Evaluating Unisa course material using a Course Evaluation Instrument (CEI)

André le Roux & Chris le Roux
University of South Africa

Progressio 2004 26(1):8-22

ABSTRACT

At the University of South Africa (Unisa), the term "review" refers to an evaluation of course material (study guide, tutorial letter, prescribed books, etc) done by a Learning Developer from the Bureau for Learning Development (BLD). Subheadings in reviews are indicated by means of clear headings that divide the writing into sections.

The person writing the review has to constantly bear in mind the topic under discussion. The logical development of ideas from one section to another, and within each section, is important. Learning Developers are encouraged to cite relevant evidence, and to be objective and specific.

In a Unisa review, the evaluation of a module/course (using the tuition policy and the BLD evaluation instrument) is followed by a summary and the conclusions. The conclusions should be based on facts. Conclusions should be convincing, and any recommendations put forward should be clearly substantiated.

INTRODUCTION

To ensure that Unisa Study Guides and Tutorial Letters meet the requirements set out by the official Academic Policy of South Africa, course materials are evaluated using the Unisa Tuition Policy and the Bureau for Learning Development's (BLD) Course Evaluation Instrument. Both documents are intended to bring study packages in line with South Africa's Academic Policy. Recommendations on how Unisa course material could be improved are also based on these documents.

The BLD Course Evaluation Instrument (CEI) consists of a series of questions designed to help academic departments address matters related to learning, linguistic and graphic design. The aim of this article is to introduce the reader to the CEI used by the BLD to evaluate Unisa course material, especially revised study guides.

Throughout the world, instructional theory has moved away from a content-centred to a learner-centred approach to instructional design. This new approach means that lecturers have to translate course objectives into outcomes in order to let learners know how they, the learners, will benefit from working through a particular course.

While there is, in any academic subject, a prescribed body of knowledge that must be learned, learners should be required to demonstrate that they have mastered a subject by applying their knowledge to real-life contexts. Courses at Unisa need to respond very clearly to the question: "What about the real world?" In order to be able to do this, the lecturers have to include activities that link the text to the learner's context.

Lifelong learning means that student discovery and the construction of knowledge (Barr & Tagg 1995) must concentrate on real issues and problems (Zuber-Skerritt 1993:46). This, in turn, means that study material and teaching methods need to make learning relevant.

OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION (OBE)

There are some general matters that need to receive attention in order to bring any course at Unisa in line with the outcomes-based education (OBE) paradigm. This paradigm is prescribed by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (see Kilfoil 2000) and is currently the norm in South Africa.

The following points are intended to guide the interpersonal aspect of all Unisa courses:

- Lecturers need to start by carefully considering the most important skills a learner needs to acquire as he or she works through the course. Lecturers then need to align assessment strategies with these skills.
- Lecturers should constantly ask themselves how teaching can be planned to achieve high levels of learning (by which we mean the acquisition of factual knowledge, conceptual knowledge, procedural knowledge, and the development of metacognitive skills). Metacognition can be defined as having knowledge (cognition), and having understanding of, control over, and the ability to make appropriate use of that knowledge.
- It is not enough for learners to simply learn and remember factual information. The activities should require that learners apply their knowledge, analyse relevant matters, evaluate relevant statements, and create hypothetical scenarios based on the learners' newly acquired knowledge.
- Assessment strategies should be carefully designed to provide accurate information about what learners do, and do not, know.

One of the major challenges in higher education today is aligning teaching strategies and assessment with curriculum outcomes. According to Killen (2002), the best way of doing this is to use the Taxonomy for Teaching, Learning and Assessment (Anderson & Krathwohl 2001). This taxonomy is, in fact, a major revision of Bloom's taxonomy (1956). The revised taxonomy takes into account recent theories of cognitive development and assessment, and separates knowledge (what is to be learned) from the cognitive processes needed to learn and demonstrate learning. The revised taxonomy provides a versatile tool that will enable educators to do the following: map the outcomes they want learners to achieve; design the teaching strategies that will facilitate this learning; and plan assessment strategies that will verify that learning has occurred (Killen 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003).

Largely as the result of the work of Benjamin Bloom (1956) and his colleagues, it is common practice for curriculum designers to group learning outcomes into three domains: the *cognitive* domain, the *psychomotor* domain and the *affective* domain. These broad groupings of outcomes provide a useful starting point for thinking about the things lecturers want students to learn. They are a practical point of departure for exploring the idea that different types of learning require different approaches to teaching and assessment.

