

A framework for work integrated learning in Public Administration and Management departments

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to investigate the process of work-integrated learning in the Department of Public Administration and Management at Unisa for benchmarking implementation at other 'comprehensive' higher education institutions in South Africa. This needs to take into consideration the different conditions of two former distance education institutions, a former technikon and a traditional university that merged and consequently became known as a comprehensive university.

In this research, an exploratory single case strategy was employed. The focus of the exploration is on the implementation of the principles of adult learning theories, such as constructivist learning, learning style flexibility, co-operative learning and self-regulated learning. Furthermore, it includes an investigation of the different roles of the lecturer; the design and development of effective work -integrated learning programmes; the implementation of such programmes by means of facilitating learning and assessing students' mastering of outcomes. Qualitative data collection was done through text analysis – specifically the process chronological thematic portfolios submitted by the students as part of their summative assessment. To gain primary data, some interviews were carried out, making use of semi-structured questions. Apart from these data collection methods, other related published literature, official documents and web-based documents were studied to explore the work-integrated learning execution procedure, research method and report organisation.

The acquired knowledge has been partly adapted and adopted by the Department of Public Administration at Unisa. The main implication of this case study is the need to explore how other Public Administration departments at South African universities can efficiently and effectively adapt and adopt such knowledge for work-integrated learning. This study represents a knowledge gap and offers practical assistance to Public Administration departments to leverage lecturer's skills and expertise together with their students and consequently to maintain and enhance their work integrated capability.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROCESS

South Africa is faced with a major problem of unemployment, especially among the youth and there is a need to alleviate the high levels of unemployment among young graduates. The South African public sector has the perception that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) do not prepare students adequately for the world of work. Learning takes place in a variety of forms. Lecturers must understand that they have to fulfil a number of roles so as to assist students in achieving their full potential.

Furthermore, the higher education sector in South Africa has gone through a merger process; in some cases former technikons merged with other technikons (such as Tshwane University of Technology) and in other instances traditional universities merged with technikons to become known as comprehensive universities (e.g. the University of South Africa which now includes the former Technikon Southern Africa, Vudec and the University of South Africa). All three of these Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) focused on distance learning. In addition to the aforementioned challenges in equipping students for the work environment, a range of government programmes, such as the internship programme and HEIs were implemented by incorporating work-integrated learning in core programmes.

The question that needs to be answered for the purposes of this article is whether a teaching and learning framework such as the one that is implemented by the Department of Public Administration and Management (PAM) at the University of South Africa can successfully facilitate the entire learning process and whether Unisa's model for work-integrated learning can serve as a benchmark for other PAM departments in South Africa. The Department of Public Administration and Management, as the research setting

for this article, is situated within the College of Economic and Management Sciences and both the department and the college are guided by Unisa policies and guidelines. This exploratory embedded single case was theoretically underpinned on the knowledge gained by studying primarily reports on the outcome of a literature study that aims to explore the extent to which the current teaching and learning framework promotes effective outcomes-based learning.

Based on an exploratory approach, this article addresses the research questions and provides recommendations relating to the existing framework, the roles of the lecturer as well as the importance of curriculum development and assessment.

An explorative investigation is an approach typical of researchers when examining a new interest or when the subject of the study is a fairly new or persistent phenomenon. Exploratory studies are most likely done to:

- satisfy the researcher's desire to understand the subject under study better;
- test the viability of undertaking a more comprehensive study;
- develop methods that could be used in subsequent studies;
- clarify central concepts and constructs of a study;
- establish priorities for future research and
- develop new hypotheses about an existing phenomenon (Babbie & Mouton 2001:79-80).

Sellitz *et al.* in Babbie and Mouton (2001:80) accentuate three methods for conducting exploratory research:

- a review of pertinent literature and other related social science;
- a survey of people that have had practical exposure to the problem under study and
- an examination of "insight-stimulating" examples.

Exploratory studies aim to lead to a better understanding and insight rather than the collection of detailed and replicable data. Exploratory studies regularly use in-depth interviews, the analysis of case studies and informants.

Mouton, Auriacombe and Lutabingwa (2006:580) state that the aim of *qualitative data* is not to provide generalisations about the specified population but to uncover new ideas from or hidden feelings/beliefs of respondents. Qualitative data collection is usually done with small numbers of respondents using unstructured interviews. The methods can include focus groups, one-on-one in-depth interviews and observational methods.

