



*The Changing Faces of Distance  
Education and Open Learning*

**NADEOSA Conference 2009  
Abstracts Booklet**

## KEYNOTE 1

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### **Joining the Hi-Tech Bandwagon on Low Bandwidth**

As the move towards technology-enabled delivery of distance education in South Africa gains momentum, distance learners and educators are facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The challenges involve the large technology learning curve required by all parties, as well as the sheer difficulty of providing access to computers and Internet connections with sufficient bandwidth. The opportunities, however, are limited only by our imaginations. Individuals and organisations around the country are exploring innovative ways of using emerging technologies to enhance the learning experience for their learners. The success stories are those in which technology has been used to engage learners in conversation about the learning, rather than simply to 'deliver' the content more efficiently to the learners.

In this paper, six key characteristics of the ODL landscape in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are discussed and compared to threads in a tapestry, which can be woven together to form a beautiful picture, even with limited resources. Through recognising the opportunities for designing learning experiences that are appropriate to our learners and our context, those of us who mediate distance learning can create high quality, sustainable and replicable models for e-learning, even in relatively under-resourced environments.

### **About Gabi Witthaus**

Gabi started her career in the NGO sector in the eighties, and later established a training consultancy, Flagship Mentoring and Training cc. She led the ABET facilitators' standards-generating body for SAQA, and contributed towards the development of the Independent Examinations Board's assessment for ABET in the nineties. She recently worked in Qatar, leading a curriculum development team in the production of multimedia training materials for the energy industry in the Arabian Gulf. At the same time, she began her own online studies through the University of Southern Queensland in Australia, and immersed herself in the process of learning through conversations with peers around the world with the help of Web 2.0 technologies. Her professional practice has been substantially influenced by this experience.

Gabi is currently a research associate at the University of Leicester, where she is researching the impact of various technologies on the learning experience for learners. She is also coordinating the university's publication of Open Educational Resources. She has a Masters in English Education (Wits) and a Masters in Training and Development (USQ).

## KEYNOTE 2

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**Working with OERs in Africa contexts**

**About Tessa Welch**

**Baird, Nico – CUT**

**Sub-theme: Integration of ICT and social networking technologies**

### **The End of the University?**

It is widely acknowledged that the face of education is changing and for the most part has already changed. We are generally just very slow to accept it and change with it.

During the past 70 to 80 years, we have all been subjected to the so-called “broadcast” model. This model where we are bombarded with information was stimulated by the advent of radio, and further embedded into our lives with the quick uptake of television broadcasts. This was a model where very little, if any, two way communication took place. This was also the basis of early websites and online educational portals. This model really has great similarities with the educational system as we have known it for ages. Lecturers are seen as the source of all knowledge and they broadcast information to the students at a specific time each day.

The problem is that we need to realize that this model has changed. Our students are now part of the knowledge pool; they now generate knowledge just as much as they consume knowledge. On a daily basis they collaborate and create. We need to know that a broadcast model will very soon no longer be an effective model for educating our learners. We need to step up, make the necessary changes to our educational approach now. We need to have a collaborative system where students are not only collaborating in class while working through the content, but where they are also responsible for the creation of their content. We as lecturers are responsible for the quality and the moderation of the content which these students create.

If we do not embrace these changes and make the necessary adjustments to our way of teaching, we may surely see the demise of universities in the next few decades.

**Baloyi, Gezani Phineas**

**Sub-theme: Research/Learner support and assessment**

### **SUPPORTING OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING TEACHER EDUCATION LEARNERS WHO LIVE IN RURAL AREAS.**

The concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is very broad and it can be variously defined. However, there are common elements which almost all authors agree on in their definitions, that is, combination of Distance Education (DE) and Open Learning, access, separation between the lecturer and the learner etc. Generally, the goal of ODL is to widen participation and to overcoming geographical, social and economic barriers.

The University of South Africa (UNISA) has been identified by the ministry of education as an ODL institution that will help in widening participation. UNISA was founded in 1873 as a university college which offered courses to learners via correspondence.

In order to support the learners in an ODL environment, it is imperative that University of South Africa (UNISA) lecturers do not only have learning skills to facilitate learning, but also skills and experience to facilitate the learning process through designing and building support that encourages learning. ODL is becoming a popular global practice as a forum for widening accessibility to education of greater percentage of the people who otherwise would not have enjoyed the benefit of full time study in conventional universities.

The paper will critically discuss literature review of Distance Education, Open and Distance Learning, Open Learning, Teacher Education and learner support so as to explore the problem under study in

depth. In addressing Teacher Education in rural areas, UNISA has to provide and invest fully in learner support. As much as UNISA has been declared as the only ODL institution in South Africa, it addresses Teacher Education by providing quality mass education in an affordable and cost effective. UNISA accommodates students from diverse background namely, political, economic and social fields, urban and rural areas. Some decades ago, UNISA used to attract students who were working and would not leave their jobs but continue working while studying. However, the institution presently also registers younger students who need to be fully supported.

Perraton (2003) asserts that teacher education at a distance is now accepted as an alternative mode for expanding the teaching service and raising its quality. It is increasingly being used not only for upgrading but also for initial teacher education. It can be justifiably being argued that Teacher Education at a distance would be a panacea to the teacher shortages and under qualification, especially in areas with an entrenched history of educational deprivation world wide. However, learners who are in disadvantaged communities struggle to perform and progress to the next grades. Students who are in rural areas are without resources and they do not have an access to technology to enhance their learning.

