Unisa and TSA negotiate the winding NQF and SAQA road ahead

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ABSTRACT

It is generally accepted that the work-cultures of institutions differ in subtle ways from one another. The purpose of the article is to show that, in the case of outcomes based education, different underlying philosophies and approaches towards the "restating of qualifications in outcomes" used by Unisa and TSA contribute towards influencing the way educational practitioners of these two institutions individually view OBE. By comparing the two institutions, certain differences concerning learning development are verified. The merging of these subtly differing attitudes, values and views into one merged institution will take time and make heavy demands on all new Unisans. Although everyone involved in the merger knows this, no one really knows just how difficult it will eventually prove to be. Bearing these differing perceptions in mind, the wisest route for learning developers/instructional designers would be not to be too rigid in their approach, as the difficult road up ahead will have to be negotiated wisely. Perhaps the way to go would be for learning developers/instructional designers and their clients, the academics, to work collaboratively towards determining broader and more accommodative but acceptable parameters that will best address the needs of all the stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The official date set for the merger of the three institutions – Unisa, Technikon of Southern Africa (TSA) and Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC) – to begin was January 2004. It has also ushered in the beginning of a new era. In her annual message for 2003 Dr Mokgokong, chairperson of the Council, bids the "old Unisa" farewell after 130 fruitful years ((Mokgokong 2003). She expresses her and all our hopes that the new University of South Africa (Unisa) will, despite the enormous challenges that await all new Unisans, continue to do sterling work in the field of higher education in South Africa (Mokgokong 2003).

The merging of the three institutions has resulted in the creation of one of the larger and more comprehensive distance education mega-universities in the world today. Since they suddenly have to offer both university and technikon qualifications on a scale much larger than before, and to do so smoothly and effectively, all the new Unisa partners will have to demonstrate extraordinarily competent levels of special skills and qualities such as creativity, tolerance, patience, collaboration and wisdom. This has to be done despite the fact that the whole process of implementing OBE in our educational system has not been approached at the level of the system but by separate universities on the one hand and the integrated technikon sector on the other (Kilfoil 2003:58). To make the country's "pool of mergers" even murkier, SAQA, the Department of Education and the CHE (who are "helping" with the complex mergers) are still in a dysfunctional relationship after many years (Kilfoil 2003:58). There are many reasons for the lack of integration, of which the following are a few:

- The motto of "building the road while walking on it" was initially advocated very forcefully by SAQA, leaving it up to the many relevant parties such as the SGBs and the providers to wrestle with issues such as implementation and the establishment of clarity.

- Frustration caused by the constant changes to concepts and processes introduced by SAQA after much work had been done resulted in an attitude among many academics of "let us rather wait until there is more clarity".
- OBE was initially conceptualised between the government and the business sectors in the early 1990s without due consideration of the academic sector until much later.

The purpose of the article is to take a closer look at just one of the crucial aspects of one of the core functions of any distance education institution, ie the generating of learning outcomes for courses and how differing paradigms influence the ways education practitioners approach the processes of doing so. Although there is much common ground shared by all three institutions, such as a uniform acceptance of outcomes-based education (OBE) as being the general approach adopted by the "new" South Africa since the early 1990s, our many HE institutions flesh out OBE in the development of courseware in subtly different ways. This is especially true of the different processes the old Unisa and TSA adopted regarding the requirements of SAQA and the restating or registering of qualifications in terms of outcomes. An analysis of the two processes implemented before the merger should help cast more light on why distance education practitioners (DEP) in general and learning developers (LD)/instructional designers (ID) in particular from the two institutions see open distance learning (ODL) somewhat differently. A more focused awareness of these two different processes can help DEPs from the old Unisa and TSA, who must now work together in the new merged institution, to be more patient and accommodating when collaboratively negotiating the way ahead. Such insights could also help to make what is already a difficult merger between a university and a technikon less stressful.

DEPs who have been involved in ODL for the last 20 years can come to some kind of agreement that the new approach to looking at knowledge can be summed up by the question that is foundational to OBE: "What do I want students to know and be able to do, and how will I know they have accomplished those ends?" (see Killan 2003). This is substantially different from the traditional content-driven approach of asking oneself "What do I plan to teach my student?" One can use the metaphor of peeling an orange to accentuate that there are different ways of peeling an orange, or as the case may be, of generating and interpreting outcomes. If the flesh of the fruit is edible and finally enjoyed in the end, the purpose would have been achieved. The only parameters or main outcomes that exist are that the skin must be removed within a relevantly short time, that a minimum amount of flesh be discarded, that the balance be made palatable, and that the remains are disposed of in a tidy manner!