By drawing on theories in literature that relate to work-integrated learning and the learning process, the research objectives are aimed at providing the following:

- An exploration of the scope of work-integrated learning and the learning process through an overview of relevant policies and literature in order to describe relevant concepts.
- An exploration of conceptual knowledge of the variables influencing the work-integrated learning module through the application of a literature study of the concepts and theories of learning styles, adult learning theories and assessment practice so as to describe the process currently applied by the Department of Public Administration and Management.
- A consideration of the insights that the body of knowledge on work-integrated learning, learning styles and adult learning theories and the role of the lecturer in the process reveal. This is done with a view to making proposals and identifying potential further steps that have to be taken for the successful implementation of the work-integrated learning framework within an open distance learning environment.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING FRAMEWORK

The Higher Education Qualifications Framework (2007) states the following: *“Some qualifications will be designed to incorporate periods of required work that integrate classroom study. Where work integrated learning is a structured part of a qualification the volume of learning allocated to WIL should be appropriate to the purpose of the qualification and to the cognitive demands of the learning outcome and assessment criteria contained in the appropriate level descriptors”*.

The *Criteria for institutional audits* (CHE 2004a), as well as the *Criteria for programme accreditation* (CHE2004b), also contain criteria regarding work-based learning. Both of these documents relate to the application of theory in a valid work-based context where competencies are developed and the skills acquired will make students more employable. Learning should thus be outcomes based with a specific focus on making students more employable. In terms of accreditation, the university programmes must include the promotion of the student’s understanding of the occupation – in this case being a public administrator. Students will have to master specific skills related to the occupation and therefore work-based learning consequently, forms an essential part of the curriculum. The Unisa work integrated learning has been formulated against the above background.

Outcomes-based learning can be broadly defined as the achievement of an outcome as an end result of the mastering of processes, knowledge and skills

(Olivier 1998:55) and places the focus on the learner. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has compiled specific requirements that relate to curriculum development in outcomes-based education (OBE). These requirements include (adapted from Erasmus, Loedolff, Mda & Nel 2006:158):

- analysing student needs
- determining the learning programme
- deciding what the learning outcomes must be
- selecting the learning content in support of the achievement of the learning outcomes
- deciding on the methods of facilitating learning, the learning activities and related tasks, and the technology that can be used for learning to take place
- deciding on the assessment opportunities as aligned with the learning outcomes
- evaluating the effectiveness of the programme.

The learning process involves “how people understand, learn and remember and what the implications are of these processes for the mediation of learning” (Nieman & Monyai 2007:72). Learning can be described as the result of application and experience and it can bring about changes as students might learn to perform tasks that they could not previously do. Through the learning process, students will acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes. Students need to be actively participating in constructing and reconstructing their knowledge; this also calls for reflection and interpretation of the various experiences (Nieman & Monyai 2007:72–75) during the work integrated learning process.

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) (2004a:26) defines work-based learning as the following: *“A component of a learning programme that focuses on the applications of theory in an authentic, work-based context. It addresses specific competences identified for the acquisition of a qualification which relate to the development of skills that will make the learner employable and will assist in developing his/her personal skills. Employer and professional bodies are involved in the assessment of experiential learning, together with academic staff”*.

With regard to vocational and professional programmes, the document proposes that work-based learning should form an integral part of such qualifications wherever possible, and provides a number of quality indicators relating specifically to work-based learning (Van Rensburg 2008:1). Work integrated learning is an umbrella term that is used to incorporate experiential learning or strategies for facilitating learning such as internships, work-based learning and professional practice. The relevant academic departments are ultimately responsible for the work integrated learning components within the respective departments. Student support is provided on a regional level as Unisa

is focused on Open Distance Learning. Open distance learning can be defined as a multidimensional concept aimed at (ODL Research Task Team 2009:5):

- *“bridging the time, bridging the geographical, economic, social and educational and communication distance between a student and the institution, students and academics, students and courseware and student and peers.*
- *the focus of ODL is therefore one of removing barriers to access learning, flexibility of learning provision, student centeredness, supporting student and construction learning programmes with the expectation that students can succeed.”*

The Unisa work integrated learning policy (2005:1) defines work integrated learning programmes as programmes:

- focusing on the application of theory in authentic, work-based contexts
- addressing specific competencies identified for the acquisition of a qualification
- enabling the developmental skills that will make the student employable and provide a real context in which the theoretical, practical, interpersonal and reflexive competencies of Unisa’s students are developed in an integrated way
- used at Unisa to include experiential education/teaching strategies such as clinical training/practice, internship, professional practice, experiential training/learning, supervised learning/practice and work-based learning.

