



ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 50, 2 MARCH 2011

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1 ODL PODCAST 4



Due to problems with the podcast server by the time this Communiqué was published, it was impossible to upload the podcast for this week.

We will try again next week.

2 NEWSFLASH – NEWS FROM THE STLSC OF 28 FEBRUARY 2011

NEWS FLASH

At the senate Tuition and Learner Support Committee (STLSC) of 28 February a number of interesting points were discussed. Please take note that the following are personal reflections and does not represent the official minutes of the STLSC...

One of the recurring issues at the STLSC is the problems our students in Ethiopia face in getting access to prescribed text books. A number of investigations later and we are not necessarily closer to a *permanent* solution. This made me wonder whether we seriously consider the implications of our aspirations to be an African ODL institution and increasing African footprint. How does the provision of teaching look in a semester system in an African and international context where students don't necessarily have access to affordable and sustainable internet, telephone and/or postal access? How do we support these students outside South African working hours?

It was also reported from CSET that they are making huge progress in providing students with multilingual glossaries and contribute to the development of multilingual dictionaries. "Extensive widely accepted scientific and technical vocabularies do not yet necessarily exist in many of the indigenous South African languages". The proposal is rather to provide students with explanations or definitions than trying to create or supply technical terms that would not have the envisaged benefit to students. At present there are isiZulu and Northern Sotho glossaries for 2 modules in the School of Computing and a glossary for a third module is under development. The School of Engineering is considering starting glossaries for Afrikaans, isiZulu and Northern Sotho as a first attempt. *Viva CSET, viva!*

The STLSC has also approved that the new generic admission requirements will be implemented as from 2013, with the current access programmes being subsequently phased out.

It was also noted that many modules at Unisa has pre- and co-requisites that actually mean very little. For example to state that "any two modules" in a particular college are a prerequisite for registering for another module, actually makes very little sense.

The STLSC also took note of the plans to draft a five-year ICT enhanced teaching and learning strategy which include the following tentative five foci:

Focus 1: Increase, sustain and support affordable access (encompassing issues regarding bandwidth, availability, cost, etc) for students and staff to a range of affordable and appropriate technologies and software.

Focus 2: Strategically differentiate between available and future technologies; and test and implement the operationalisation of these technologies over a five-year period. This will result in the optimisation of the potential of multimedia, software and tools such as podcasts (voice and video), white-boarding (eg BigBlueButton) for increasing the effectiveness of teaching, assessment and learning.

Focus 3: Engage and collaborate with other role-players (such as the DCLD and HR) to ensure the continuous professional development and support of staff and students.

Focus 4: Maintain and increase the effectiveness of current video conferencing and satellite-broadcasting.

Focus 5: Optimise and support the use of and contributing to Open Educational Resources (OERs).

This ICT enhanced teaching and learning strategy will contribute and form part of the broader framework for an ODL pedagogy at Unisa. The latter is in its initial stages of development. A small team consisting of Dr Paul Prinsloo (ODL Coordinator), Mr Richard Chauke (Gauteng Region), Ms Linda Proctor (Midlands), Mr Dhaya Sewduth (KZN) and Mr Hennie Pretorius (KZN) did a content analysis of current policies, frameworks and ODL task team reports and found the following 7 principles that are *already* in place:

Unisa's ODL pedagogy is

1. Is student-centred
2. Is developed according to the Framework for a Team Approach in curriculum and learning development (FTA).
3. Creates rich environments for active and successful learning
4. Is evidence- and inquiry-based
5. Is well-resourced through integrated and effective institutional systems, processes and procedures
6. is informed and sustained by a well-designed ODL Continuous Professional Development programme for all Unisa employees
7. Is clear regarding the scope of and roles of different role-players in their respective contributions to an ODL pedagogy

It is clear that it may be time to revisit the Unisa Tuition Policy (2005), the Assessment Policy (2006), the ODL Policy (2008) and various other documents such as the Curriculum Policy (2010), the Framework for a Team Approach in Curriculum and Learning Development (2010) and others to provide an integrated and holistic picture and framework for teaching and learning at Unisa. This will be a huge task and we will start the process within the next week or two.