It is in this regard that I propose to investigate and support Open and Distance Learning teacher education students who live and study in rural areas.

Learner support has frequently been identified as of particular importance for student success in Open and Distance Learning, but how it operates in practice especially in most rural areas remains to be seen.

The problem will be investigated by qualitative research methodology. The researcher will interview teacher education students who have registered with the institution. The researcher will use purposeful sampling and the reason for designing purposeful sampling in the study is that it is purposive and the participants will help the researcher to answer problem statement and research question. The research study will be carried out in Mopani District of the Limpopo Province, in South Africa.

**Chokwe, JM – Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Integration of ICT and social networking technologies**

**The under-usage of MyUnisa as a learning tool by UNISA English Access students**

UNISA as an open and distance learning institution has decided to use ICT as one of its modes of teaching in addition to the traditional distance education delivery mode. An online tutoring system known as myUnisa has become a powerful tool that lecturers use to teach and most importantly communicate with the students. Though one would applaud this innovation by the university, students are not using this facility to their advantage. However, it is greatly surprising that students use unofficial online communication systems where communication is more open and free. This paper will explore the reasons for poor usage of myUnisa as an online teaching facility and also suggest possible mechanisms that will encourage the use of myUnisa by students.

**Dindar, Shereen – Gert Sibande College**

**Sub-theme: Integration of ICT and social networking technologies**

**Life-long Learning – Bridging the digital divide in SA**

This presentation will cover the following points:

The importance and nature of a life-long learner;

We need to make education in all sectors accessible to the life-long learner;  
Addressing the skills shortage crises;  
How does SA deal with and cope with the digital divide?  
Corporate social investment, a mere philanthropic gesture?  
Questioning the current teaching methodology and philosophy of the SA Education Culture;  
Growing the Sakai Community for those new to Sakai, considering SA'S government's stance towards the use of open source;  
Envisioning the future for SA Education through collaboration and investing by becoming part of the 'glocal' community

**Presentation Description: (Committee Review)**

Currently South Africa faces a huge challenge with the skills shortage crises and is striving to bridge the digital divide due to existing monopolies. Education should be the key role player in addressing many of these challenges. With the Government's stance of supporting open source and elearning initiatives, the country can only improve and develop education accessibility to the point where our education standards can be of international standards, in order to compete in the 'glocal' economy. Corporate Social Investment making education top priority in SA, can significantly contribute to the growth and prosperity of a country that has a market to support the upgrading of technical infrastructure, effectively bridging the digital divide, thereby making education accessible to all sectors and communities. Collaboration with Higher Education Institutions like Unisa, can help foster the culture of life-long learning through using platforms such as the Sakai community, thereby giving new meaning to the word 'education' by contributing to new teaching methodologies, philosophies, and culture of SA education by taking education to the Nation, for the Nation.

**du Plessis, Elize; Marais, Petro and van Schalkwyk, Alena - Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Research/Learner support and assessment**

**THE ABC OF ASSESSMENT IN TEACHING PRACTICE**

Student teaching practice and the assessment of their learning during this time play a significant role in preparing students for the teaching profession. The study on which this paper reports focussed on the challenges associated with assessment of distance education student teachers during teaching practice. A previous investigation has indicated that students experience assessment as problematic. The specific aims of the study were therefore to further investigate all aspects of assessment of the current model of student teaching practice and to make recommendations for the improvement thereof. Students enrolled for the BEd (Early Childhood Education and Foundation Phase) were purposely sampled to gather data. Data were collected by means of document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Socio-constructivist learning and situated learning theories were used as theoretical framework to evaluate learning and assessment by mentors and other teachers, peers and by the students themselves. The findings are significant to improve tutorial matter, provide guidelines for assessment and coordinate a platform for partnerships between the different role players regarding this issue.

**Kamau, Judith, W – University of Botswana**

**Sub-theme: Research/Learner support and assessment**

**Factors that affect progress and retention of distance learners enrolled on the Diploma in Primary Education (DPE) programme in Botswana**

Statistical data on the progress and retention of distance learners enrolled on the DPE programme by distance mode between 2000-2004 indicate that many of the incomplete results are from Research Projects and the mandatory Teaching Assignment Portfolio in lieu a supervised teaching practice. One of the main constraints cited in the supervision of practical work on this programme has been physical and transactional distances between distance learners and their supervisors, and related transport and accommodation costs. This challenge has come about as a result of the need to meet equivalency and parity of standards between the conventional and the distance taught programmes. Since distance learners cannot meet with their supervisors frequently due to logistical problems, it is necessary for the providing institution to identify and apply the most appropriate pedagogical approaches that facilitate regular interaction between distance learners and their and supervisors.

A short qualitative action research was carried out with the part time DPE programme coordinators to find out and gain a deeper understanding of how the management of the supervision of research projects impacts on retention and completion rates on the distance taught programme. Findings from this study will establish the constraints experienced and inform possible strategies to enhance the improvement of retention and completion rates on the DPE programme by distance mode.

**Kok, Almero – NWU – Potchefstroom campus**

**Sub-theme: Research**

**Process evaluation of open distance learning programmes at the SCTE of the North-West University**

In Higher Education much attention is given to the quality of open learning programmes on both institutional and national level. Although there are established systems that cover quality of open distance programmes, only a few of these systems have thus far developed a focus on the evaluation of programmes governing distance education and open learning.