The focus of the policy is to create a framework for effective work integrated learning practices within Unisa, such as work preparedness and life skills, where work integrated learning forms part of the curriculum as is the case in the work integrated learning module, ‘Public Management Practice (PMP301P) – an offering in the National Diploma in Public Management. The work integrated learning policy also makes provision for implementation procedures such as placement opportunities, liability insurance, mentoring and learning contracting, monitoring and assessment of work integrated learning and record keeping. A section in the policy focuses on the rationale and costing implications. On average, 280 students in the Department need to undergo the Public Management Practice module each semester. As work integrated learning is a compulsory module in the National Diploma in Public Management, students are placed in the public sector, private sector and the not-for-profit sector. Three out of ten students are unemployed and the Department and the Unisa work integrated learning sections assist them in finding suitable placements.

Historically, work integrated learning was not part of the curriculum of the so-called academic research universities. It was primarily found in the curricula

of the former technikons. This changed with the changes in the educational landscape that resulted from the merger process. The lecturers involved in the module are from the former technikon and the lecturers from the former academic university are hesitant to become involved – the reason might be the fact that, historically, established activities of an academic university focused on research, teaching and learning. Community engagement was seen as an add-on instead of an integral core of university programmes.

Community engagement can be defined as: “... *initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community. Community engagement typically finds expression in a variety of forms, ranging from informal and relatively unstructured activities to formal and structured academic programmes (work integrated learning) addressed at particular community needs (service-learning programmes) and some projects might be conducive towards the creation of a better environment for community engagement and others might be directly related to teaching, learning and research*” (HEQC 2004a).

Curricular community engagement (CCE) is defined by the Policy of Community Engagement of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria (2006) as “teaching, learning, and scholarship, which engage academic staff, students and the community (service sectors) in mutually beneficial and respectful collaboration. Their interactions address community identified goals or needs, deepen students’ civic and academic learning, enhance the well-being of the community, and enrich the scholarship of the institution.” The different types of CCE include academic service learning, work integrated learning, experiential learning, community-based education, internships, community outreach, community service and clinical practicals.

In terms of the conceptual framework, work integrated learning primarily benefits the students, as they are placed in the so-called world of work and have opportunities to collaborate and develop. Students are prepared for work integrated learning by means of cooperative education, as they are essentially placed within industry and, in the specific department’s case, students are primarily placed (or already employed) within the public sector. As students will be public servants once they are employed, and therefore in the service of the community, it might be advisable to incorporate aspects of service learning into the Public Management Practice module. The categories of community engagement are not, after all, mutually exclusive and can be combined to create a fully employable student who is not only aware of his or her social responsibility, but also actively engaged in communities (Bender, Daniels, Lazarus, Naude & Sattar 2006).

An important aspect that needs to receive attention in the current work integrated learning module (eg if students participate in an internship) is the lack

of purposeful civic learning and more opportunities should be given to students for structured reflection. A more combined approach would enhance academic learning, purposeful civic learning, and meaningful service *with* the community (not just *to* the community) (Bender *et al.* 2006) and this should lead to civic development and a better integrated citizen.

THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF A WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING PROGRAMME

As stated previously, all activities in the department are guided by Unisa policies. Neither the college nor the department has separate policies to guide community engagement, curricular community engagement or work integrated learning. The process commences when students receive a logbook, a guide for employers and mentors, and a tutorial letter outlining the various salient points. Students are required to complete a compulsory assignment in order to obtain a year mark. This is a formative assignment consisting out of multiple-choice questions based on the Unisa Experiential Learning Framework. The examination mark will comprise the logbook, a report and a competency certificate from the employer and the evaluation of this documentation, as well as a process chronological thematic portfolio. This portfolio is a complete, illustrated report on all activities and the entire learning experience. It is a chronological record on a specific theme and is systematic and purposeful and provides evidence of what the student has learnt during the experiential period. The importance of the portfolio lies in the fact that all learning should be assessed and the portfolio is the most important document for assessment purposes. It must be a complete and formal report on the entire learning experience.

