



Constructive alignment at the University of Cape Town

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Overview of talk

- Curriculum Review initiatives at the University of Cape Town (UCT)
- Brief outline of Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECPs) in South Africa and Academic Literacy provision within the ECPs
- Challenges within academic literacy provision in ECPs which impact Constructive Alignment
- How these challenges are addressed within an academic literacy course in the Humanities faculty
- I conclude with some considerations of Constructive Alignment in ECP contexts

Constructive Alignment

- Making the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of a course explicit before teaching takes place
- Systematically aligning the teaching and learning activities and assessments within the course to the ILOs
- Learning activities must enable students to develop knowledges, skills and understandings described in the ILOs.
- Assessment tasks are designed to enable clear judgments as to how well those outcomes have been attained

(Biggs & Tang, 2011)

Quality assurance

- The Council of Higher Education (CHE) is responsible for quality assurance in higher education
- ECPs are located within accredited programmes in the faculties



Curriculum Review initiatives within the institution

- Current institutional initiative to review course curricula within faculties
- At the level of course credits and notional hours
- At the level of classroom pedagogies, and content, alignment
- “Our teachers need to be self-reflective on the effectiveness of their teaching practices, and to recognise, include and respect the contribution of students to their classes. In order to do this, we will continually renew and transform our pedagogies” (Vision 2030, UCT, pg. 13).
- Graduate attributes – self, community and world (critical citizenship)

Providing access and success through the ECPs

- Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECPs) in South Africa – provide access to knowledge and skills required in HE for students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds (characterised by surface approaches to learning)
- Overseen and funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)
- Located within the Academic Development Programme at UCT
- 5 Educational Development Units and 2 cross-faculty units
- Language Development Group – we work within a variety of contexts outside of the ECPs – writing courses at UG and PG, curriculum design work, staff development, facilitating communities of practice at the postgraduate level.

Some of our challenges as academic literacy practitioners

- Stigma within the ECPs – “Why do we all look a certain way in this course”?
- Academic literacy support beyond the first year – transition to second and third year and expected literacy practices
- Foundation courses – Generic / stand-alone or integrated?

Case study – Writing across Borders course

- First year mainstream course in the African studies department, designed and taught by ADP staff (close consultations with African Studies staff in designing the course)
- Course objectives - Course forms part of a “Curriculum Reform” project, “its design pays attention to issues of decolonisation at a curricular level in terms of transforming the teaching and learning space to equip students with the research skills required for the second year” (Nomdo *et al.*, 2021, pg 4).
- “A significant milestone is the transition from first to second year, where students are expected to develop researcher identities. This was confirmed through qualitative research conducted in 2018 across 10 Humanities departments with second-year students, course convenors and tutors, where participants reported that second-year students struggled predominantly with the skills of critical reading and research” (Nomdo *et al.*, 2021, pg. 3).
- Approach - Enquiry based Learning approach (EBL) – teacher as facilitator, student central to production of knowledge
- Mode of enquiry that is ‘question driven’
- Central question that cuts across the course – “What happens to identity as people cross borders? – underpins all the learning activities and formal assessments

(Some) Course Aims

- 1.To engage critically in current debates about migration, interrogate representations of the 'migrant' historically and at present, and to make visible multiple dimensions of their being and becoming
- 2.To develop critical awareness of the complexities and dynamics of the constructions of racialised identities in the African context
- 3.To engage in landscapes of practice to construct knowledge collaboratively
- 4.To engage in reflective, and research writing practices
- 5.To produce coherent argumentative essays on the effects of mobility on identity
- 6.To develop a range of digital literacy skills

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

- At the end of the course, you (as the student) must be able to:
- Critically ***analyse*** and ***evaluate*** different perspectives and concepts on migration and identity
- ***Present*** and ***discuss*** your ideas coherently (within Writers Circles)
- ***Apply*** concepts to a case study (in blog writing) and ***relate*** these to your experiences
- ***Reflect*** on your practice as a developing researcher (focus on growth in writing)

Course Activities

- The content is structured in a “flipped classroom” blended mode that requires students to first engage with the material online, and then enter the physical classroom (termed “Writers’ Circles” following the model of an organic postgraduate writing space) for discussion.
- Guided videos which model good reading practices and note taking – linked to the goals of the course – *analysis* and *synthesis* of the prescribed readings
- Writers’ Circles – Students bring ideas and link to the blog for that week to *discuss* these in the circles (Reflective space)
- Blogs – Addressing a different reading each week - key concepts that students are expected to unpack and *apply* to the case study (a recorded interview with a refugee) and to their autobiographies in relation to the central question
- The above activities function as rehearsal spaces for *data analysis* and *discussion* (literacy practices required within research writing)

Course Assessments

- Weekly submissions of blogs. The submissions count 15% in total.
- Three academic essays in the course of the semester. The first essay counts 15%, the second essay counts 20%, and the third essay counts 30%.
- Exam: The exam counts 20% of the course mark.
- The first two argumentative essays, which have research components within them, address the course's central question
- These essays require students to draw on the theories and concepts introduced in the course, as well as the blogs and videos shared over the first six weeks– takes students from describing to theorising to reflection (looking back to consider shifts in conceptualisation)
- Final assessment is a *reflective* essay – students expected to report on the shifts that have occurred in their writing - students take stock of their growth as writers, lecturers take stock of the extent to which the course has met its ILOs
- Annual re-alignment of course – making improvements based on the reflections and 'student evaluations' in the third essay.

Some points for consideration

- Collaborations between academic developers and disciplinary specialists to attain constructive alignment within challenging AD contexts
- Importance of training – what is good teaching within an AD context? Principles?
- Importance of alignment not only within the course but within the broader Humanities curriculum beyond the first year
- Importance of ‘keeping students in the analytical mode’ (Arend *et al.* 2017)
- Being explicit about how the various components of the course are linked and revisiting concepts and processes as a way of articulating the ILOs.

References

- Arend, M., Hunma, A., Hutchings, C., and Nomdo, G. 2017. “The Messiness of Meaning Making: Examining the Affordances of the Digital Space as a Mentoring and Tutoring Space for the Acquisition of Academic Literacy”. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* 5 (2): 89–111. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v5i2.2704>.
- Biggs, J.B. & Tang, C. 2011. Teaching for Quality Learning at University. (4th Ed.). Maidenhead: McGraw Hill Education & Open University Press.
- Nomdo, G., Hunma, A. & Samson, S. 2021. Becoming Knowledge Makers: Critical Reflections on Enquiry-Based Learning. *Education as Change*, Vol 25 | #8996 | 21 pages.

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