Within each domain there may be many different types of learning. For example, Bloom (1956) claimed that outcomes in the cognitive domain could be classified into a hierarchy of six levels. Harrow (1972) proposed a six-level classification of outcomes in the psychomotor domain and Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia (1964) proposed a five-level classification of outcomes in the affective domain. At Unisa, lecturers are mainly concerned with outcomes in the cognitive domain because, obviously, the cognitive domain is central to most of the learning that occurs in formal educational settings.

According to Killen (2003), there are many different ways of approaching outcomes-based programming and assessment (eg Brown 1988; Burns 1987; Burns & Squires 1987; Fitzpatrick 1991; Marzano 1994; Nyland 1991; Pollock 1992; Smith 1991; Spady 1988). However, they are all based on the idea that we start with a set of outcomes that *all* students are required to achieve. It is on this point that OBE (outcomes-based education) is most often criticised. The most frequent criticism directed at OBE is that if all students are to achieve the outcomes, then these outcomes must be trivial (see, for example, McKernan 1993). Killen (2003:4) describes this as a rather naive criticism, because it is based on the assumption that it is never possible to teach in ways that will help all students achieve significant outcomes. OBE supporters argue that it is always possible, but not always easy, to specify appropriate outcomes and to teach in ways that will, in fact, enable all learners to achieve these outcomes. This is also the thinking that lies behind the approach followed by the BLD Course Evaluation Instrument (CEI).

EVALUATION IN TERMS OF THE UNISA TUITION POLICY

The following matters, which are covered in the Unisa Tuition Policy (University of South Africa 2003), are all relevant to the transformation of distance teaching courses:

- The Unisa Tuition Policy (point 2) stipulates that "as a provider of open and distance learning, Unisa commits itself to ... open learning that denotes a shift in emphasis from the institutional lecturer and or content-centred learning to a learner-centred and outcomes-based approach". Some courses at Unisa, however, are still focused on the content, with lecturers stating, for example: "The course will provide you with a better understanding ...." A better way of approaching this, and one that would draw attention to the interpersonal focus of a course, would be to write the sentence as: "You will benefit from the course in the sense that ...."
- The Unisa Tuition Policy (point 3.1) stipulates that, in developing new courses, "all stakeholders should have the opportunity of contributing to the curriculum". "Learner involvement" in this context is specified as being non-negotiable. Unisa lecturers can profit from their discussion classes by asking learners to comment on Unisa courses. While learners are not necessarily qualified to comment on what the content of courses should be, they can make an invaluable contribution here by telling lecturers how they experience the way in which the course content is presented.

COURSE EVALUATION FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

The comments that follow relate to the BLD Course Evaluation Instrument (CEI), which was developed to evaluate academic courses in terms of their learning design, linguistic design and graphic design. This instrument is used on a daily basis by Learning Developers. Earlier attempts to set criteria for assessing Unisa learning material for distance education were done by, among others, Le Roux and Le Roux (1989, 1990, 1991, 2003) and Wessels (2001).

In 2002, the Bureau for University Teaching (BUT) changed its name to the Bureau for Learning Development (BLD). This indicates the shift from a content-driven teaching approach to a learner-centred learning approach. This shift is specifically relevant to the design of learning material. In the wider Unisa context, this shift corresponds to a shift from Distance Education and Correspondence Learning to Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Unisa's Tuition Policy document clearly focuses on: student learning; involvement of learners through an effective learning experience; the creation of a supportive learning environment; and lecturers fulfilling their role as learning facilitators.

LEARNING DESIGN

Throughout the world, instructional theory has moved from a content-centred to a learner-centred approach to instructional design. Such an approach has brought with it a focus on the skills a particular course/module will give learners.

A learner-centred approach means that lecturers have to translate course objectives into outcomes in order to make it clear to learners how they (ie the learners) will benefit from working through a particular course. Such outcomes are formulated in terms of observable behaviours or actions (eg "demonstrate that you ... by ... ".)

Although every academic discipline has a prescribed body of knowledge which must be learned, learners are now required to demonstrate that they have mastered this body of knowledge by applying it to real-life contexts. All Unisa courses need to respond very clearly to the question "What about the real world?" To be able to do this, courses have to include activities that link the text to the learner's context.