The work integrated learning module is a subject and students therefore pay the full subject fee, as this is a credit-bearing module and can therefore be classified as “curriculum related community engagement”. As Unisa has a global footprint, students are allowed to participate in work integrated learning outside the different university geographical borders and are serviced by the regional offices. Unisa policy stipulates the academic staff responsible for work integrated learning, as well as the responsibility of the Directorate of Tutorial Services, Discussion Classes and Work Integrated Learning in helping to place students for their Public Management Practice module.

There is a booklet, “Guide for employers and mentors”, which elaborates on the rights and responsibilities of employers, as well as the specific responsibilities, rights and responsibilities of students. This booklet also makes provision for “Responsibilities of TSA learners that are undergoing experiential learning”. The guide for employers and mentors includes a competency profile that focuses on

the learning objectives determined by the curriculum. The guide further makes provision for guidelines that mentors can use. Unfortunately the contact details provided in the guide (as well as the other guides) are out of date and are being revised in totality to also incorporate the findings of this article.

The onsite supervisor must complete the logbook. They must also evaluate the outcomes and learning objectives (with the explanations) that have been identified. Some of these supervisors seem to have difficulty completing the logbook and this should perhaps be included in the mentorship programme briefing. In the logbook, provision is made for concluding remarks focusing on a general evaluation of student proficiency. Aspects that must be evaluated include practical ability, willingness to learn new procedures, initiative, people skills, neatness and experience. Finally, at the end of the work integrated learning process the employer must complete a certificate of competence. The assignment, logbook, report, certificate of competence and the portfolio are used to assess the student for a final mark. The portfolios are assessed by means of a rubric which is sent to students in a tutorial letter (Holtzhausen 2008:227).

There are specific departmental coordinators who work on the administrative processes involved, as well as various administrative departments within Unisa, such as the assignment and examinations section, to which portfolios are submitted. It should be mentioned that some of the HEIs have a cooperative education section that takes care of the entire work integrated learning process—from placement to assessment. It is recommended that departmental and regional coordinators visit the student at the place of learning and monitor the student's progress; however, owing to financial, geographical, workload and time constraints this is seldom done.

Students who do not receive relevant exposure can fail this subject, but provision is being made to allow students to qualify for a second opportunity; however, if a student has not submitted a portfolio, a second opportunity will not be granted. Students who do not find placement pose a problem. Some of the South African HEIs allow these students to submit a comprehensive assignment although this defies the whole purpose of work integrated learning (Holtzhausen 2008:228).

In July 2005, a taskforce on Standards of Excellence for Public Administration Education and Training was tasked with finding mutually acceptable standards and criteria for assessing an institution's progress towards achieving the Standards of Excellence. The taskforce comprised various international role players including the United Nations. The final report was presented in May 2008 and aspects in the report relating to work integrated learning include the following (International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration 2008):

- Combining scholarship, practice and community service as public administration is an applied science and therefore needs to integrate theory

and practice. This will include a programme that will draw on the knowledge and understanding generated by research and practical experience. The inclusion of academic staff and students with their communities (and other stakeholders) is fundamental to research, education, training, service and technical assistance activities. This allows for a diversity of participation and ideas. Excellent programmes will be characterised by intellectual and participatory inclusiveness.

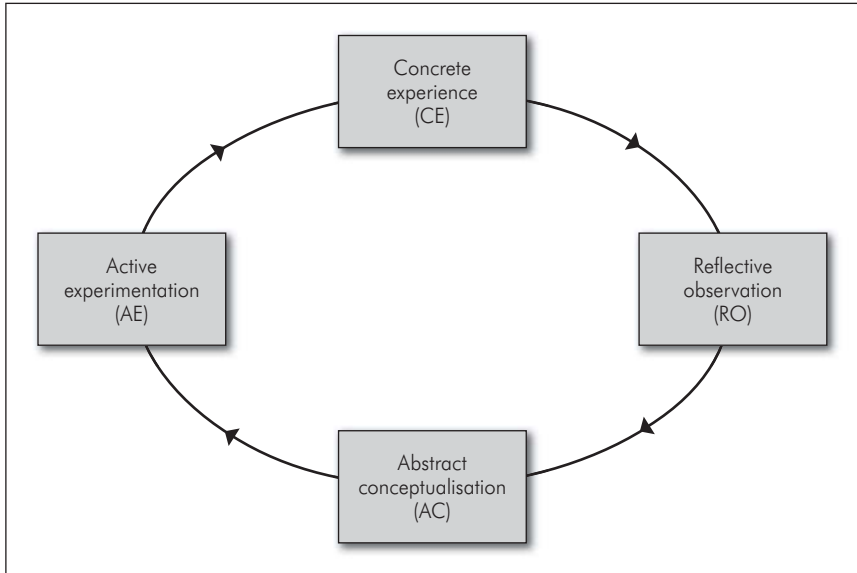
- A curriculum that is purposeful and responsive will lead to students being strong public administrators making contributions to the public service. This will require that curriculum in Public Administration have coherent missions, that the academic staff are responsive and that the students are involved and want to make a difference.
- Public service commitment, which calls for all university activities (teaching, research and other service activities) to always advance the interests of the public and democracy.
- Advocacy of public interest values by, for example, the creation of a participatory, responsive, committed and accountable culture, by making use of pedagogy and practical examples.
- Funding and workload should be structured in such a manner that staff members have ample opportunity to be involved in research, education, training, service and technical assistance activities.