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE WAYS WE LOOK AT OUTCOMES

By examining a typical "analysis and outcomes generation " process followed by Unisa and TSA prior to the merger, this article may help us comprehend to a greater degree why interpretations of certain key concepts and outcomes, and the ways they are generated and referred to, need to be approached flexibly at all times.

Such a tolerant approach is understandable, particularly if we consider the following:

- The different ways Unisa and TSA approached the complex processes of "restating qualifications in outcomes" towards the end of the millennium so that the necessary documents could be filled in for SAQA in a relatively short period of time. Underlying these differing interpretations and ways of generating outcomes are the various educational paradigms and philosophies developers of learning materials have been

exposed to in their lifetimes and which they have assimilated. It is in many ways the same as in the case of research. Schulze (2003:1) in her inaugural lecture uses a quote by Hathaway to explain the phenomenon of why researchers view qualitative and quantitative research so differently. She writes that these differing views are inevitable since paradigms dictate "... what researchers consider data, what their role in the investigation will be, what they consider knowledge, how they view reality, and how they can access reality".

- No two "projects" are the same as they always consist of several ever-changing variables such as the varying needs and difficulties or strengths of the clients regarding their abilities to write OBE materials, the differing levels of expertise of the specialists that make up the team, the ways all the role players' personalities relate and even the natures and requirements of the different subjects.

- "Design and development" is not merely a science but an art as well, as it involves more than just knowledge concerning learning; it also includes personal qualities such as instincts, experience, specific skills, creativity and dispositions that are deployed. The more one designs and develops, the more it becomes an art which is a skill of application (see Allen 1996:9).

- The consensus that exists among specialists involved in the business of designing and developing courseware that there is no one "right" way of generating outcomes. In an article on the Internet Roth et al (2002) write the following:

  Bottom-up or top-down? There is no one 'right' way to carry out departmental-based assessment of specific learning outcomes (SLO). Some departments may wish to proceed systematically from the course level to the more general level of the major, while others may wish to first articulate overarching program outcomes and then correlate them with individual courses or course clusters or concentrations. Proceeding from either direction, one will want to eventually loop between the two ends, with each informing the other.

- The generally acknowledged differences in approach to knowledge and practice that a university and a technikon may be expected to have (see diagram towards the end of the article). However, even here change is forcing technikons to become more research-oriented than in the past and universities to look more closely at the relevance of their qualifications in the real world. Besides, the policy of the government encourages this trend so as to offer resistence to academic drift (Van Rensburg 2002:1, 3).

- The defining lines between on-campus teaching and distance education are also becoming less distinct. Johnson (2003:chapter 1) writes the following:

  Distance education has touched a majority of institutions of higher education in the United States over the past 5 years. USA Today (Snapshots 2000) reports that 75% of US institutions of higher education now offer distance education courses and programs, and 35% have accredited distance education programs. It appears, however, that public institutions are using the distance mode of delivery much more than are private institutions.

- Then there are the rapidly changing trends concerning learning theories with respect to education in general and distance education in particular. This is especially true of the last few decades. Garrison (2000:1) writes about the "conceptual confusion" which is created with the advent of new terminology and the "enormous challenges for educators to make sense of the distance education options available". He also asks the pertinent question whether DE "has the theoretical foundation to take these constantly evolving changes into the future and whether the theoretical development will keep pace with innovations in technology and practice" (Garrison 2000:1).

- There has been a marked but diffused and differing trend in institutions away from the more behaviouristic and cognitive approaches towards the more constructive, and even postconstructivist, ones. Jonassen and Rohrer-Murphy (1999:61) in their article on designing constructivist learning environments (CLE) point out that "behavioral and job analysis techniques and learning analysis methods, such as hierarchical task (prerequisites) analysis, or even cognitive task analysis methods, cannot provide an appropriate foundation for designing CLEs" because they assume that relevant knowledge can be embedded in the instruction for transfer to the learner in any context. Regarding the above quote on CLEs, one should note that learning environments need not always be constructivist in their approach. The authors specifically list the kinds of CLEs they have in mind, namely (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy 1999:61) open-ended learning environments, micro-worlds, anchored instruction, problem-based learning and goal-based scenarios.
- Regarding the above paradigm shift, Goetz (2004:2) quotes Barr and Tagg who state that "subtly but profoundly we are shifting" from a college that exists to provide instruction to one which exists to produce learning. They make the important point that in the case of instruction and teaching, the method and product are one and the same, whereas in the case of learning, the method and product are different as the end governs the means (Goetz 2004:2).
- The recently published Nadeosa Courseware Awards for 2004 contain the evaluation criteria which they used for the adjucation (NADEOSA 2004). They have also chosen to look at materials development "within the framework of a continuum from an instructivist to a constructivist position", recognising that although they tend towards the social constructivist approach in theory, there needs to be a mixture of both positions in a " fit for purpose" approach.
- Finally, Unisa's bureau has learning developers while TSA centre has instructional designers, reflecting once again the differing philosophical underpinnings regarding learning and instruction between the two.