The School of Continuing Teacher Education (SCTE) at the North-West University currently offers three programmes, namely NPDE, ACE and Hons BEd to more than 20 000 students. As provider, the SCTE needs to address all the separate elements that constitute a course to provide students with a programme of excellent quality that will improve their competencies. Evaluation of the quality of open distance learning programmes is considered a priority at the SCTE and therefore four full-time programme evaluators were appointed in 2007. The main focus of the programme evaluators is threefold, which includes: the development of a quality control process, internal evaluation of programmes and research in terms of impact studies of programmes. Apart from the internal evaluation, external evaluation of programmes are also done by peers from different universities in South Africa.

The main focus of this paper is to present the process evaluation of the SCTE, indicating the various levels of the quality control process which includes the internal- as well as the external evaluation of programmes. Currently the quality assurance system in South Africa is accountability-driven and backward-looking. In distance education and open learning at the SCTE there is a definite need for an improvement-driven and forward-looking system of evaluation. The approach followed by the SCTE is a process evaluation and includes traits such as: a bottom-up and middle-out approach, improvement driven and forward looking approach and a structured quality control process

consisting of four levels. The aim with the process evaluation of open learning programmes is to ensure a high quality transformative learning experience for all students enrolled at the SCTE of the North-West University.

**Kok, Illasha & Rabe, Albert – North West University, Potchefstroom Campus**

**Sub-theme: Research**

**Implementation of an ACE programme designed for IQMS.**

The main aim of investigation with this 2008 project was to establish the effectiveness of an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) programme to empower the teachers for the demands of the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) implemented by the National Department of Education. The IQMS provides information and feedback to teachers regarding effective practice and offers a pathway for individual professional growth.

SCTE programme evaluators did a survey to establish whether the ACE: Curriculum and Professional Development programme was effective for the purpose of helping the teacher-students meet the demands of the IQMS in the North-West Province. The purpose of the study is to identify specific needs of educators, schools and district offices; to provide support for continued growth; to promote accountability; to monitor an institution's overall effectiveness, and to evaluate an educator's performance.

We identified events that had already occurred or conditions that had already been present and then collected data to find an answer to the question of whether the ACE was effective or not. The research was also seen as a case study, in the sense, that a particular programme was studied in depth (n=39). For this investigation, data was gathered through an integrated data collection process. A qualitative research methodology was used, supported by quantitative data. The quantitative section of the research design provided valuable information about (a) the biographical status of the alumni teacher-students and (b) programme specific issues. With the qualitative section of the research major themes and sub-themes were identified and some important issues were highlighted.

Professional development for teachers throughout their career in education will always be important. The promising feature of this ACE-programme was its potential to effectively contribute towards this aim. This research once again underscored the fact that the outcomes-based assessment procedures seem to be rather difficult to master for teacher students who had undergone training according to another teacher training model. Overall, the conclusion was drawn that the teacher-students as well as principals and subject specialists appear to view and perceive the programme as beneficial, and relevant. This is likely to be because the course material is context-based, and viewed and perceived by participants to be relevant to the IQMS.

**Kotzé, Theuns G & Nagel, Lynette, University of Pretoria**

**Sub-theme: Research/Integration of ICT and social networking technologies**

**Innovative ICT Solutions for a Large Higher Education Course**

Higher Education Institutions are seeking innovative solutions for overworked faculty to cope with increasing class sizes. The web enables electronic teaching of distance students, providing convenient access to and interaction in their courses.

The context of this study is a research methodology course for Masters' and Doctoral students in the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences at the University of Pretoria. Challenges include off-campus students who work full-time, a single lecturer with no teaching support, more than 200 students and demanding supervisors. International instructional design standards do not suggest



solutions for the large student / lecturer ratios imminent in local institutions.

The lecturer innovatively used specific tools in the Blackboard™ Vista LMS to combat the teaching challenges, particularly assignments, grading forms, Turnitin™ assignments and peer-reviewed discussions. The lecturer also developed an electronic template to identify the most common writing mistakes students make, as well as a program to manage and distribute documents for peer review.

The purpose of the research is to evaluate the innovative implementation of ICT's in this course. The research depended on mixed methodologies; two questionnaires provided quantitative data. Qualitative data were gathered using open-ended questions and were analysed with the help of ATLAS.ti. Findings were triangulated with course artefacts and logs of online activities.

The ICT's dramatically reduced the lecturer's time spent on corrections and document management, and improved the quality of student proposals. Innovative use of ICT enabled the lecturer to provide the same quality of teaching previously only possible in much smaller classes.

**le Roux, André & Mitchell, Jean – Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Research**

### **The changing landscape of publishing ODL research**

In recent years there has been a change in the focus of research in Open and Distance learning (ODL). This paper presents an analysis of research themes as represented by articles published in the journal *Progressio: South African Journal of Open and Distance Learning Practice* from 1979 to 2008. Topics addressed are a reflection of the trends in distance education worldwide. The evolution of the use of technologies, as well as experimentation with 'small media' as well as mass media and multi-media, has been a recurrent theme of research. Concern for the student is noticeable, as can be seen from themes like student performance, development, opinion, counselling and so on. This trend towards student-centeredness again reflects international tendencies towards a more constructivist approach to ODL delivery. The themes of curriculum and materials development are also significant. Assessment and research methodologies are critically evaluated in relation to their impact on student success. At the same time there is evidence of a move towards self reflection as researchers have considered their roles in the university and the types of continuous professional learning they require. As the need for distance education increases, research will continue to reflect the changes being made in the field.