In terms of the suggested programme content, the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (2008) states that degree-granting programmes should be structured in such a manner that they will ensure that some sort of structured experience in the public sector or not-for-profit sector will be included. Public-sector ethos makes provision for civic engagement (unfortunately it is not elaborated on to determine if it can specifically relate to work integrated learning). When designing and implementing work-integrated modules, it is important to make provision for outcomes-based principles as well as for various learning styles.

LEARNING STYLES

Various learning style theories are well documented and cited in the literature (Kolb 1984; Herrmann 1995; Vermunt 1995; Sternberg & Grigorenko 2001). For the purpose of this article, the work integrated learning framework is evaluated against the background of Kolb's (1984) and Herrmann's (1995) learning style theory and Gardner's theory on multiple intelligences (MIs) (Gardner 1993).

Figure 1 Kolb's experiential learning cycle



Source: Adapted from Kolb & Fry 1975.

The Department of Public Administration and Management follows the learning cycle as proposed by Kolb, which consists of four stages, namely *experience*, *reflection*, *conceptualising* and *action*. This learning cycle is used throughout the entire work integrated learning experience. Students are prepared for this experience from their first year by means of, for example, case studies. It is, however, advisable for all lecturers involved in the work integrated learning programme under investigation to incorporate the different learning styles as developed by Kolb (1984), which link to the experiential learning cycle.

Kolb (1984) defines a learning style as "... the dimensions of perceptions, input, organisation, processing and understanding". This definition provides a broad explanation on the way the learning process takes place. The four different types of learning style, as they relate to the different phases of the learning cycle, are

- activists: concrete experience (CE)
- reflectors: reflective observations (RO)
- theorists: abstract conceptualisation (AC)
- pragmatists: active experimentation (AE)

According to Du Toit (2008), CE refers to learning from feeling. Students who prefer this style learn from a specific experience, relate well to others and are

sensitive to various needs, feelings and diversity. RO is learning by watching and listening. This type of learner carefully observes before making judgements and views issues from different perspectives. Learning by thinking refers to AC. Learners systematically analyse and plan ideas. They act on an intellectual understanding of the problem. AE is learning by doing and if learners prefer this learning style, they have the ability to get things done. These learners are risk-takers and influence people and events through action. It should be kept in mind that the challenges different situations bring, based on the nature of the task at hand, could lead to the use of different learning styles and/or MIs. A variety in the nature of assignments will facilitate the development of flexibility in learning styles and intelligences.

Learners have dominant ways in which they assimilate and disseminate information. This is influenced by a number of factors. One of these factors relates to the MI theory as developed by Gardner (1993) who argues that intelligence consists of a variety of separate and independent systems which interact with one another within each individual. Each intelligence consists of various characteristics (Erasmus *et al.* 2006:113) as depicted in the following table:

The different intelligences can be linked to learning styles, as suggested by Du Toit (2008). Learners will make use of different styles in different situations, but will predominantly favour one (or two) styles. It is also possible that learners

Table 1 Gardner’s multiple intelligence system

Intelligence	Learning characteristics
Linguistic	Thinks in words; likes reading, writing, speaking, listening
Logical-mathematical	Likes reasoning, organising and interpreting data, mathematics and science problem solving
Spatial	Thinks in images, drawing and observing, mind-mapping, puzzles, graphics
Musical/rhythmic	Thinks in tunes, likes music and dance
Bodily-kinaesthetic	Thinks through sensations, likes sports, drama, movement and physical activity
Interpersonal	Thinks best with others, group activities, interactive, people-centred activities
Intrapersonal	Thinks best alone, individual, self-paced

Source: Erasmus *et al.* 2006

can use a combination of styles to compile a portfolio for example. Lecturers need to incorporate the different intelligences to allow learners to also develop in areas that they would not predominantly use. This will help learners to develop MIs.