The above factors merely underscore two statements often quoted by many people, namely: "We do not see things as they are but we see them as we are" and "We can never step into the same river twice".

The eleven facts listed above serve to underscore the "rapidly changing trends" and variety of perceptions that DEPs have of ODL. Therefore the whole process of writing well-designed, learner-friendly courseware can be seen as a developmental one and will continue to be so *ad infinitum*. All educational practitioners are placed somewhere on a continuum regarding their expertise in OBE and DE and will move on, as learning occurs, towards greater levels of proficiency. Although we could set minimum requirements regarding the quality of the courses we develop, the dynamic and ever-changing nature of education cannot allow for the existence of an end-point on this continuum.

With the advantage of hindsight we as LDs/IDs should be able to look back at these past several years and identify more ably the strategies and processes that worked and those that caused unnecessary friction, and thereby avoid scenarios that contain pitfalls which can hinder processes unnecessarily. Whatever we do, it is our stewardship which will determine whether or not we keep our clients. Learning developers have to take findings of research bodies like NADEOSA and SAIDE seriously when they write that "often a comprehensive set of quality criteria/standards is overwhelming – they can be too comprehensive or even too high" and that

"as a result, the tendency is to either ignore them or pay lip service to them because there just isn't time to read through such long checklists" (NADEOSA and SAIDE 2003:1).

THE TSA'S APPROACH

To address the many challenges posed by the NQF, the technikon sector, with its 15 institutions at the time and represented by the Committee for Technikon Principals (CTP), tasked the Committee for Tutorial Matters (CTM) to devise a strategy. The strategy had to help the sector meet the requirements of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) as reflected in the regulations under Act 58 of 1995. In broad outline, the target for 1998 was to achieve general awareness among academic staff of the NQF and its requirements and to "restate the qualifications in outcomes" for the interim registration for 1999. This had to be done in order to comply with the requirements for registration of technikon qualifications by SAQA by June 2000 (Genis 1999:i).

As early as 1996 instructional designers in the Centre for Courseware Design and Development (CCDD) at the TSA had received training in criteria referenced approaches towards creating learning objectives, which are widely used in the industry and founded on Robert Mager's teachings on human performance. 1997 saw another small specialist private training group called DevTrain hired by TSA to help the instructional designers and academics implement the NQF requirements. DevTrain had also had extensive experience regarding the setting of unit standards for companies who were eager to have their unit standards registered with SAQA. Instructional designers then began to help with the capacity building exercise of preparing academics to generate outcomes by moving into the six programme groups and facilitating the process.

The initial process that was followed was loosely based on the process suggested in the guide *Technikon qualifications for the NQF* (see Genis 1999:6–20). Since the first draft, documents such as the proforma (which was the term given to the SAQA prescribed format listing the outcomes, assessment criteria etc. for the accreditation of qualifications) have been undergoing constant changes. Even concepts have been changed by SAQA, and everyone has had to adapt and make changes. The following table is a brief representation of this process which was used for determining the outcomes for certificates, diplomas and the various degrees at technikons:

Certain "convenor" technikons were made responsible for specific qualifications who would then take final responsibility for the submission. All technikons were urged to "restate" and register their qualifications in the required format and submit them to the convenor technikon for the final compilation.