**Lephalala, Mirriam, Dr – Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Research/Learner support and assessment**

### **An evaluation of a task-based assessment activity in distance learning: Teacher trainees experiences of putting theory into practice**

Assessment activities play a critical role in supporting learning, particularly, in distance learning contexts. The challenge for lecturers is determining the extent to which assessment tasks are valid and learning has occurred. This article evaluates the extent to which a task-based assessment activity designed for teacher trainees in an English Didactics course addresses students' needs and the course outcomes. The qualitative study is two-fold: firstly assignments students submitted on the activity are examined and, secondly, their responses to a questionnaire on the activity are analysed. The findings reveal that student' assignments varied ranging from creative and contextualised to irrelevant and impractical. In addition, their responses to the questionnaire show that some students had difficulties understanding the assessment activity. The implications are that in setting the task students' specific needs were not considered. The findings suggest the need for

continued evaluation of task-based assessment activities in distance learning contexts and further research into the alignment of theory and practice in education.

**Makina, Blandina – Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Research/Learner support and assessment**

**MYTH OR REALITY: IMPLEMENTING OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION IN AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASS IN SOUTH AFRICA.**

It is now over a decade since the outcomes-based (OBE) approach was introduced in South African schools to replace the content-based apartheid education system. Since then, the OBE approach has been subject to much controversy regarding its success in terms of implementation (Jansen, 1999b; Potenza & Monyokolo, 1999; Allais, 2003). Recently, Spady (2008), who is credited as the architect of the South African version of OBE, has said that this approach has never been implemented as intended. This paper is based on a study that was conducted to find out the lived reality of OBE in schools. Two instruments - interviews and observation - were used to gather data. The participants were a group of student teachers enrolled for the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE: English) programme with Unisa. The findings support Spady's (2008) claim that OBE in South African township schools remains a myth because in reality, that is, at implementation level, very little has changed. Although numerous reasons have been given for the lack of change in the teachers' classroom practices, findings from this study confirm that the teachers' perceptions of the essence of OBE are the primary reason.

**Makoe, Mpine, Dr – IODL, Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Integration of ICT and social networking technologies**

**The pedagogical suitability of using MXit – a cellphone instant messaging system - to enhance learning in distance education**

The widespread availability of cellphones has given the potential to revolutionise teaching and learning in distance education. One of the major challenges facing distance education institutions is to provide support for students who are not only geographically isolated from their teachers as sources of information, they are also separated from their peers as sources of support. The proper provision of learner support services may break learners' isolation and meet not only the academic demands of students in distance education but also their social needs. Distance education students need support mechanisms that will enhance social interaction.

Technologies such as cellphones hold such a promise because they are accessible, affordable and available. More than 90 percent of students at the University of South Africa (Unisa) own a cellphone and most of those have software features such as pictures, video, music, games, instant messaging and the internet. All these features enable cellphones to be used in education for collaboration, tutoring, research, reading and writing purposes. The aim of this paper is to investigate the pedagogical suitability of using cellphones to enhance social interaction in distance education. Social interaction will be used as a conceptual framework to explore the potential for using "MXit" – a cellphone instant messaging system – to support and enhance learning for distance education students. Most young people in distance education already use MXit for social purposes. The idea is to build on informal learning that most students are exposed to through using MXit to develop formal learning opportunities and support mechanisms for distance education students.

**Masehela, Langutani – Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Research**

**Distance Education in Africa: some challenges and perspectives**

**Who defies or decides what quality is?**

According to Varoglu (2008: 98) quality assurance is “the systematic internal review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained”. In attempting to unpack the meaning of this definition, it is evident that quality assurance (QA) not only involves the testing of standards of say teaching material for a given programme, but the concern goes beyond just that. Research, teaching, learning and the physical resources used to deliver the services also count. Above all proper planning of running the programmes also counts in QA. Lenthell, 2006 confers a stirring point when she argues, “What is quality for one group of managers, one group of employers, one group of civil servants, may not have much impact on the quality of learners' experiences and learning outcomes.” This statement simply says to higher education practitioners that what we regard as quality may not necessarily be that to the affected student. On implication, higher education practitioners should consider quality partly from the student’s perspective. I am therefore tempted to advocate Lenthell’s approach to quality in higher education which considers outcomes and not just input. What makes me even more comfortable about this stride is that South African Higher Education (HE) is shifting from being concerned with access to being concerned with outcome (*Daily Higher Education News* 20 February 2009). Therefore I can argue that for HE to increase success rates, quality is a key factor today which compels practitioners to put in place quality assurance measures if they expect to be reputed as serious providers of HE.

Distance education products are more often than not regarded as second class products of a university. In order to deal successfully with this stigma, this paper attempts to point out the importance of quality assurance in open and distance learning study materials. The study will further illustrate how that could be achieved successfully without leaving doubts, more especially in the African context.