Whole brain learning (Herrmann 1995) suggests that learning takes place best when the whole brain is involved in learning. Roger Sperry's research in the 1950s established that the brain has two hemispheres. The implication is that learners learn with the more dominant side. Whether a learner is right-brain dominant (holistic/global, spatially-orientated, artistic and creative) or left-brain dominant (rational, logical, structured and organised) it is advisable to stimulate both sides to increase the ability to reach one's full potential (Erasmus *et al.* 2006).

As an assessor one needs to be aware of the fact that students have different learning and thinking styles. One's assessment practice needs to make provision for these differences. One also needs to realise that each assessor has an own preferred style, which will have an influence on his/her assessment practice, as well as other responsibilities such as facilitating learning and curriculum design. It is therefore imperative to make use of assessment practices that are objective and make provision for different styles.

The current framework primarily makes provision for the factual and logical learning style (Herrmann), theorist learning style (Kolb) and verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical intelligence (Gardner), as students are required to complete a set of multiple-choice questions based on the Unisa experiential learning policy (as theory). To some extent an intrapersonal learning style (Herrmann) and intelligence (Gardner), and reflector learning style (Kolb) are accommodated since a logbook and a portfolio are submitted. The step-by-step way of completing the logbook also accommodates the sequential learning style (Herrmann) – based on an analysis of 74 portfolios and logbooks. Only one of the students submitted a DVD as part of the portfolio which is evidence of visual learning (Herrmann).

The portfolio is based on set learning outcomes and forms the summative assessment. It is suggested that students be challenged to make use of other learning styles and intelligences as well when compiling their portfolios. It can be done by, for example, a video recording of their own practice or simulations, drawings to illustrate what they are doing, mind maps that can assist them in acquiring critical thinking skills. It is also proposed that students use myUnisa (web based) and the blog created for Public Management Practice to promote group discussions and therefore also accommodate students who prefer the interpersonal learning style. It should also be kept in mind that various adult learning theories also apply to work integrated learning as is discussed in the next section.

Adult learning theories

Various adult learning theories exist. For the purpose of this article, self-regulated learning, constructivism and cooperative learning are discussed within the work integrated learning framework. Adults need to take responsibility for their own lives and the decisions that they make. They also need to know the reason for having to learn something before they make the effort to learn (Jacobson & Harris 2005:412). Merriam and Brockett (1997) support this notion as they state that it is important for the planning and development of educational programmes to know why adults choose to participate in programmes and to be aware of the possible barriers they may have to overcome in order to participate.

Constructivist development theory is built on the work of Piaget, but extends Piaget's work into adulthood and beyond the cognitive focus. Constructivist development theory deals with the manner in which a person constructs and interprets an experience – the meaning a person makes of an experience. *Constructivism* organises the way people make sense of themselves and others and the way these regulative principles are constructed and re-constructed (Nicolaidis & Yorks 2008:53). Constructivist theory relates directly to work integrated learning as students are required to reflect on learning content and construct their own understanding which is reflected in the portfolio. It was, however, found when the portfolios were assessed that students had not fully comprehended what was meant by "reflection".

One of the primary goals of HEIs is to foster independent, *self-regulated* thinkers who will become specialists in their chosen field. Self-regulated learning can be defined as "... multi-component, iterative, self-steering processes that target's one's own cognitions, feelings, and actions, as well as features of the environment for modulation in the service of one's own goals (Boekaerts & Cascallar 2006:199). It is therefore clear that the work integrated learning module under discussion should be designed in such a manner that students are allowed the freedom to achieve their own goals according to carefully designed guidelines which can be found in clearly defined learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

According to Kennet (1996:177) *cooperative learning* can be defined as situations where students work together in groups of two or more, where they share and clarify ideas. The idea is that students can make sense of what is happening by talking and clarifying what they understand from each other. There is even evidence that students can engage in higher-order thinking skills which includes application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Within the current work integrated learning framework there has not been any opportunity for cooperative learning among students to date. The principles of cooperative learning need to be incorporated into the framework through, for example,

the discussion board on *myUnisa* and the Public Management Practice blog (available at www.publicmanagementpractice.blogspot.com).

