African Religion or Christianity and an African Islam

From the examples above one can immediately sense that the field of expertise will have a direct influence on the way the respondents might approach the different competencies. It cannot but to 'colour' their perspectives.

Concerning post-colonial perspectives (question 2) , I found some interesting snippets in the data, for example:

Respondent 1 commented: I think firstly the students need to be able to read the text and the post-colonial context and the interplay between them. So, for me that's key. They need to have a framework and not necessarily – maybe some normative framework in terms of what theological perspectives relates to issues of poverty and inequality. Also, intercessions of powers are some core frameworks that they need to understand. But they also need to interpret, to do social analysis and to see how text and post colonial context relate to one another and to be able to read that changing context also and how the text relates to it.

Respondent 3: I would think someone who is able to develop their own theological framework or lens. So, you've studied a degree in Theology. So, at some point, I would think you are able to discern and make decisions around what you believe or don't believe based on a lens or framework you've developed while studying. I think that's what makes you different from someone studying Theology and someone doing Ministry without a Theology Degree. So, being able to make sound theological choices within Ministry based on some form of theoretical framework or lens that you've developed.

Respondent 5: I would say since they engage in a true realistic context that they have the appreciative knowledge in terms of cultural and religious diversity (post-coloniality). I mean that is the major one. And therefore they should actually as far as the discipline is concerned even begin to map that depending whether in the second year level or the fourth year level to map that or these are the issues that are important because only if you have that kind of knowledge that you begin to appreciate the theological and religious and the cultural kind of differences. So, appreciation it's a key kind of dimension in it also.

Outcomes

From the responses one can see that a large number of very different competencies surfaced in the interviews: From competencies to read the text and post-colonial context, to understand intercessions of power, to good communication linked to integrity, to develop own theological frameworks, to understand smaller competencies, to dealing with complexities of trauma, to appreciative knowledge in terms of cultural and religious diversity. This concurs with the thoughts of Shavelson (2013) who understands competencies as "a combination of cognitive, affective, motivational, volitional and social dispositions that form the basis for performance", and Hartig et al.'s (2008) definition of competency as a complex ability construct closely related to real-life-situated performances. This brings us to move

in the direction of a first attempt at constructing a competency framework, taking the Graduate Attributes of Stellenbosch University as a starting point (see Table 1 below).

The competency framework has been developed by taking the four Graduate Attributes of the University of Stellenbosch (an enquiring mind, an engaged citizen, a dynamic professional and a well-rounded individual) and linking them with a specific set of skills or competencies. An enquiring mind has been linked to personal skills, an engaged citizen to people skills, a dynamic professional to applied knowledge skills and a well rounded individual to workplace skills. Each of these set of skills or competencies has been further divided into a number of sub-competencies. For example personal skills has been further developed into thinking critically, research and writing, practicing Biblical hermeneutics, understanding the development of doctrine and articulating a personal theology. All of these sub-competences are seen as necessary and important to develop your personal skills to become a competent pastor. The same applies to the other competencies and sub-competencies.

Table 1: A competency framework for Master of Divinity students:

Competency framework for MDiv			
Personal skills	People skills	Applied knowledge	Workplace skills
Thinking critically	Initiating transformational change	Becoming a mature disciple	Embracing Cultural Diversity – Cross-cultural competency
Research and writing	Exercising Flexibility in Ministry	Understanding Healthy Congregations	Articulating Biblical Theology
Practicing Biblical Hermeneutics	Embodying the Love of God	Applying Biblical exegesis	Utilizing Biblical Languages
Understanding the development of doctrine	Communicating God’s Truth	Applying foundational Doctrines	Resolving Leadership Conflict
Articulating Personal Theology	Recognizing one’s impact on other people	Embracing sanctification	Taking responsibility



Assessing the competencies

Once one has identified the core competencies required for success in the targeted ministry setting a four-step approach can be applied to help with the improvement of assessing these competencies. It is important to invest the time to write a description, performance standards, and indicators for each competency.

- The competency description is a concise, high level definition of the competency. It expresses the intent and scope of the competency within the context of the program. It is a necessary element but does not provide enough detail on its own for consistent assessment.
- Performance standards provide more detail. They describe what mastery of the competency looks like in context; the observable components of the performance that, when combined, fully represent mastery as defined in the description. They articulate what the learner is expected to know (cognitive domain), be (affective domain), and do (proficiency domain) with respect to that competency.
- Performance indicators describe observable, measurable behaviours, outputs or circumstances that signal achievement of the performance standards. They quantify criteria a mentor can use to assess whether the learner has demonstrated achievement of the performance standard; they describe what evidence of competency achievement might look like in a learner.

Conclusion

Through participating in the TAU-project, both in my individual project and in our group project, I had the opportunity to think and critically reflect on the role of graduate attributes and how they are used to develop and enhance student learning at my University. I also had the prospect of developing a number of competencies and sub-competencies related to the graduate attributes. In terms of the six sequential phase that I discussed under processes, I managed to finish the first three phases and plan in further research to continue with the three remaining phases which will further enhance the competency framework I am busy developing.

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