1	**The situation and needs analysis.**
	Review the scope of the qualification: Place qualification in correct learning area; survey for overlap of similar qualifications and establish/verify the necessity for the qualification, an exercise which requires consultation with fellow providers.
1.2	*Analysis*: – Consult narrowly with as many stakeholders as possible, ie both provider and industrial subject specialists, students, representatives from relevant government and community bodies, etc. This is emphasised especially where industry is concerned. – Verify the NQF level and establish the purpose statement with the group. – Encourage the use of the Canadian DACUM (Development of A Curriculum) system, which has since been adapted and referred to as the "participative" approach. Warn the participants in such a process not to fall into the trap of going into a detailed task analysis. – Instead, establish broad or advanced exit level outcomes (ELO) which, when unpacked or broken down, would become the specified outcomes. They are named as such to avoid confusion with the specific outcomes of the unit standards used by industry. An example of an ELO for the qualification "Medical Surgical Nursing: Oncology" is: *Apply scientific nursing skills and technologies in the delivery of comprehensive oncology nursing to the cancer patient, family and community.* To achieve this broad outcome the workshop participants decided in the end that the knowledge and skills a learner would need are: – *apply the knowledge, principles and concepts of the pathophysiology and epidemiology of cancer in the scientific nursing of the patient* – *relate the implication of diagnosis and staging to treatment goals and strategies* – *apply holistic care in the scientific nursing of the cancer patient throughout the lifespan of the patient* – *use programmes to inform and educate patients, families and communities on the nature and prevention of cancer* The above four outcomes constitute the specific outcomes for which the assessment criteria had to be determined.
2.	Then identify the critical (cross-field) outcomes and briefly indicate where they are demonstrated within the specific outcomes.
3.	Spend some time looking at the credits. At least 72 credits of a qualification has to be at least at the same level at which the qualification is registered,or a higher level. Consider the estimates of the learning time students would require to master the qualification as well.
4.	Identify and formulate the assessment criteria for each specified outcome. The format used as suggested by SAQA at the time regarding unit standards was to write in the present tense, starting with the noun, then the verb and condition, as if the performance was observed and completed. In the end the module outcomes were set out according to the prescribed proforma format as follows: **Specified outcome:** Apply the knowledge, principles and concepts of pathophysiology and epidemiology of cancer in the scientific nursing of the patient.

	Assessment criteria: – *Different tumour types are correctly defined and described.* – *The neoplastic process can be explained to patients and families.* – *Epidemiological studies and findings are used to evaluate cancer–preventative measures.* At a recent workshop at Unisa (see Approval, registration and accreditation process: planning for successful curriculum development: 2003), a SAQA representative said they would change the verb and noun of the assessment criteria around as few practitioners were following these guidelines.
5.	Complete the rest of the standardised proforma document. These proforma documents as explained above contain the registered outcomes and their assessment criteria plus various other data for a particular course or qualification. They form the basis of the NQF when captured on the National Learner Database. The more meaningful and apt the outcomes and assessment criteria are, the better the chances are that the provider will be able to develop a well-designed learning programme for the course. Students and assessors would also have a clearer perception of what is expected of them.

Through trial and error the IDs then helped with the facilitation in the different programme groups of the above process. The example below was done with lecturers from the programme group "Agricultural Management" and other stakeholders from a few Agricultural Colleges and the industry. A brief description of the process that was followed is given and a matrix of the outcomes generated for the qualification BTech Agricultural Management is provided. The exercise lasted approximately three days after the main principles of the NQF/SAQA requirements had been discussed and explored with the participants.

The TSA process for generating outcomes

The process the two IDs followed is briefly outlined below and provides a glimpse of how the "participative" process proceeded:
- First of all, clarity had to be obtained concerning a preliminary "purpose statement" for the four year qualification. To do this the IDs started listing the characteristics of the typical students doing the course according to a checklist so as to create a student profile. They also listed the most common problems the lecturers felt they had regarding the course and their students. These charts were then put up on the wall so that participants could refer to them constantly so as to keep their student profile in focus. The IDs also briefly discussed for whom the course was meant and how being qualified in such a course would benefit the students in their professional career and beyond.
- The groups were then divided into groups of three to five people and equipped with koki pens and quarter sheets of A4 paper. They were given basic information on how to write outcomes and identify outcomes in terms of how advanced or broad they were. Each of the 5 groups then had to write 10 such broad "activities" for the four year qualification. Activities consisting of a verb(s) and noun(s) were written in large enough letters for all to read when stuck up on the wall . These were then displayed on the wall and clustered into categories. Each category was then sorted under an outcome statement that encompassed all the clustered activities. Finally, the preliminary purpose statement was written as follows and placed on the wall to be constantly referred to when necessary:

The learner will be able to evaluate agricultural situations, plan appropriate strategies and apply management skills in order to obtain and maintain a viable and sustainable agricultural industry.