Curriculum design and assessment practice

A curriculum is a plan for the process of learning and teaching and can be seen as a process for determining learning outcomes and the learning content of the work integrated learning module and the way in which students will be exposed to the learning content (the what). It also makes provision for assessment criteria as well as the methods of facilitating learning and technology that will be used (the how).

An integral part of OBE is outcomes-based assessment (OBA). Assessment can be defined as "... a process of collecting, synthesising and interpreting information to assist teachers [lecturers], parents and other stakeholders in making decisions about the progress of learners" (Department of Education 2005:5). OBE and therefore OBA are guided by various sections of legislation. OBE is characterised by four principles and these principles should be perceived in a holistic manner. Spady defines four principles of OBE, namely designing

Table 2 Outcomes-based assessment principles in classroom practice

OBA principle	Definition
Design down	When planning assessment lecturers should <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the relevant learning outcomes and assessment standards • identify the skills, knowledge and values that need to be assessed • choose an appropriate assessment strategy • plan steps for differentiation to accommodate learners at different levels
Clarity of focus	Lecturers should ensure that students understand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the criteria against which they will be assessed • the substantiation of learning they are expected to demonstrate
High expectations	Lecturers should be instrumental in assisting students reach their full potential. Progress of individual students should be measured against previous performance and not against other students.
Expanded opportunities	Lecturers should create an environment in which students will have various opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and reach their full potential. Students should be made aware of the fact that they are competing against themselves and not other students. The idea of non-competition will impact on the management of the class by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking into account various learning styles and MIs • presenting and enriching the curriculum in diverse ways

Source: Department of Education 2002

down, clarity of focus, high expectations and expanded opportunities (Vandeyar & Killen 2003), as summarised in the following table:

The four key principles of OBE refer to the design of an ideal environment in which students can achieve their full potential in the work integrated learning module. Lecturers are instrumental in this process by, for example, designing various learning tasks that would provide students with opportunities to showcase their abilities as in the portfolio. As a lecturer, one needs to ask: “What are the characteristics of the citizen I want to help develop to contribute to the future of South Africa – what should this person be able to do and know?” Assessment activities will then be designed in accordance with, for example, but not exclusively, these characteristics in mind as they are in line with OBE principles of assessment.

According to Vandeyar and Killen (2003:124) the relationship between the principles of OBE and the principles of assessment are:

- Procedures for assessment should focus clearly on the specified outcomes so that valid inferences can be deducted from learning.
- Assessment procedures must be reliable and efforts should be made to minimise measurement errors and create opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding at fitting times and in ways that will lead to consistent results.
- Fairness is an important principle as it allows for students to illustrate their capabilities without being influenced by, for example, poor language capabilities.
- Assessment should be reflective of the knowledge and skills that are most important for students to master.
- Assessment should discriminate between students who achieve high standards and those who do not. It should challenge the students to the limits of their understanding and ability to implement knowledge.
- Assessment tasks need to be valid and meaningful, support opportunities for students to learn and should make provision for students to illustrate their individuality.

As an assessor it is important to have clarity on what one wants students to learn and how it should be learned, and then structure learning opportunities accordingly. Assessment must therefore focus on assessing whether they have learnt.

Good assessment practice requires that certain questions need to be answered:

- What is assessment? Assessment can be broadly defined as the assimilation and interpretation of evidence about a student’s level of skill and/or knowledge in relation to a set of predetermined standards.

- Why do we need to assess? We need to assess for growth, development and support.
- When do we assess? Assessment is a continuous process and should take place when growth, development and support have been established through the learning experience. The compulsory multiple-choice questions constitute formative assessment and the portfolio forms the summative assessment.
- Who assesses? All the stakeholders, including peers, should be involved in the assessment process. It should, however, be noted that, in terms of protocol, formal assessments will only be done by the lecturers involved in the specific module.
- How do we assess? We assess by incorporating a variety of methods, tools and techniques. The portfolio is assessed by means of a rubric and students can be asked to also assess their own performance by using the rubric.

Assessment should be a natural and positive activity in the daily routine of lecturers. It is important to communicate clear guidelines to students regarding expectations, requirements and assessment methods (Maree & Louw 2007). Assessment should always reflect the learning that has taken place. The next section of this article focuses on the various roles that lecturers fulfil.