**Mihai, Maryke and Nieuwenhuis, Jan, Prof - University of Pretoria**

**Sub-theme: Research/Integration of ICT and social networking technologies**

**THE INNOVATIVE USE OF COMPUTER AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION: A LESSON FROM A RURAL ENVIRONMENT**

The Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria offers a number of education programmes through distance education to students from across South Africa. One of the challenges faced is to ensure that students who attend contact sessions at different tuition centres receive the same quality of instruction and support.

In 2008, the researchers participated in a research project that evaluated the effect of the use of ICT in a cluster of secondary schools in Mpumalanga.

Ligbron Academy of Technology developed an ICT learning environment that is innovative by integrating smart board and computer technology with interactive communication technology. Through adopting this approach Ligbron, as the leading school, was able to reach out to rural schools in the area in the teaching of Science and Mathematics to address the critical shortage of skilled teachers in these subjects and to improve the quality of teaching offered to students.

A limited qualitative research study was undertaken to determine the possible impact of the project on senior learners, their educators, the organizers and principals.

This paper will report on the findings and insights gained and will interrogate the possible use of such a strategy in distance education.

**Minnaar, Ansie – Unisa, IODL**

**Sub-theme: Research/Learner support and assessment**

### **Supporting research students from a distance – A cyclical metacognitive approach**

**Introduction and Background:** In South Africa 20% of Masters degree- and only 13% of PhD-students complete their research degrees. Studies into why students fail to complete their research indicate the absence of the supervisor as a reason for “giving up”. Supervising higher degrees does not always happen face-to-face and students often feel lost and overwhelmed by the demands of research on their own and the fact that they are not able to discuss issues with their supervisors. In ODL institutions research supervision is mostly done using e-mail or the telephonic medium to communicate. Barely any face to face supervision is possible in ODL practices.

**Significance of the study:** CHE in South Africa is constantly referring to the low throughput numbers at Universities in masters and PhD programmes. Retention at Universities of masters and PhD students is becoming more and more important and Governments worldwide are putting pressure on higher education institutions to increase their throughput. This has now reached a point where universities look at throughput rates strategically as it serves as a measurement to rate effectiveness of universities.

**Problem statement:** We are tasked to deliver masters and PhD graduates in South Africa, but at an ODL institution the task to effectively supervise higher degree students from a distance is a field full of landmines. There is an abundance of literature on supervision in research, but not a lot of studies describe effective supervision of higher degrees in ODL.

**Solution:** This paper will discuss the metacognitive approach to Course Management System (CMS) as a support mechanism to support learning and supervision strategies in research supervision from a distance. This model uses web-based instruction and self-regulation and is aimed at improving learning and completion rates at masters and PhD levels.

**Motswagosele, Dineo & Maria Marakakgoro, University of Botswana**

**Sub-theme: Learner support and assessment**

### **Assessment and Learner Support– Issues and Concerns of the Diploma in Primary Education at the Colleges of Education**

In 1999 the University of Botswana (UB) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) launched a project that aimed to upgrade the primary school teachers’ certificate to a diploma through open and distance learning (ODL). The UB developed instructional materials and quality assured the programme while the MoE financed and delivered the programmes through the Colleges of Education. Although the venture proved attainable; there were assessment and learner support issues that impeded timely completion of the programme by the trainees.

Therefore the study seeks to investigate the issues and concerns that relate to assessment and provision of learner support in the study materials and assessment activities at the Colleges of Education that offer teacher training. Study materials from seven purposively selected modules will be evaluated for learner support within the modules. Sampled marked test and assignment scripts of the Tlokeng College of Education (TkCE) 2004 cohort based on the selected modules will be examined for the provision of learner support through the tutor’s comments. Alignment of

assessment items with module objectives as well as crafting of items will also be assessed. Furthermore, TkCE library resources will be evaluated for effective learner support. Check-lists will be utilized to collect data. Content analysis and thematic categorization will be employed for data analysis. Ultimately the study will provide insights into the processes and procedures regarding assessment and learner support as applicable to ODL primary teachers' programme in Botswana.

**Naude, Erin, Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Integration of ICT and social networking technologies**

### **Satellite delivery as a open distance learning tool**

Unisa is a distance education institution in South Africa and serviced 130 000 students during 2008. To be able to produce successful life-long learners, Unisa started some years ago with the following learner support activities:

- Creation of a social learning environment for students;
- Academic assistance of students to enhance their pass rate and thus the university's through-put rate.

Within Unisa, learner support consists of a menu of services within the academic support division. The menu of services consists of Tutorials, Discussion sessions, Academic literacy, Peer collaborative learning, Work integrated learning, Satellite delivery, DVD viewing, E-learning and more.

The purpose of this study is to focus on the satellite delivery learner support activity. Satellite delivery bridges the geographical distance between students and tutors/lecturers and synchronous learning as well as asynchronous learning can take place. This study will provide information on the development of aspects of satellite delivery within Unisa and will focus mainly on:

- Infrastructure
- System
- Scheduling
- Marketing and communication
- Resources
- DVD viewing
- Reports and statistics
- Research
- How to integrate satellite delivery with other learner support services
- Feedback from students regarding satellite delivery
- Successes and limitations

The most important aspect is to integrate the learner support services and not to create silo's within these support services. The services should complement each other and add value to the total learner support experience of students. It is also important to indicate that no service can replace or substitute another service.