- The six groups were then given approximately 45 minutes to generate 70 broad activities covering all four years of studies. In the end these many activities clustered into seven main areas forming the following ELOs or broad outcomes:

  - Develop and implement intensive and extensive sustainable plant production systems.
  - Develop and implement intensive and extensive sustainable animal production systems.
  - Plan and implement land-use strategies.
  - Develop human resources (labour)/(transformational).
  - Develop, implement and control integrated business and marketing plans.
  - Select and operate appropriate technological skills.

- Each of the ELOs with the many activities listed under them were then rearranged into the four years of study. Seeing the whole matrix of six ELOs and their 86 specified outcomes (SOs) displayed on the wall at the end of the exercise proved to be of great value in helping subject specialists reorganize the various modules more meaningfully.

The following table is a shortened version of the matrix showing only the number of ELOs and SOs generated in the end:

	ELO 1 Plants	ELO 2 Animal	ELO 3 Land use	ELO 4 HR: labour & trans- formation	ELO 5 Business & Market.	ELO 6 Tech . skills	Total
Cert	6	7	4	4	3	10	34
Nat Cert	7	8	4		3	2	24
Dipl	2	8	3	3	1	1	18
BTech	1	1	1	2	3		8
	16	24	12	9	10	13	84

TSA proforma example

The following table shows examples of how a certificate SO and a BTech SO were finally written on the proforma:

National Certificate ELO 1 *Develop and implement intensive and extensive sustainable plant production systems*	
Specified outcome 1	**Assessment criteria**
Describe how infestations of weeds, diseases and pests affect crop growth	*The description of how infestations affect crop growth must be correct in respect of:* *1.1 Weeds* *1.2 Diseases* *1.3 Pests* *1.4 Roles of pesticides in enhancing profitability of crop production*
Assessment guidelines: *Learners should be able to indicate in writing: the losses of production due to the different infestations and how to limit the effects; the correct timing for the control; and when it should stop.*	
BTech	
Do an in-depth study of one commercially grown agricultural crop or plant per climatic region as they exist in South Africa.	*The learner will be assessed on the production of the scientifically based production model of the selected crops. The assessment will cover the following :* *1.1 Proper selection of the climatic zone for the planting* *1.2 Preparation of the soil* *1.3 Maintenance of the plants* *1.4 Manipulation for increased production* *1.5 Control of pests* *1.6 Harvesting and storage*
Assessment guidelines: *Will be done in two equal proportions ie written examination and via presentation of a seminar. It is recommended that the seminar be presented to the relevant industry meeting where the learner is to be evaluated.*	

The inclusion of the assessment guidelines was considered an asset as they provided more information to the assessor and the student, informing them how the assessment would be conducted and what aspects were of particular importance. Providers would also benefit as they could in the future go to the National Learner's Recorded Database (NLRD) to obtain the outcomes and assessment criteria for a particular course or qualification they would like to develop. It is interesting to note that by 2002, 8858 qualifications had already been recorded and 6808 revised, formatted and posted on the NLRD (Report of the study team:2002).

THE UNISA APPROACH

Similarly, the university sector also had to negotiate the interim registration of non-unit standard based (formative) as well as unit-standard based (professional) qualifications on the framework

by June 2000. In early 1999, Unisa started the process when the Faculty of Arts at Unisa compiled a glossary entitled "Understanding SAQA" as it applied to their Faculty (see Kilfoil 2003:55) which was then extended to the whole university through an Interfaculty Tuition Committee. Developments soon lead to the formation of a more dedicated team named the SAQA Action Group with a senior academic in a full-time capacity leading a small team (Kilfoil 2003:55). The members of the team consisted of (Kilfoil 2003:55): the head of the Collaboration Unit, a representative of Undergraduate Student Affairs, the head of the Quality Assurance Unit, a member of the BLD, a member of the Black Forum and the senior academic who was the coordinator.

As in TSA's case, the internal stakeholders (the academics and relevant decision-making bodies) and the external ones (SAQA, the Department of Education and the relevant representative bodies) were included in the process of introducing the new paradigm.