Whilst it is true that learners generally register for the course in order to acquire subject specific knowledge, a university with such a diverse learner profile as Unisa requires the inclusion of some cultural background to the course content (ie as an aid to effective learning).

The CEI states that questions pertaining to the following topics should be asked with relevance to *learning design*: outcomes, contextuality and authenticity, content and theory, reflection and metacognition, activities, learning skills, feedback to activities and social transformation.

Outcomes

Unisa operates within the OBE learning system which, as we have said, means a shift from lecturer input to learner outputs. Outcomes, by their very nature, focus on what the learner needs to achieve. Learning outcomes are therefore seen as the starting point of a learning experience. The CEI evaluates the quality of learning outcomes in terms of the end results of the learning process.

Learners must be able to explain and apply what they have learnt; in other words, they must be able to demonstrate knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Outcomes refer to learners' competence to do something with the learning content, rather than merely to reproduce that content. Outcomes differ from traditional "objectives", which, on the whole, were simply a statement of the lecturer's teaching intentions.

Our experience at Unisa is that lecturers still think in terms of objectives – that is, they still think in terms of what they, the lecturers, want to achieve with the study material. In cases where outcomes are formulated, we find that lecturers use a very limited range of verbs: mainly "explain", "discuss" and "describe".

Powerful and specific demonstration verbs need to be included in formulating outcomes (eg list, define, summarise, discuss, differentiate, classify, illustrate, arrange, compare, design, compose, rank, convince, measure). These verbs cover a wide range of knowledge, values and skills: comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Vague verbs, such as "understand", "know", "appreciate" should be avoided. Instead, learners should be asked to show that they understand something, or demonstrate their knowledge of something through analysis, explanation, comparison, evaluation, synthesis.

Authenticity

When we review Unisa's study materials, we look for real-life examples and scenarios. Content which reflects up-to-date material is relevant to the learning experience. Authors need to show how learning content is related to learners' life experiences. Authentic material includes: case studies, problem areas encountered during the course of investigation, newspaper clippings, photographs and even music scores.

Where outcomes focus on content only, little is made of application of knowledge in prescribed study material. Therefore one finds limited inclusion of examples, case studies, problem areas.

A constructivist theory of learning recognises that knowledge is constructed in specific contexts; material should therefore be connected with those contexts. The aim here is that the learner will be able to apply his or her knowledge, skills and attitudes/values in the workplace. The learner-centred approach to learning is also a problem-oriented approach – that is, reflective learning rather than mechanical (rote) learning.

Activities

Learning activities within the learning material are an extension of, and therefore need to be aligned with, learning outcomes. Activities aim at encouraging learners to engage with the material/content. Activities give learners the opportunity to practise certain skills and thus to achieve the outcomes – a clear alignment between outcomes and activities is therefore needed.

Activities enable learners to experience a form of dialogue/discussion between the lecturer and themselves. The feedback to activities has a number of aims: to assess learners' progress, raise new issues, create dialogue, motivate learners to proceed with the learning experience, and suggest ways of making a positive impact on society through the application of their newly acquired knowledge.

Our experience at Unisa is that activities seem to be added on at a later stage, almost as an afterthought. As a result, many activities consist of little more than content-related questions, with no or little challenge to the learner to move beyond content (ie to application).

LINGUISTIC DESIGN

One of the most important issues that is addressed in Unisa course material with relevance to *linguistic design* is the choice of language. As far as the distance education (DE) facet of linguistic design is concerned, it is important that the text enters into conversation with the learner, whatever language the course is written in.
The lecturer should address the learner directly, using the first and second person. If the text is to demonstrate empathy with the learner, the author needs to "show" him or herself to the learner. This can be achieved by means of a lecturer's comments, in a rationale, or by commenting on the activities.

With reference to *language accessibility* the CEI asks the following questions: How accessible and appropriate is the language used? Does the writer use the active and passive voice

correctly? Is the learner addressed directly? How does the writer "show" him or herself? Is there evidence of empathy with the learner?

Dialogue is made easier by using language at a level that is appropriate for the learners. The appropriate pitch for the situation and the purpose is of paramount importance here.