3 FIFTY ODL COMMUNIQUÉS LATER – A LUTA CONTINUA

A friend of mine sent me a compilation of the past ODL Communiqués in one document and what a surprise it was to see how the ODL Communiqué developed since 9 February 2010 when the first one-page ODL Communiqué was circulated. The second ODL Communiqué also had a very basic layout, and consisted of three pages focusing on the different delivery models.

The third Communiqué saw the first of the current layout and provided feedback on the different task teams. In the sixth ODL Communiqué of 19 March I took the “bold” step (at the time) to provide *personal* reflections on the work of the different task teams. For me personally, this was a courageous move – moving the ODL communiqué from “mere” reportage on the work of the ODL Task teams, to also sharing personal viewpoints and reflections. ODL Communiqué 9, (14 April) saw the first effort to use a recently published book or article as basis for reflection on teaching and learning at Unisa.

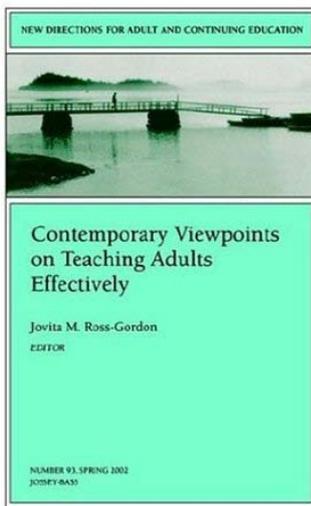
From then onwards, this became an integral (and personally very gratifying) element of the ODL Communiqués.

ODL Communiqué 41 (dated 1 December 2010) for me personally was a “next step” in the sense of sharing a very *personal* vision of where I saw ODL going in the next five years. In that communiqué I shared my apprehension and uncertainty to formulate a personal vision for ODL. But by the end of 2010 it was as if some emerging trends became very visible and I felt surer of my role as ODL Coordinator to draft an “ODL charter”.

ODL Communiqué 47 (9 February 2011) saw another first, namely the first ODL podcast – a very tentative (and scary) attempt from me to embrace the affordances of technology, in public...

This week we therefore celebrate **50** issues – and what a journey it was and still is! I would like to thank everyone who trusted me (and still do ...) to provoke, stimulate, provide a space for critical reflection and importantly, try to share information and share my personal vulnerability of not knowing.

4 GOOD TEACHING: ONCE SIZE FITS ALL?



One of the most exciting series in adult education is the series called “New directions for adult and continuing education”, published by Jossey-Bass. “Contemporary viewpoints on teaching adults effectively” (Number 93, 2002) edited by Jovita M. Ross-Gordan has a number of thought-provoking essays that are worth reading. One of the essays is by Daniel D. Pratt “Good teaching: One size fits all?” (2002:5-16).

Pratt (2002:5) starts his essay by reflecting on the increasing drive across the educational spectrum in accepting a “constructivist view of learning and teaching” as the “single dominant view of learning or teaching”. He is not so sure that this is a good thing...

He states that he “found a plurality of good teaching” in “five different countries, studying hundreds of teachers of adults” and much of the good teaching he found did not necessarily rest on “constructivist principles of learning” (2002:5). He refers to a number of other educational researchers who agree that there is no single educational paradigm that has the sole claim to “good teaching” (2002:5). In his research he documented five different perspectives on teaching, “each with the potential to be good teaching”. These perspectives included: transmission, developmental, apprenticeship, nurturing, and social reform (Pratt 2002:5).

Before we continue, just take note of the statement Pratt makes that each of the different perspectives on teaching has the potential to be good teaching...