Unisa process for generating outcomes

The SAQA Action Group, like the TSA Committee for Tutorial Matters, followed a strategy in the initial stages that was broadly speaking the same in many ways. The process Unisa followed can be briefly summarised as follows (see Kilfoil 2003):
- A seminar was held with the CEO of SAQA and speakers from other universities present.
- Buy-in was achieved as a result of the calibre of the speakers and training and follow-up seminars followed. This was an important initial presentation regarding the academics. Kilfoil (2003:56) explains how academics who work in universities tend to regard OBE as being "reductionist and technicist, valuing practice above theory" and that to gain their cooperation, OBE had to be presented in a way that "emphasised their values" and how "outcomes can be intellectual" as well. It is interesting to note that the majority of the lecturers at TSA showed initial resistance but became more receptive once they became involved in the reiterative process .
- Anchor speakers from SAQA and people with hands-on experience were invited to the training sessions.
- A standard for the Bachelor of Arts was drafted as a prototype after a few workshops involving a large representative group for the rest of the university which academics could then use as a point of reference. Before issuing the standard, a SAQA member responsible for standard setting had to workshop it with the participants. The capturing, categorising and final phrasing of the various outcomes generated by the groups of participants were done by means of flip charts, note papers and assigned individuals who drafted a document for assessment.
- Hands-on workshops conducted by staff from the BLD were held with each of the faculties to help the academics acquaint themselves with unfamiliar concepts and with the setting of outcomes, range statements and assessment criteria.
- Roy Killen of Newcastle University near Sydney, an Australian expert in competency-based education, was used as a consultant and trainer at various stages of the process.
- The faculties then submitted draft documents for each of their qualifications to the SAQA Action Group for review and comments before the Faculties revised them and submitted them in final form for submission to SAQA.
- By the end of June 2000 the University's qualifications were all written in outcomes-based format on the required SAQA Form 1 format for whole qualifications and had been submitted to SAQA for interim registration. The SAQA Action group remained in

existence until the end of the year to help with the drafting of short courses in unit standard form for recording with SAQA in December.

Unisa forms for approval and registration

UNISA's ranges of formal and non-formal offerings are varied and complex. There are now 5 such modified forms in existence for the formal or formative qualifications (see Unisa 2003:33–35):
For the approval and registration of formal or the formative qualifications Forms 1, 2, 3 or 4 should be used depending on the qualification, programme/unit standard or module.
- Form 1: The form is for interim SAQA registration of a whole qualification of 120 or more credits. The qualification should be completely new and is to be approved by the Senate via the Faculty/School Tuition Committee.
- Form 2: This form is for the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and is meant for the accreditation of new qualifications.
- Form 3: This form has to be filled in for interim SAQA registrations of unit-standards or modules.
- Form 4: This is for the approval by the Department of Education of existing teacher education qualifications and must be in line with the Norms and Standards for Educators.
- Form 5: A form required by the Department of Education for approval of new qualifications and the change of an official designation of an existing qualification.

In the case of non-formal or professional qualifications and modules as developed exclusively at the technikons for the industries, UNISA has three forms to fill in consisting of the following:
- Form 1: A new form for the SAQA interim registration of a whole non-formal qualification which had to be completed for submission, via the School/Faculty Non-formal Programme (Community Participation) Committees/Tuition Committees, to the University Certificate (Non-formal) Programme Committee for final approval by Senex (Executive Committee of Senate).
- Form 2: This form is for the CHE/HEQC to accredit when qualifications are new or in new fields of specialisation.
- Form 3: These forms are for SAQA registration of non-formal modules or unit standards that are less than 120 credits.

For the purpose of articulation, all modules were made multiples of 12 credits.

It is important to note that in the case of developing the specific outcomes for a programme or module, designers also needed to unpack the 12 generic critical outcomes in relation to their own disciplines and then the assessment criteria for each (Unisa 2003:117). This was done after the Form 1 document had been checked by the SAQA representative, who felt they should also provide assessment criteria for the 12 critical cross-field outcomes. As the BA is a very broad qualification that caters for a large number of fields in the humanities, the outcomes understandably had to be phrased to reflect this broadness. The "standard forms" for approximately 30 modules of 12 credits each that would constitute the whole qualification in the end, were completed by the relevant and available academics from the many departments concerned. In the end these final Form 3 forms differed in their layouts from one another with one closely resembling those done at TSA (see Unisa 2003:148, 153). A few examples from the

Bachelor of Arts prototype previously referred to, which was designed by the action group as a reference point, should provide the reader with some idea of the final Form 1 modified standard document for the whole qualification:

> The primary purpose of the qualification is to provide BA graduates with the knowledge, specific skills and applied competence in a number of fields traditionally associated with the humanities to give opportunities for continued personal intellectual growth, gainful economic activity and valuable contributions to society.