Language style is crucial if a learning event is to be effective. A paternalistic style (talking down to learners) alienates and patronises learners. The style used must be able to create a constructive learning relationship. Examples of appropriate style include explaining terminology and using first person pronouns,"I"-"you", in order to create a learner-lecturer relationship. The lecturer can show him or herself by sharing experiences related to the learning material, acknowledging limitations of the material, and communicating a vision for the learners' success in learning the material.

Unfortunately, there is very little evidence of dialogue in Unisa study guides; the study material usually reflects distance and a distant relationship between learners and academic authors. The majority of academics are not used to a dialogue style of writing and, as a result, the material is often very formal and sometimes paternalistic. A friendly, non-formal, welcoming style is the aim. As Learning Developers we support authors in achieving this, while we rely heavily on the expertise and experience of qualified staff members from Unisa's Editorial Department.

INSTRUCTIONAL DEVICES

The CEI states that the following questions should be asked of the *graphic design*: How clear are the icons or navigational devices? Are the topic illustrations in line with modern trends? Are cross-discipline references clear? If other media and forms of contact are used, how are they integrated?

Navigation

"Navigation" refers to the accessibility of the text. Navigation is also known as "scaffolding", and is aimed at guiding and supporting learners through the learning event. Learners need to be supported in finding their way through the learning experience; they should be able to gain access to the material easily and effectively. The material must be presented in a logical order.

A number of devices may be used, such as: a course overview at the start of a study unit, introductions and summaries to study units, digestible chunks of learning, a glossary, numbering of headings and subheadings. Cross-references to the rest of text, or even other aspects of the course, help the learner to navigate his or her way through the course. This, in turn, helps learners to see the bigger picture or framework within which the course operates.

Media

"Media" include: videos, audio cassettes, authentic material, cartoons, online connections, CDs (computer programs as well as music).

The purpose of using media is to contextualise the learning material; again, this relates to the need to connect the study material with real-life examples and experiences. Media usage also aims at going beyond the printed material in an effort to help learners see the bigger picture. Media therefore ought to include relevant material, and learning content should be clearly linked to learners' existing knowledge and experience.

Media need to be integrated into the learning experience; in other words, media should form part of the learning experience and not be an "add-on" to the printed material. Alignment with those outcomes that dictate specific media is important. Any media used during group visits/discussion classes should be chosen carefully for a specific, planned purpose. All forms of support need to serve the main purpose of the course.

As far as we can see, only a limited number of Unisa course materials incorporate media into the learning experience. This may be because of time constraints or because of a basic lack of skills (which means that lecturers are less than enthusiastic about using media).

VISUAL DESIGN

The following questions are relevant here: What is the quality of the layout in general? Are the headings and subheadings clearly identifiable and easy to spot? Is the font of the correct size? Are the visuals clear? Are the structural elements clearly identifiable and consistent?

The "look and feel" refers to the ambience of the study guide/material. The right ambience can be accomplished by using certain specific devices, including: cover design, general layout, headings and subheadings, a readable font, graphics, tables and icons. Unisa Press supplies academics with layout artists who can signal and manipulate these devices. Indeed, graphic artists can give academics valuable advice (eg not to mix graphic styles, cartoons and clipart, but to keep to one style throughout).

To improve learnability, certain aspects of the learning material (eg activities, feedback, previews and reviews) need to be highlighted. The aim is to get learners involved in the learning process.

A word of warning is in order here: graphics may be culturally sensitive; icons or connotations attached to colours may be interpreted differently by people from different cultural groupings. Lecturers need to decide whether illustrations are illustrative or decorative. Illustrations in study material should always be functional. Unisa is currently moving away from the extensive and artificial use of icons in study material, and the result is a much simpler, more functional layout.

Assessment design

The CEI discusses two aspects of *assessment strategy*: continuous assessment instruments and summative assessment instruments.

An assessment strategy needs to be determined for the course as a whole, and any assessment strategy used must be both *consistent* and *coherent*. Assessment must, therefore, be integrated and included in the initial course design process. However, we often find that academics design assessment only after they have developed a course. But assessment should not be added on afterwards. Assessment must be aligned with the rest of the learning experience, that is, outcomes, activities, assignments and, finally, the examination; all need to communicate the single purpose of the course.

The learning experience needs to include both formative (eg assignments) and summative assessment (eg formal exams, a portfolio or a research project).