THE ROLES OF THE LECTURER

Lecturers have to fulfil a variety of roles (South Africa 1999). One of the roles is that of learning mediator, which means that learning should be facilitated in a manner that is sensitive to the diversity of students. Unisa, for example, has students from all over the world with different backgrounds, religions and beliefs and lecturers should therefore create learning environments that accommodate different students. When lecturers communicate with students, respect should be shown for diversity. Lecturers must be knowledgeable about the different ways of facilitating learning and strategies for learning and how these can be used best to promote effective learning.

Another role is that of a learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist, which calls for lecturers to be well versed in the skills, values, procedures, methods and knowledge relating to the subject field. As a learning mediator, lecturers are required to display a sound knowledge of the subject content and the various strategies, resources and principles appropriate for the context – which in this case is work integrated learning.

Part of the mentoring role is to develop and empower students so that they can reach their full potential and develop skills and capabilities. It is therefore imperative for lecturers to be in close contact with industry through, for

example, advisory committee meetings to determine what skills are needed. This will enable the lecturers to fulfil yet another role, namely that of interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials, which calls for the design of original programmes that can address a variety of needs. Lecturers should use the best-suited textual and visual resources for learning. As in the case at Unisa, there are the textual documents as well as online sources available that feature audio, video and text.

It is important to give students feedback, as lecturers also have an assessment role, which is an essential part of the learning process. Lecturers need to understand the purposes, methods and effects of assessment. Both formative and summative assessments must be designed in such a manner that they are useful for assessing the level of learning and meeting the requirements of accredited bodies. It is also important to record the results and keep diagnostic records of assessment. These results will also help the lecturer to improve learning programmes as students might, for example, experience difficulty in understanding certain aspects. In order to improve learning, adaptations can be made. It is also imperative that assessment measures whether or not set learning outcomes have been achieved (Du Toit, 2008:2–3).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this article, an exploration of relevant literature showed that the current framework for work integrated learning at the Department of Public Administration and Management at Unisa is mostly in line with the requirements of the learning process.

It is vital that students should not only be prepared for the world of work, but also be moulded into responsible citizens who understand that they have a social responsibility. A paradigm shift is needed in the Unisa Department of Public Administration and Management in order to shift the emphasis to a more outcomes-based approach instead of traditional teaching and learning. The challenge is greater at an institution such as Unisa which follows an open distance learning approach. In terms of this approach, it is hoped that lecturers will become more accessible to students; however, in reality there are a number of “distances” between the lecturers and students that cannot be ignored, such as geographical and communication distances. It is difficult to assess a student’s competency levels fully, as there is no face-to-face contact apart from the two scheduled contact sessions each year and these do not take place in the workplace. For the work integrated learning framework to be able to achieve its objectives, the assessment criteria need to be communicated clearly to students. An in-depth explanation must be given of what is expected by means

of reflexive activities and thoughts. It might also be advisable to offer a video conference at the beginning of each semester to give students an opportunity to interact face to face with the lecturer. This would strengthen the mentoring role of the lecturer and could put into motion a process of collaborative learning as students will interact not only with the lecturer, but also with one another and this would hopefully lead to more interaction via *myUnisa*.

Furthermore, all academic staff need to become involved in the Public Management Practice module, as they will bring their unique skills and capabilities to the module. Common ground needs to be established within the Department as there is a definite division in thinking between the former technikon and university lecturers on work integrated learning and specifically community engagement (as well as curricular community engagement). These are foreign concepts to most of the academic staff of PAM departments at South African universities and it is therefore imperative that a common understanding be created and established. This would also lead to an improved curriculum across modules as lecturers would be sensitive to the various aspects relating to curricular community engagement and teaching and would most likely incorporate these aspects into their modules. When modules are designed, it should be kept in mind that the students have different learning styles and these should guide assessment activities for example.

It is suggested that electronic learning tools be incorporated into the electronic version of the Public Management Practice module on *myUnisa*. Tools that can be used are, for example, a discussion board, frequently asked questions and podcasts to assist students in understanding what is expected of them. At a later stage, a wiki could be created to establish a collaborative space for students and lecturers. The module will have to incorporate a more integrated curriculum model approach. A further suggestion is that the various adult learning theories should be incorporated when the module is designed as one of the aims of learning is to create self-regulated, motivated and reflexive students.

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