> A second purpose of the qualification is to provide South Africa (and other countries) with graduates in a number of learning fields in order to ensure that innovative and knowledge-based economic and scholarly activity is widened.

> A third purpose of the qualification is to provide South Africa (and other countries) with people who can understand the constructive role they need to play in their society and who are empowered to play that role.

The SAQA prescribed forms are all basically the same yet differ in small ways. Point 4 of the Form 1 format for example is set out as follows:

4. Exit level outcomes and associated assessment criteria

4.1 Critical cross-field outcomes

All critical cross-field outcomes will be embedded appropriately in the modules which constitute the programmes that lead up to the qualification. They will be assessed within the context of the programmes. The distance education context has particular challenges that we try to meet below.

Critical cross-field outcomes	Associated assessment criteria Evidence in the form of tasks in study materials, written (and, in some cases, oral) assignments, portfolio tasks, projects, case studies and examinations, will show that learners
1. The BA graduate can identify, analyse, formulate and solve convergent and divergent problems of living, of individual and societal kinds, responsibly and creatively.	• with limited guidance, identify, analyse and solve concrete, routine problems by drawing on their own experience and the theoretical knowledge base of individual disciplines in the Humanities • generate a number of strategies for dealing with problems, evaluate those strategies and select the most appropriate for a particular context • critically evaluate various viewpoints and compare them to each other and to their own views • offer evidence in a variety of ways (from theoretical base, from experiential base, etc) to support their stated views • analyse the global, national and local community in terms of problems, needs, opportunities

After all twelve critical and developmental outcomes as requested by SAQA, we come to the specific outcomes and their assessment criteria.

4.2 Specific outcomes and associated assessment criteria

A BA student is actively engaged in becoming a well-rounded, educated person and in preparing for further, more specific study or the work environment. As such she or he develops and holds certain values and integrates knowledge and skills to achieve her or his purposes. The SOs show how knowledge, skills and values are integrated in the qualification in the SAQA fields of Culture and Arts (02), Communication Studies and Language (including literature) (04), Human and Social Studies (07), Law, Military Science and Security (08) and Health Sciences and Social Services (09

| Specific BA outcomes	Associated assessment criteria Evidence, in the form of tasks in study materials, written (and in some cases, oral) assignments, portfolio tasks, projects, case studies and examinations, will show that learners
1. The BA graduate can engage in critical and creative thinking.	• apply skills to comprehend and evaluate new information, concepts and evidence from a range of sources • with limited guidance, analyse and reflect on the theory and practice of at least one discipline • analyse , reformat and evaluate a wide range of information within a discipline • report on and justify information coherently and systematically, showing an awareness of field-related classification systems and processes

Points 5 and 6 state the conditions regarding the credits: a minimum number of 360 credits with all learning programmes leading to a BA having first-level modules adding up to a maximum of 120 NQF level 5 credits and a minimum of 240 NQF level 6 credits. Each programme will comprise a minimum of 180 credits in the core category (which must include a clear major), a maximum of 24 credits in the fundamental category and a maximum of 156 credits in the elective category. Point 8 provides further configurations of how the qualifications need to be structured so as to promote articulation.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Capturing the main broad differences between the old Unisa and TSA is easier to do via a graphic than by listing the details of these differences, as they manifest in many ways, reflecting the work and research done by individuals within the two institutions. The matter is complicated even further because of the differences that exist between individuals within departments and groups.

The graphic below is partly based on one of the merger documents containing a response to the South African Vice Chancellors Association (SAVCA) in which "comprehensiveness" is defined (Unisa merger 2003). The rest reflects the views of how academics who have worked in both institutions may picture their "diversified characteristics" that will have to "align on a symbiotic