Assessment ought to be closely related to prescribed level descriptors; learners should not be subjected to "unpleasant surprises" during the assessment process. In other words, the learning

process ought to be transparent: learners should be informed on issues such as the format of the assessment (eg portfolio, case studies, essays, paragraphs, multiple-choice questions) as well as other special requirements (eg length of answers, marks allotted, duration).

To conclude: assessment criteria form an important part of assessment and need to be formulated in advance, preferably in the form of a rubric, for the use of both lecturer and learner. This will make it clear to learners what is expected of them in order to earn a pass, or a good or excellent mark. Assessment is part and parcel of the learning process; it therefore needs to be designed in such a way that it helps learners achieve the specific outcomes of the learning material.

CONCLUSION

Our aim, in this article, was to discuss work in progress on the BLD Course Evaluation Instrument (CEI) and to review the preliminary results of this project.

Outcomes-based education requires Unisa lecturers to have a very thorough understanding of what they are teaching, and to be able to relate their main subject matter to other learning areas. According to Killen (2003), it is just not possible to take an integrated outcomes-based approach to teaching if a lecturer does not have a deep understanding of what he or she is teaching.

If Unisa lecturers want their students to learn and to achieve significant outcomes, they need to follow the instructional procedures contained in the BLD Course Evaluation Instrument (CEI). Note that each of these procedures has implications for the way lecturers plan or programme their course work.

Unisa lecturers must develop their students adequately so that they can succeed. This means that lecturers have to understand exactly what they want students to learn, anticipate the difficulties that students might have, and plan course work in a way that minimises these difficulties.

Unisa lecturers must create a constructive and supportive learning environment which makes it clear to distance students that they will be helped in their learning, no matter how easy or difficult they might find that learning.

Unisa lecturers must help their students to understand what they have to learn (study material), why they should learn it (including what use it will be to them in the future), and how they will know when they have learned it. According to Killen (2003:6), a lecturer should not assume that students will see the purpose of what they are learning (course content) just because the lecturer knows why he or she is teaching it.

Unisa lecturers must use a variety of instruction methods, as set out in the BLD Course Evaluation Instrument (CEI), in order to help each Unisa student to learn. Lecturers should not assume that all students can learn equally well from one particular teaching strategy, or that any particular teaching strategy is a suitable way to help students achieve all learning outcomes. Killen (2003) stresses that a lecturer should not always assume that the so-called "student-centred" strategies are always the best strategies to use in OBE.

Unisa lecturers must provide distance students with sufficient opportunities to practise their new knowledge and skills so that, under the lecturer's guidance, they can explore and experiment with their new learning, correct errors and adjust their thinking.

In summary: the starting point for outcomes-based education must be a clear definition of the outcomes that students are to achieve, and some effort must be made to indicate the priority of each of these outcomes. Having done this, the lecturer must then describe, in detail, the knowledge, skills and dispositions that students must develop in order to achieve these outcomes.

The next step is to make explicit the prerequisites that students need before they attempt to develop their new knowledge, skills and attitudes. Planning becomes a process of anticipating possible activities, rather than predetermining specific activities. As a result, content needs to be seen as a support base for addressing and facilitating students' achievement of the outcomes, rather than as an end in itself.

The Unisa distance education system has been shaped by society, and it is important that we realise that this society has changed more rapidly than the education system it created. Outcomes-based education is an attempt to overcome this problem, so that each of the criteria for assessing distance learning material will be focused on preparing Unisa students for their future, whatever that future might be.

REFERENCES

Anderson, L & Krathwohl, D 2001. *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: a revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. New York: Longman.

Barr, R B & Tagg, J 1995. From teaching to learning: a new paradigm for undergraduate education. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 27(6):12–25. November/December.

Bloom, B 1956. *Taxonomy of educational objectives: cognitive domain*. London: Longman (Handbook 1).

Brown, A S 1988. Outcomes-based education: a success story. *Educational Leadership* 46(2):12.

Burns, R 1987. *Models of instructional organization: a casebook on mastery learning and outcome-based education*. San Francisco, Calif: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Burns, R & Squires, D 1987. Curriculum organization in outcomes-based education. *The OBE Bulletin* 3:1–9.