**Ntuli, Zodwa – Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Research**

**An investigation of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Professional Development Programmes at the University of South Africa (UNISA).**

### **Introduction**

The University of South Africa (UNISA) seems be serious about enhancing professional development in open and distance learning (ODL). This becomes evident in the fact that this University has embarked on a series of ODL initiatives over the past few years. Unfortunately, all of them were not successful. The worrying factor about their failure is that a lot of resources were invested in these programmes. It is important to point out that these programmes were not successful despite the fact that they were at different levels, namely the certificate, undergraduate, postgraduate diploma and Master of Education in ODL; they had support of the University management and there is obviously, a need for them. One wonders as to what exactly might have happened that seems to be a strong ingredient for these programmes' failure. What is it that was not done which was supposed to have been done in the development of these qualifications?

### **Conclusion**

This paper seeks to investigate why these programmes have not been successful despite the importance of content of each, the fact that there was a need for each of them, they were at different levels, they received support from management. It therefore, seeks to make a proper environmental scan before similar programmes are developed. This investigation is done in order to avoid committing the same mistakes in future.

**Payne, George – Unisa, Deputy Director: Facilitation of Learning and ICT Support - Gauteng Region**

**Sub-theme: Learner support and assessment/ ODL ethics**

**UNISA AT A CROSSROADS: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION FOR ODL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.**

The participation and success of students with disabilities is an issue that permeates all institutions of higher education and is one that the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies seeks to address.

After an eventful five-year journey filled with policy-making ramifications, consultations and conversation circles, UNISA (the University of South Africa) has developed a Policy for Students with Disabilities which was approved in 2008. However, globalisation, technological advances and demographic changes worldwide reflect that more is needed than just a policy. The real test lies in successful implementation.

The Unisa policy is aimed at addressing the need for a more positive learning experience for students with disabilities. It introduces an agenda for change and transformation which will increase access to and successful participation of disabled students.

UNISA currently finds itself at a crossroads for implementing this policy. This presentation will focus on the challenges and strategies embedded in implementing this policy in an ODL environment. The participation of students with disabilities in regional integrated learner support programmes will be specifically discussed. These programmes provide a platform for practical policy implementation through a wide range of services such as student registrations, counselling services, bursaries, tutorial services and digital learning.

The successful implementation of the Policy for Students with Disabilities will place Unisa at the forefront of African universities with regard to catering for its disabled students.

**Pretorius, Rudi W – Unisa, Dept of Geography**

**Sub-theme: Research**

**Rich environments for active learning in open and distance learning: a case study from Geography**

Rich environments for active learning (REALs - Grabinger, 2001) provide students with opportunities to develop their critical thinking skills, to apply what they learn, to solve relevant problems, to address issues and to develop and attach their own meaning to the learning materials that they come into contact with. This links perfectly with the ideal of authenticity, with its emphasis on the advantages of teaching and learning within the context of real word issues (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). It is also in line with the plea by Beets (2007:583) for a more “productive pedagogy focused on the skills, abilities and capabilities” of Geography students in South Africa. In open and distance learning, where neither teacher nor learners are in face to face contact, these type of approaches present numerous challenges. This necessitates “out of the box” thinking and the design of innovative teaching and learning interventions. This paper maps the development and implementation of a rich environment for active learning for the module “Tourism Geography” at the University of South Africa (Pretorius, 2008). The role of the assessment strategy in this regard will specifically be highlighted. Some examples of exceptional work by students will be presented, together with feedback on how they experienced the learning process. The approach in this module provides a unique and innovative opportunity for authentic learning and knowledge construction, despite the constraints of the open and distance learning environment.

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**Prinsloo, Rachel – Unisa**

**Sub-theme:**

**Quality and Systemic Imperatives for Transformation in ODL – The Unisa Case Study**

**Proctor, David & Steyn, Leonie & Goodwin-Davey, Alice – Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Learner support and assessment**

**Working with Tutors at a Distance – a Unisa pilot project.**

In piloting aspects of Open Distance Learning (ODL), the module **Practising Workplace English** has appointed Unisa’s first ‘tutor-assessors’. Our objectives are to include these part-time members of staff meaningfully in an extended ‘teaching team’ that has the capacity to cater for individual



student preferences; enrich and humanise the learning process that our students engage in; expand the students' seriously eroded opportunities for formative assessment; and strengthen students' perception of the tutorial service as a powerful driver towards success in their studies. All are founded on the integration of tuition and assessment in the person of the tutor.

More than 7000 students enrolled for this module in the first semester of 2009. Because the few lecturers located in Pretoria cannot communicate effectively with this number of students, a country-wide team of tutors assists with assessment and tuition, both online and in person.

The tutors need orientation to distance education and the institution. They need to be properly equipped to carry out their tasks, and need guidance and support from lecturers and each other. There is also a need to quality assure the service they provide to students. The question is: How? In reducing the distance between student and institution, we have opened a gap between lecturer and tutor.

The answer has come from ICT and the myUnisa Team – the use of a Project Site that opens a channel through which lecturers can communicate with tutors at any time. We anticipate that the value of such sites will become apparent when lecturers find that they are required to work with tutor-assessors located where they are needed - in amongst our students.