Pratt (2002:6 et seq.) continues by exploring the five perspectives on teaching and one of his first points is that there are significant overlaps among them and that similar “actions, intentions, and even beliefs can be found in more than one perspective”. He quotes an example where teachers holding different perspectives on teaching may all hold “critical reflection” dear to the teaching process. If I understand Pratt (2002) correctly, it would seem as if each perspective on teaching has advantages and disadvantages, *depending on the context*. Pratt (2002:6-7) states that “transmission” is still the most common orientation to teaching in secondary and higher education. This entails that the teacher is the expert and students are “containers” to be filled. This is an additive process of teaching and often results in students being overloaded (anyone at Unisa listening?). Despite of all the negative perceptions regarding transmission paradigm, Pratt (2002:8) states that we all have (fond) memories of such teachers and much of the foundational knowledge we have comes from a transmission paradigm of teaching. Though this paradigm has fallen from grace, these teachers’ enthusiasm and expertise earned our respect.

In a “developmental” perspective on teaching, a constructivist orientation to learning is foundational (Pratt 2002:8). The primary goal of such teaching is to “develop increasingly complex and sophisticated ways of reasoning and problem solving within a content area or field of practice” (2002:8). In this paradigm, the pre-knowledge of learners is an important element of validating what they already know and starting the teaching process *from where they are*. “Questions, problems, cases, and examples form the bridge that teachers use to transport learners from previous ways of thinking and reasoning to new, more complex, and sophisticated forms of reasoning and problem solving” (Pratt 2002:9). Important in this paradigm is that teachers “adapt their knowledge to learners’ ways of understanding” (Pratt 2002:9), and not the other way round. Anyone listening?

Pratt (2002:9) cautions that although this paradigm has reached the status of a new orthodoxy, and through this paradigm’s commitment to celebrating learners’ prior knowledge, this paradigm requires teachers to be very careful in not only using problem solving and case-studies as mere “tools”, but to use their knowledge carefully. *In this paradigm less telling means more learning...* (Pratt 2002:9).

In an “apprenticeship” perspective on teaching, “learning is facilitated when people work on authentic tasks in real settings of application or practice” (Pratt 2002:9). In this perspective, teachers “must find ways to translate the habituated movement and artistry of performance into language and demonstrations that are accessible and meaningful to learners” (Pratt 2002:9). Crucial in this perspective is that as learners are exposed to authentic practice and reflect on practice (praxis), their identities are transformed as they adopt, often unconsciously, the “language, values, and practices of a specific social group” (Pratt 2002:10). “Learning therefore is a matter of developing competence and identity in relation to other members of a community of practice” (Pratt 2002:10).

In the “nurturing” perspective on teaching, especially in adult learners, teachers are conscious of the fact that adult learners are often very vulnerable and that their self-concepts may be under threat or wounded. The challenge in a “nurturing” perspective is to find a balance between caring and challenging (Pratt 2002:11). Due to the caring nature of a nurturing perspective, assessment and evaluation are often minefields.

The last paradigm or perspective Pratt (2002:12) discusses is the “social reform perspective” which is difficult to describe because of a range of characteristics and strategies. This teaching perspective focuses on the reform of society as bigger ideal and most of the teachers in this paradigm are either rebels or leaders (Pratt 2002:12). Social reform teachers make three assumptions: “that their ideals are necessary for a better society, that their ideals are appropriate for all, and that the ultimate goal of teaching is to bring about social change, not simply individual learning” (Pratt 2002:13).

Pratt (2002:14) wraps up his exploration of the different perspectives on teaching by stating that perspectives “are neither good nor bad. They are simply philosophical orientations to knowledge, learning, and the role and responsibility of being a teacher”. Pratt further warns that “it is important to remember that *each of these perspectives represents a legitimate view of teaching when enacted appropriately*. Conversely, each holds the potential for poor teaching” (2002:14; italics added).

Pratt (2002:14) concludes by stating that our preconceived notion of “good teaching” needs to be interrogated and explored.

If you are interested in exploring your own teaching perspective, visit the following website: <http://www.teachingperspectives.com> (accessed 1 March 2011). The survey takes between 10-15 minutes to complete. I did and my most dominant perspective is “developmental” (45), with “apprenticeship”, “nurturing” and “social reform” coming in all in second place (44), with “transmission” the perspective with the lowest score (40). From the analysis I received per e-mail, it would seem as if there is no major discrepancy between my beliefs (74), my intentions (71) and my actions (72).