Fitzpatrick, K A 1991. Restructuring to achieve outcomes of significance for all students: a progress report from Township High School District 214. *Outcomes* 9(4):14–22.

Harrow, A 1972. *A taxonomy of the psychomotor domain: a guide for developing behavioral objectives*. New York: David McKay.

Kilfoil, W R 2000. *Understanding SAQA: a glossary of terms*. Pretoria: University of South Africa (Inter-Faculty Tuition Committee).

Killen, R 2000. Some principles of assessment in Outcomes-Based Education. Paper presented to the Faculty of Education and Arts, University of Newcastle, Australia.

Killen, R. 2001 Engaging distance education students in productive learning. Paper presented to the Faculty of Education and Arts, University of Newcastle, Australia.

Killen, R 2002. Aligning outcomes, teaching strategies and assessment. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the South African Society of Educators, Pretoria, 26–29 September.

Killen, R 2003. An introduction to Outcomes-Based Education. Paper presented to the Faculty of Education and Arts, University of Newcastle, Australia.

Krathwohl, D, Bloom, B & Masia, B 1964. *Taxonomy of educational objectives: affective domain*. New York: David McKay (Handbook II).

Le Roux, A I & Le Roux, C R 1989. Die beplanning van 'n skyfieklankprogram: 'n voorlopige verkenning. *Progressio* 11(2):107–116.

Le Roux, A I & Le Roux, C R 1990. Die produksie van ‘n SKP vir Bybelse Argeologie. *Progressio* 12(1):17–24.

Le Roux, A I & Le Roux, C R 1991. Die evaluering van ‘n SKP vir Bybelse Argeologie. *Progressio* 13(2):93–101.

Le Roux, A I & Le Roux, C R 2003. Evaluating Unisa course material: the use of a Course Evaluation Instrument (CEI). Paper presented at the 13th Biennial Conference of the South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education (SAARDHE), University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, 25–27 June.

Marzano, R I 1994. Lessons from the field about outcomes-based performance assessments. *Educational Leadership* 51(6):44–50.

McKernan, J 1993. Some limitations of outcomes-based education. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 8(4):343–353.
Nyland, L 1991. One district's journey to success with outcome-based education. *School Administrator* 48(9):29–35.

Pollock, J E 1992. Blueprint for social studies. *Educational Leadership* 49(8):52–53.

Smith, S J 1991. Outcomes-based education and the gifted learner: theory, practice and challenges. *Gifted Child Today* 14(1):52–56.

Spady, W G 1988. Organizing for results: The basis of authentic restructuring and reform. *Educational Leadership* 46(2):4–7.

University of South Africa 2003. Unisa Tuition Policy. (http://www.unisa.ac.za)

Wessels, J S 2001. Criteria for assessing learning material for distance education. *South African Journal for Higher Education* 15(1):217–224.

Zuber-Skerritt, O 1993. Improving learning and teaching through action learning and action research. *Higher Education Research and Development* 12(1):46–57.

Appendix

1 Learning design

1.1 Outcomes

a) How and where are learning outcomes provided? Are they effective and useful? Why?
b) What is the quality of the outcomes? (Do they cover knowledge, skills, values and attitudes?)
c) Do the outcomes meet the requirements of the profession/industry/discipline area?
d) How effective are the activities in terms of helping the learner to meet the specific outcomes?
e) How effective are the activities in terms of transferability and applicability? Will the learner be able to practise, apply and transfer the skills learnt in the activities to her/his real-life context?

1.2 Contextuality and authenticity

a) To what extent are contextual tools (authentic case studies/real-life problems/narratives etc) integrated in the learning experiences?
b) How are the contextual tools integrated with activitie ?
c) To what extent is the learner required to solve problems through activities based on his/her life and work contexts?
d) How are local and indigenous knowledge used, that is, how are different perspectives from different parts of society used?

1.3 Content and theory

a) To what extent is the learner encouraged to be involved in making and exchanging meaning in the discourse of the discipline/subject field?
b) How is the learner engaged in critically evaluating or contrasting theoretical perspectives and/or in critically evaluating what is regarded as international "best practice"?
c) How effective are the activities in allowing the learner to use and apply new concepts and principles?

1.4 Reflection and metacognition

To what extent is the learner required to think critically and reflect on her/his own actions/learning processes?