#### **Schulze, Salome – Unisa**

##### **Sub-theme: Research/Learner support and assessment**

##### **Research development through mentoring: a case study at a distance education institution**

This paper examines the research development, in particular of women and black academics through mentoring at the University of South Africa, a distance education institution. The model used for research mentoring was informed by a 'communities of practice' (CoP) perspective which considered situated learning theories (e.g. Wenger as well as Lave and Wenger) in addition to constructivist and socio-constructivist learning principles. One mentor and eleven mentees were involved. The mentees were divided into three groups of two, four and five participants. Each group embarked on a research project of their own choice. The case study explains the participants' experience of their development as researchers from the before mentioned perspective. Data were collected by means of interviews, observation and document analysis. The findings indicate that the research development of the academics from legitimate peripheral to central participation was not a simple linear process but was influenced by the university context, activities in the CoP and participants' individual dispositions. These factors influenced participants' development and thus their identification or dis-identification as competent researchers.

#### **Shabalala, Lindiwe, J – Unisa, IODL**

##### **Discussion Group**

##### **Open and distance learning (ODL) at UNISA: the ODL change model**

The University of South Africa (UNISA) is part of change not only on the use of technology in education but also on the changing perceptions and knowledge about (a) how learning is understood; (b) how people learn at a distance and (c) what systems and facilities work for which contexts towards the facilitation of effective learning. To achieve this goal, the UNISA Council and the Vice Chancellor, mandated the special advisor: ODL to establish a project aimed at defining the ODL model and the future business approach to be used at Unisa. The purpose of the ODL project was to begin the work on transforming UNISA to being an ODL University. The exploration of the ODL best practices that can be effectively contextualized to UNISA for developing an ODL model



formed the initial work of the project staff. Thus contextualizing the ODL for the UNISA included:

- interrogating ODL best practices internationally;
- assessing the current approach and practice at UNISA;
- introducing change initiatives to establish a relevant ODL culture and practice throughout the Institution and
- engaging directly with relevant stakeholders on the effective access, retention and success of learners by establishing the appropriate service and learning environment.

The purpose of this paper is to report on the development of the ODL change model, how it is currently being implemented at UNISA and some key developments emanating from it.

**Steyn, Leonie, Dr & Myburgh, FM – Unisa, ICLD**

**Sub-theme: Research/Integration of ICT and social networking technologies**

#### **What do students say? Students' perceptions of online learning**

Open distance learning (ODL) is increasingly becoming the mode of learning for many students due to a variety of reasons. Students, especially working adults with families, appreciate the flexibility and the fewer time constraints that distance learning has to offer. It provides a viable alternative for a large proportion of the population that cannot afford – either in money, time or resources – to attend traditional face-to-face educational institutions.

To support a traditional paper-based mode, Unisa launched their Learning Management System called myUnisa, in January 2006. The myUnisa system offers a variety of teaching and learning tools as well as various administrative functionalities to enhance the learning experience, including amongst others, discussion forums, announcements, wikis, blogs and communication functionalities.

Although there will always be students who do not have easy or reliable access to computers and the Internet, Unisa has the responsibility to accommodate students and meet their needs by utilize ICT optimally and provide alternative means to access materials, communicate and learn within the framework of life-long learning. To establish in how far myUnisa does address students' needs we conducted a survey on how students use and experience the system. Students also had the opportunity to give their opinions and provide suggestions on how to improve some of the tools on myUnisa to enhance their learning experience.

The following will be addressed:

- Student access to computers and the Internet
- The use of various tools on myUnisa
- Communication via myUnisa
- Students' comments.

**Subotzky, George, Prof and Prinsloo, Paul, Dr – Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Research**

#### **Towards a Conceptual Model for Explaining and Predicting Retention and Success in Distance Education: The Case of the University of South Africa**

Improving student retention and success constitutes a key challenge worldwide. With massification,

student populations are now more diverse, non-traditional and generally less prepared to negotiate the transition from secondary to tertiary education. Faced with increasingly complex life circumstances and often conflicting social and academic demands, retention and success rates vary widely among different demographic groups and are shaped both by cognitive factors and numerous non-cognitive factors. Unisa, in providing comprehensive distance open access to a large, diverse, mostly non-traditional, and generally underprepared student population of over 270,000, faces particular challenges in this regard. Accordingly, a comprehensive retention and success strategy is being developed. The first step comprised conceptually modelling all relevant factors which impact on retention and success in the Unisa context. Drawing from an extensive literature review, the model utilises psychological, sociological and critical theoretical perspectives and key constructs including: habitus, cultural and other forms of capital, situatedness, attribution, locus of control and self-efficacy. Success is explained as the outcome of sufficient fit at each interactive stage between shifting student attributes, attitudes and life circumstances on the one hand, and institutional practices, services and support on the other. Fit arises through mutual adaptive transformation. Students must master learning expectations and negotiate multiple academic and socio-economic demands. The institution must inform its practices by the detailed qualitative and quantitative student tracking and profiling of cognitive and non-cognitive factors and, accordingly, predict and proactively mitigate risk through intensive student engagement. The model is unique in emphasising the role of institutional transformation and intensive student engagement in the distance education context.