continuum" and " lead to the osmosis that is necessary for defining a new 21st century model for higher education" (Unisa merger 2003).
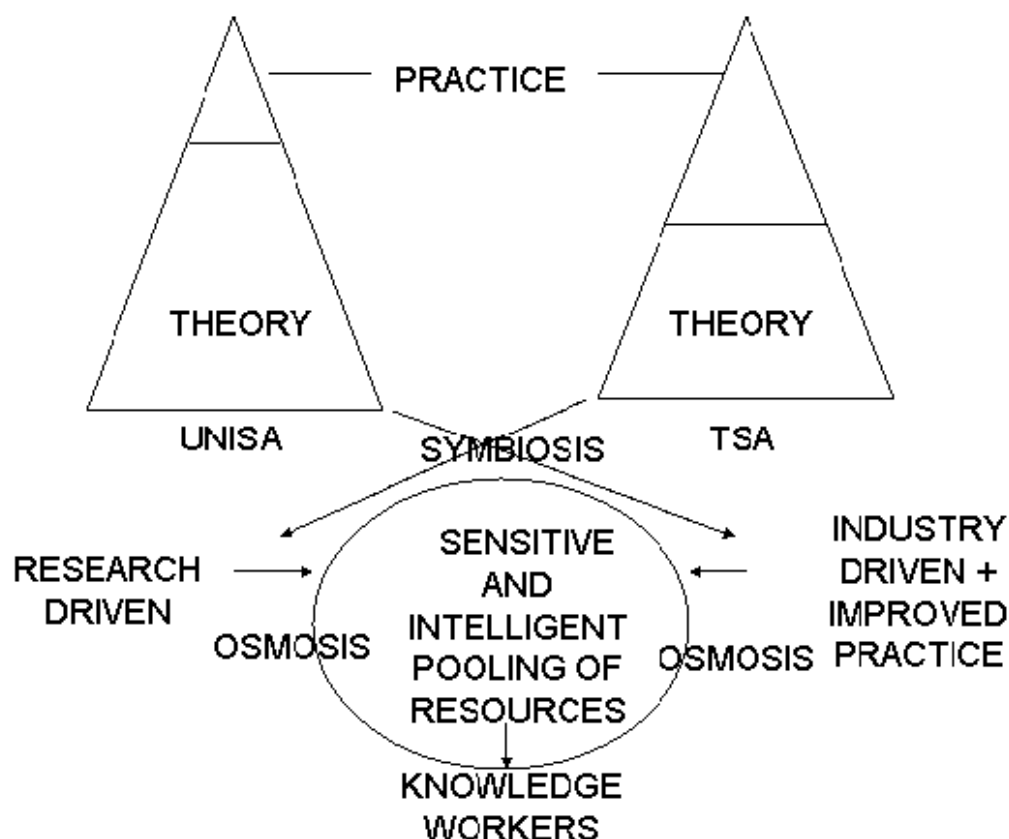
The Vice Principal of our newly formed comprehensive institution envisages that "the respective cultures and missions will stay in place in the early years after formation but not necessarily be preserved aggressively" and that our "commonality should be on the agenda from day one" (Unisa merger 2003). The following indicates some ODL aspects which may need further investigation:

- Although outcomes are generally seen as "end-products" of learning processes (see Unisa 2003:116), the hierarchy or status of these outcomes in terms of their complexity or broadness is often interpreted differently by individual learning developers and instructional designers.
- For some learning developers/instructional designers the term "activity" means a series of sequenced "tasks"; for others again a "task" is seen as a sequence of "activities".
- The concepts: learning objects, learning outcomes and enabling outcomes are also seen differently. Whereas one LD/ID may see these as all being synonyms for low-level outcomes, another may not.

- While a few LDs/IDs may agree that the assessment criteria for a specific outcome are strongly based on the same specific outcome's learning objectives/outcomes/enabling outcomes, others may oppose this view because their perceptions differ.

The following are a few recommendations that may be of help as Unisans seek to navigate the future:

Pursuing a strategy of first concentrating on the "commonalities" as stated by the Vice Principal would be a good route to follow for the Bureau and Centre as it seems there are far more commonalities on which agreement can be reached regarding learning development and the generation of outcomes than differences. Categorising all aspects into these two categories could be a starting point. Hopefully, as the commonalities are discussed, some real differences that need to be clarified and agreed on will be resolved.
When discussions ensue, often spontaneously, regarding the above they are not always concluded satisfactorily. It is important for the sake of clarity that concrete examples be used as reference points

In closing, when one contemplates the varying complexities that are part of OBE and learning development only briefly referred to in this article, we should focus on learning as one of the main products of the new Unisa if we are to take researchers like Barr and Tagg seriously (see Goetz 2004:3). There are almost 7000 modules/offerings presented by the three merged institutions, of which only a small percentage has been redesigned. A great deal of work still remains to be done and it is important that all Unisans realise that not in the too distant future, learning materials will be assessed for SAQA compliancy and if found wanting, may not be accredited. If we can remain open and maintain the necessary levels of humour and goodwill, we can help empower one another to travel together the path that must be negotiated.

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