5 MUMBO JUMBO 7: STUDENTS ARE NOT USING THE DISCUSSION FORUM ON MYUNISA THEREFORE THEY DON'T HAVE ACCESS

In the previous communiqués we started to explore some of the general assumptions and often unquestioned beliefs regarding teaching and learning at Unisa. This week I want to explore the claim recently made by a lecturer that he knows that our students don't have access to the Internet because there is no activity on the Discussion Forum in his module on myUnisa.

The scary aspect of this claim or statement is that there are many lecturers that judge their students' connectivity to the Internet on the intensity of students' activity on the discussion forums of their modules... Let me immediately add that I do not want to judge the quality or effectiveness of a lecturer's teaching based on student activity on *myUnisa*, or for that matter their own activity on *myUnisa*.

I really think the quality and effectiveness of teaching is more complex than just using student and lecturer activity on *myUnisa* as criterion. Having said that, I really think that judging students' connectivity or readiness to engage in online teaching and learning based on their engagement on *myUnisa* is also an overstatement.

Let me stake my claims:

1. Students will engage on and use the tools on *myUnisa* if there is a sound reason why it will be beneficial for their learning to do so. If the benefits of engaging on *myUnisa* are not clear or credited in one way or another, students will most probably share trivia and soon disengage from using *myUnisa*. The other side of the coin is equally true: There is enough evidence that students engage on *myUnisa* when there is a teaching presence by the lecturer, when there is a social engagement from tutors, fellow-learners and lecturers and when the engagement on *myUnisa* enables them to learn better and more effectively.
2. At present most of the activities on *myUnisa* are non-credit bearing, non-essential, and many activities add-ons. *To therefore judge the lack of student activity as evidence of the fact that students don't have access, I suspect, is not valid.*
3. At present lecturers try to balance doing research, collect evidence for their next performance review, attend meetings, keep up with increasing administration, write study materials, answer student administrative enquiries and try to placate deeply frustrated students due to the lack of other efficient services; write tutorial letters 101, find prescribed text books, set of examination papers, mark and moderate examination papers; and yes, also try to be active on *myUnisa* without sustainable and dedicated pedagogical and technical support.

I take my hat off to you. I sit in awe. But don't judge students' connectivity on the grounds of their absence on *myUnisa*.

If we don't find ways to make students' contributions and activity on *myUnisa* credit-bearing or contributing to portfolios of evidence or assignments; their activity on *myUnisa* will be less fruitful, for them *and* for the lecturers involved. If we don't find ways to provide effective pedagogic and technical support for lecturers (whether centralised or decentralised), expecting lecturers to do more on *myUnisa* will be final straws on the backs of already overburdened camels (excuse the metaphor, nothing personal).

If we don't find effective and appropriate ways to get trained tutors to engage with students on *myUnisa*, our responses will be less effective and impoverished. Our tutors can really provide an excellent teaching, cognitive and social presences on *myUnisa* – if we can only provide them with access and training and ... of course trust *them*...

If we don't find appropriate ways to engage huge student numbers in effective and enriching ways on *myUnisa*, the pedagogic use of *myUnisa* will remain an elitist domain of the smaller courses.

How can we use *myUnisa* in a module with more than 15 000 students per semester? Of maybe the more important reason to ask is... For what reasons can an institutional virtual learning environment (VLE) such as *myUnisa* be used in modules with huge enrolments?

No one claims to have all the answers to these (and many other unasked questions). But to make the claim that our students don't have access to networked environments because they do not use a discussion forum in a particular module is non-sense.