1.5 Activities: learning skills

Are activities included to help the learner communicate effectively in the language required of the discipline/learning area through sufficient reading guidance, writing guidance, thinking guidance?

1.6 Feedback to activities: learner

How useful is the feedback provided to activities in terms of the following:
the learner's ability to assess her/his own progress / skills / understanding; the learner's ability to raise problems and comments with the educator; the learner's ability to exchange ideas with a peer/a group of peers?

How effective is the feedback in terms of motivating and encouraging the learner?

1.7 Feedback to activities: writer

How useful is the feedback in terms of the writer's ability to do the following?
offer advice and encouragement

predict and address problem areas
identify problematised issues
maintain a constant dialogue with the learner
provide indications of competency levels/the achievement of outcomes
encourage the learner to reach higher levels of performance

1.8 **Social transformation**
Is social transformation built in – does the learner have to use and reflect on sociopolitical issues such as Aids, poverty, violence?

2 Linguistic design (dialogue)
2.1 How accessible and appropriate is the language used for the target group? For example:
specialist or new vocabulary
sentence structure and length
paragraph structure and length

2.2 Does the writer use the active voice and the passive voice correctly?

2.3 Is the learner addressed directly? How does the writer refer to her/himself? How does this contribute to the creation of a dialogue between learner and teacher/writer?

2.4 Is there evidence of empathy with the learner? How does this contribute to the creation of a dialogue between learner and writer? Is the lecturer successful in motivating the learner?

3 Instructional devices
3.1 How clear are the navigational devices (providing the learner with a consistent "map" of the learning process & content)?

For example:
course overview
list of contents
bulleted learning items for each digestible chunk/mind-map
marginal notes (eg glossaries)
consistency in unit structure (eg headings, subheadings and chunks of learning)
consistency in numbering
cross-referencing to other units/part of units

Are reader stoppers used effectively? (For example, page break after unit; graphic line or page division; verbal text indicating a physical break in the learning process.)

3.2 Are cross-discipline references used effectively? Are there opportunities for including them?

3.3 If other media are used, how are they integrated? Other media include the following:
audio/video cassettes
study schools/group visits
potential group/pair discussions with peers
online learning elements

4 Visual design
4.1 How does the cover of the guide contribute to the learning experience for all learners?

4.2 To what degree is the design appropriate to the content of the study material?

4.3 How does the general layout contribute to the learning experience? Does it, for example, provide the following?
resting space for the eye
the impression of an organised, open, caring learning-environment-in-print
contrast in foreground and background

4.4 Are the heading and subheadings clearly identifiable and easy to spot?

4.5 Is the font readable?

4.6 Are the tables and graphics visually appealing and clear? Do they contribute to the learning experiences?
Are the visuals (pictures, photos) clear?

4.7 Are the main structural elements clearly identifiable and consistent?
Structural elements include:
introduction
outcomes
activities
feedback
learning chunks
conclusion/summary

4.8 Are icons used appropriately and effectively (ie in relation to the level and the content)?

5 Assessment design

5.1 Formative assessment instruments (eg assignments, journals, portfolios)
a) To what extent do the activities in the materials help the learner to cope successfully with the formative assessment instruments?
b) How are formative assessment instruments integrated in learning materials?
c) How is the learner guided in terms of the assessment and the relevant study material?
d) To what degree are formative assessment instruments aligned with the outcomes?
e) How are assessment criteria and level descriptors used for assignments/portfolios provided to learners?

5.2 Summative assessment instruments (examination)
a) What are learners told about the examination?
b) How are learners informed about the format of the examination, assessment criteria and requirements?
c) To what extent are examination questions aligned with the outcomes?
d) Is there consistency and coherence between the activities, the formative assessment instruments and the examinations?

5.3 To what degree is a balance struck between continuous and summative assessment?

Note: The authors would like to acknowledge the input of Jane Smith from Unisa's Editorial Department for her contribution to the formative development of this article.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Prof André le Roux (MEd, DLitt et Phil, DTE) is an Associate Professor in the Bureau for Learning Development (BLD) at the University of South Africa (Unisa), Pretoria. Contact: lrouxai@unisa.ac.za

Dr Chris le Roux (DTh, DTE) is a Learning Developer in the Bureau for Learning Development (BLD) at the University of South Africa (Unisa), Pretoria. Contact: lrouxcr@unisa.ac.za