**Swanepoel, Louie, Prof and Mays, Tony – Unisa/Saide**

**Sub-theme: Research/Ethics**

**Quality assurance at Unisa: towards a framework to support transformation**

This paper explores the complexity of quality assurance and promotion at Unisa, one of the world's mega-universities. Since the completion of the merger process in 2004, the new Unisa has been seeking to re-define itself as the country's dedicated ODL, comprehensive university. This has required extensive reflexive research into the institution's current practices and attempts at setting appropriate benchmarks for transformation. However, with 260 000 students, 6000 courses and 600 assessment centres all over the world, and a particular mission with regard to development in Africa, Unisa has both similarities with and key differences from other institutions. This has led to the development of an Integrated Quality Management Framework (IQMF, Unisa 2008) which provides guidelines rather than prescriptions and processes that require self-evaluation based on professional ethics and reflexive practice. The paper provides an overview of the model and some of the theoretical assumptions that underpin it.

**Tshivhase, AC, Dr – Unisa, DCLD**

**Sub-theme: Research**

**ODL policy making and implementation: vision and reality**

This article argues that the ODL policy making and implementation is enhanced by the policy makers' expertise and outlining of effective implementation processes. In many context of ODL policy making, the limited knowledge and personal experience leads to ineffective policy making and implementation. Thus, the author suggests few things towards the understanding of policy making and implementation from a general ODL operation.

Policy making and implementation processes are regulated by the policy makers' perception and action to the vision and reality of such a policy.

Key words: ODL, policy making, policy implementation.

**Van der Merwe, BC; De Beer, KJ and Baird, NH – Central University of Technology, Free State**

**Sub-theme: Integration of ICT and social networking technologies**

### **ELECTRONIC LEARNING IMPLIES LEARNER CENTREDNESS**

There seems to be a worldwide interest in enhancing the student learning experience, particularly through student centred learning - an educational philosophy that places the student at the centre of the learning process (Van Der Merwe, 2007). It also seems to be the current universal and generic trend in modern learning and teaching practices. The philosophy of Open Learning is also supported in an array of Open and Distance Electronic Learning (ODEL) methodologies (De Beer, 2009).

These methodologies are built and supported by modern multimedia and webbased applications such as, podcasting, blogging, wiki's, social networks, online video, Skype, e-books, and other collaborative technologies and Open Education Resources (Baird, 2009).

More important is the fact that the learning facilitator has to manage the learning experience of the student towards achieving specific and generic objectives progressively (Van der Merwe, 2006). Subsequently, the facilitators, learners as well as Higher Education planners and developers have to stay abreast with the latest developments in online learning support systems which changes on a daily basis. (Baird, 2009). Learning content stored in electronic format can also be used as Supplemental learning resources for Supplemental Instruction sessions as well as for Co-operative Education (Work Integrated Learning) when learners are placed for experiential training in the real work place. As such Mobile learning becomes part of:

- the quick collection of new knowledge;
- the storing of empirical data;
- the consulting process of the electronic formats; and
- the integration and interpretation of holistic concepts and individual perceptions.

**van Rooy, Tinus – Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Research**

### **Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in open distance learning - the University of South Africa assessor training experience**

This paper focuses on the role of assessment in providing quality educational experiences in open distance learning. It reports on a study which aimed to investigate the impact of an assessor training course on the teaching and assessment practices of academic staff in a higher education and open distance learning context. The study examined lecturers' perceptions and experiences of the assessor training and the effectiveness of the training in addressing the unique needs and requirements of quality teaching and assessment in this context. The study was conducted against the background of ongoing debate regarding norm-referenced (traditional, measurement) versus standards-based (criterion-referenced, outcomes-based) assessment systems. The study revisits the well-known taxonomies of learning outcomes and addresses critical issues in outcomes-based assessment in open distance learning and in constructively aligning teaching, learning and assessment to enhance educational experiences in open distance learning. Findings obtained from focus group discussions, questionnaires and semi-structured individual interviews showed that the course managed to qualitatively enrich existing assessment approaches; inform teaching, learning

and assessment practices in the higher education and open distance learning context; and put together a stimulating and challenging learning experience for the academic staff and their academic activities in a broader constructivist framework.

**Weeks, Fransa and van Schalkwyk, Alena – Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Learner support and assessment**

**PERSONALITY TYPES IN A MENTOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP**

The focus of this research is personality types within the context of the teacher-student relationship, with special emphasis on the mentoring relationship in particular. The outcome of this research will assist the lecturers at UNISA in determining the personality factors that need to be taken into consideration with the placement of a student in a school. These factors can have a determining impact on the student teacher's interaction and experience of teaching practice. It can be the difference between an experience that is meaningful and enriching as opposed to an unpleasant one.

**Wilson, Hentie – Unisa**

**Sub-theme: Learner support and assessment**

**Student support in Foundation provision at Unisa - Assessing the impact of the NQF aims of redress and access**

South Africa embarked on a Foundation provision project and at Unisa we supported this national project in the Unisa Science Foundation project. This 150 milion 3-year cycle project aims to put money and resources into improving access to universities by previously disadvantaged people and to attend to redress the imbalances of the past (NQF 2008).

The Unisa Science Foundation provision was developed and piloted specially for the ODL environment over the period 2005-2007. The first roll-out was in 2008 onwards. This paper aims to provide an overview of strategies to provide student support in a developing country where tutoring and academic skills are targeted in the model as the vehicles to support redress towards success. This paper will further interrogate access in ODL and how openness affects success. How is redress measured and possible in the South African scenario? What characteristic does the Unisa student in the sciences have? What success rate has been achieved in passrates, redress and who are these disadvantaged people that benefit from the grant?

The action research research methodology is descriptive and supported with documents and data. The successes and challenges will be discussed in the context of redress and access.