6 RE THE PROVISION OF PREVIOUS YEARS' EXAMINATION PAPERS...

No, I did not forget my promise to follow-up on this matter. We have asked Legal Services at Unisa for a formal exposition of Unisa's response to the Access to Information Act with regard to the provision of previous years' examination papers. Watch this space. *Blessed are those who are patient.*

7 RE THE ROLE OF RACE AND LANGUAGE IN STUDENT PASS RATES AT UNISA

I received an interesting response on last week's "Mumbo Jumbo" in which I explored the controversial and much contested claims that Unisa's tuition language model favours white students and therefore, discriminates against students whose mother tongues are not Afrikaans or English. I post Ms Yuraisha Chetty's (DISA) response with her permission. She writes in her personal capacity:

Just a quick perspective to share on the language of instruction issue. Even if multilingualism is the way to go and all our study materials are translated into a variety of official languages, this does not necessarily mean better success for our students. Why? Well, importantly due to the fact that we cannot assume that students are *proficient* in their home languages. Proficiency is the key, I suspect (and obviously this must be supported by research...there might already be some research out there to this effect?).

The Multilingual Glossary Survey showed that the overwhelming majority of students actually prefer English as the language of preference for tuition/study materials, corresponding (e-mails, SMSs, letters) and examinations – and this with a sample which had a fair spread of students with African languages. Interesting? I don't think this for a second suggests that students with African languages do not celebrate or embrace their languages or cultural identities. All of this speaks to the global dominance of English in knowledge economy and the current status of English as the language of "employment" and "wealth". The argument for elevating the status of African languages in Higher Education, by DHET, has as its basis the need to not neglect our indigenous languages.....of course, for universities to take all of this seriously would mean effectively implementing their language policies – which would have financial and logistical challenges.

8 ODL FORUM ON ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT: EXPLORING PORTFOLIOS, MONDAY 7 MARCH 2011

In 2010 a number of alternative assessment strategies were approved by the Senate meeting of 2 June. While portfolios were always used in the Unisa context, there is a concerted effort to increase the effective use of portfolios in formative and summative assessment at Unisa wherever possible and appropriate. Using portfolios is however not without its pitfalls, challenges. But it also provides opportunities that other means of assessment don't provide.

At this forum we are also very happy to listen to Dr Leonie Steyn and Dr Willa Louw (both from the DCLD) who recently visited New York University, Virginia Tech and Michigan University as part of a Unisa International Fellowship. The purpose of this fellowship was to explore how American Universities use Sakai when implementing e-portfolios in their teaching and learning and how Unisa can implement using E-portfolios in a developing world ODL context.

Join us on **Monday 7 March** for a critical interrogation of portfolios as an exciting and authentic assessment methodology in an ODL context.

10:00	Overview of the programme	Dr Paul Prinsloo
10:05	Official Welcome	Prof Peter Havenga (Executive Director: Academic Planning)
10:15	A short introduction to Portfolios	
10:25	Panel discussion: current issues in using portfolios in assessment	Representatives from different sections from Unisa engaging with current practices regarding portfolios
10:40	E-portfolios in three US institutions: A feedback report	Dr Leonie Steyn and Dr Willa Louw (both from the DCLD)
11:00	Institutionalising E-portfolios @ Unisa	Prof Heinz Scheck Dr Willa Louw
11:30	Open discussion	Dr Paul Prinsloo
11:45	Closing remarks	Prof Peter Havenga
12:00	Lunch	

Please let us know whether you want to attend? Please RSVP before or on **Thursday 3 March** at mokoets@unisa.ac.za

9 PANDORA'S BOX OR NOAH'S ARK? USING SOCIAL MEDIA @UNISA

Join us on **Tuesday, 8 March 2011** (11:00-13:00) in the Senate Hall for an ODL Forum on using social media in the context of teaching and learning at Unisa.

As more and more lecturers are using various social media platforms (eg Facebook, Ning, Twitter, etc) there is huge potential to either increase the quality of teaching or potential for a disaster...

Join us for a critical exploration of the issue. Please RSVP before or on **Wednesday 2 March** at mokoets@unisa.ac.za. We would like to provide a light finger lunch and knowing how many people will come will allow us to plan accordingly.

10 A LIFT GOING NOWHERE? INTERROGATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A TEAM APPROACH TO CURRICULUM AND LEARNING DEVELOPMENT

On Tuesday 1 March we critically interrogated the challenges and issues regarding the implementation of the *Framework for a Team Approach in Curriculum and Learning Development*. The first *Framework for a Team Approach in Curriculum and Learning Development* was approved by Senate on 25 October 2006. A revised version was approved on 17 March 2010.

It is therefore 6 years since the first Framework, and almost a year since the revised Framework was approved.

After a broad overview of some of the elements of the Framework, a panel consisting of Prof Hanaretha Kruger (Private Law), Ms Lynette Naidoo (Communication Science) and Ms Ronell van der Merwe (Computing) shared their experiences regarding the implementation of the Framework. While there were many success stories, it was clear that many academics and service departments are still in the dark regarding the Framework and its implications for the development of curricula and learning experiences.

While the panel members were very positive regarding the potential of the Framework to contribute in quality teaching and learning experiences, there were clear concerns regarding role clarification, resource-allocation, staffing issues from support and service departments, and the coordination and wrap-up of the development processes.

Questions from the audience indicated huge support for the principles embodied by the Framework, but also raised a number of concerns regarding roles and responsibilities. Ms Liana Griesel (DSPQA) and Mr Ernie Blignaut (Planning and Coordination) shared further insights into the implementation of the Framework.

It is clear that the issue no longer is whether to implement the Framework or not, *but how?*



From left to right: Ms Ronell van der Merwe, Ms Lynette Naidoo and Prof Hannaretha Kruger



Prof Louis van Niekerk taking part in the open conversation during the Forum

[Photographs by Mr Anton de Jager (Unisa: Sound, Video and Photography)]

11 THE SECOND CELEBRATION OF INNOVATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Join us on **Thursday, 17 March** (Senate Hall, 09:00-13:00) for the “Second celebration of innovation in teaching and learning”.

We would like to celebrate examples of innovation in teaching and learning (including student support, administration, etc) at Unisa. The programme is as follows:

- | | | |
|--------------|--|--|
| 09:00 | Programme overview | Dr Paul Prinsloo (ODL Coordinator) |
| 09:10 | Official Welcome | Prof Rita Maré (Vice Principal: Academic & Research) |
| 09:20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking the “distance” out of distance education: going the extra mile: the role of group discussions • The use of satellite broadcasting in bridging the cognitive and emotional divide | <p>Mr Theo van der Vyver (Department of Economics)</p> <p>Ms Rochelle Wessels (Department of Public Administration)</p> |
| 09:50 | <i>Open discussion</i> | |

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|--------------|---|--|
| 10:05 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-learning as maieutic: teaching Philosophy in ODL. | Mr Callum Scott (Department of Philosophy) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eish! Why a video conference? Using video conferencing in the teaching of Communication Studies | Prof Elize Terblanche (Department of Communication Science) |
| 10:35 | <i>Open discussion</i> | |
| 10:50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The optimum use of myUnisa in the teaching of Computing: pitfalls and opportunities | Mr Jan Mentz (Computing) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new face of tutoring at Unisa: A pilot E-tutor project in Management Accounting | Mr Anton Jordaan (Department of Management Accounting) |
| 11:20 | <i>Open discussion</i> | |
| 11:35 | Response | Prof Peter Havenga (Executive Director: Academic Planning) |
| 11:45 | Closing remarks: Teaching and learning at Unisa: the next generation | Dr Paul Prinsloo |
| 12:00 | Lunch | |

Please RSVP before or on **Monday 14 March** at mokoets@unisa.ac.za. We would like to provide a light finger lunch and knowing how many people will come will allow us to plan accordingly.

12 ODL REPOSITORY AND BLOG

All the ODL task team reports, the overview of the recommendations of the STLSC and other ODL documents are available on the [Unisa Library's Institutional Repository](#). The repository is updated on a regular basis and if you register on the repository, you will get notifications of any new uploads.

Drafted by Dr Paul Prinsloo

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Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this ODL Communiqué represent my personal viewpoints and do not represent the viewpoint of any other member of the Unisa community.