

these assumptions by requiring lecturers to establish the levels of knowledge before formative assessment takes place.

- OBE-aligned assessment encourages communication and feedback between lecturers and students. Formative assessment requires adequate feedback so that competences can be demonstrated in the summative assessment. Often lecturers do not provide feedback which is timeous for the learning process, which research (Driscoll & Wood, 2007; Stevens & Levi, 2005) has shown is essential for student learning, and this forces them to do so.
- OBE assessment lends itself to assessing students or learners in real-life situations. This is beneficial to UWC students, who often do not do adequate justice to their abilities as a result of poor writing skills. If students' abilities to assess and intervene with clients were assessed through participant observation or by interviewing clients about the students' skills, they may be assessed in a more direct and fairer manner.
- OBE assessment is conducive to democratic forms of assessment and encourages practices of accountability on the part of the assessor/lecturer for the decisions made in relation to competencies. Because the learner is assured that he/she has access to appeal against the decision that the assessor makes, the assessor would have to be in a position to justify why he/she had made decisions about the evidence of competence. This makes the process of assessment far more transparent than has normally been the case at university level. Lecturers are often defensive when asked on what basis they have made judgements about student assessment. This also means that criteria have to be specified and fleshed out with regard to the exit-level outcomes. Also learners are given the opportunity of knowing exactly how they are going to be assessed, and in signing the agreement on the assessment plan, both lecturers and learners are made responsible and accountable for the assessment process, which has to be made transparent.
- The VACCS (validity, authenticity, consistency, currency and sufficiency) criteria in the SAQA assessment provide for a rigorous evaluation of evidence against specific criteria, and would obviate more generalised evaluations with regard to whether or not learners have acquired the requisite knowledge, skills and values. Furthermore, criterion-referenced assessment does not encourage learners to compete against each other in the way that norm-referenced assessment does, but focuses on the learner improving him- or herself in relation to the specific criteria which are provided upfront for the learners to understand and engage with from the outset.
- OBE assessment requires reflection on appropriateness and suitability of assessment methods in that a major emphasis is put on the alignment of the learning activities, assessment and outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2007).
- The approach which is part of the SAQA unit assessment unit standard also looks at equity issues in relation to overcoming potential learning barriers to assessment with regard to language, literacy and numeracy problems, physical disadvantages, nervousness and anxiety, etc., but does not elaborate on how these can be accommodated or overcome.
- The methods of assessment assist in the learning process as they become an integral part of learning – it becomes assessment for learning rather than assessment for making judgements (Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Bryan & Clegg, 2006; Butcher *et al.*, 2006; Driscoll & Wood, 2007; Stevens & Levi, 2005).

- The assessment is a dialogical process where the lecturer does not have unchallengeable authority or claims to certainty; there is much more of a sense of accessibility on the lecturer's part, which is important for learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2007).

Outcomes-based assessment techniques are, however, limited in certain respects. The following are some of the identified limitations:

- Since learning outcomes are predetermined and standardised, learner-driven knowledge and significant input into curriculum development by learners is not really possible. Learners have to adhere to the delineated outcomes. By applying minimum standards in the form of exit-level outcomes, one could be missing possibilities for learning from students in social work. Learners from differing gender, class and ethnicity backgrounds could contribute significantly to appropriate South African social work knowledge education (see Bozalek, 2004 for elaboration on how student knowledges can be used to inform the social work curriculum). Supervisors, educators and practitioners in many instances occupy privileged class and sometimes ethnic positions. They could gainfully learn from students' knowledge of the communities from which they come and from students' own experiences. Having a universalised set of exit-level outcomes precludes such opportunities, as not much time is left to pursue issues outside of the exit-level outcomes and their associated assessment criteria.
- One could question whether SAQAFying the curriculum gives adequate consideration to the inequalities of previous opportunities and life experiences. To what extent is a middle-class learner who can conform to traditional middle-class expectations anticipated in the assessment of learners? There is certainly the assumption with the minimum standards that learners approach the curriculum from a position of sameness or equality, which is definitely not the case for UWC students, who are now drawn mainly from the Eastern and Western Cape and have a background of coming from historically disadvantaged educational systems. That is, they are academically under-prepared and not familiar with academic discourse. The economist Amartya Sen (1995) and philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1995), amongst others, have drawn attention to the idea that access to goods such as education in itself is not enough to judge whether a society is providing opportunities for living an adequate human life. It is people's position in relation to these goods which has to be taken into account in order to make decisions about what is needed.
- Outcomes-based education does not really address power relations or how lecturers and learners may be differentially situated in terms of power differentials such as race, class, gender, generation, status, etc.
- OBE does not acknowledge the political nature of assessment and assumes that a position of value neutrality is possible, rather than viewing knowledge as situated. One's positionality may be influential in terms of how one assesses, what one's paradigm is, etc. Fortunately the exit-level outcomes are progressive, but the situation could have looked very different, if they had been constructed by conservative academics or practitioners.
- The universalisation of exit-level outcomes assumes that these are appropriate for any context. Perhaps the important issue is *who* is drawing up these standards for the profession and *how* this is being done. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999:5) refer to the importance of the process of defining quality. Wide stakeholder consultation and input into the process of establishing minimum standards is an important process, as was the case with the Bachelor of Social Work minimum standards.

- The outcomes-based framework has the potential to be used in a mechanistic and positivist manner, although this need not necessarily be the case.
- It is important to capture that which is dynamic and unpredictable in the exit-level outcomes by focusing both on intended and unintended outcomes, in order to maintain creativity in teaching (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have described the journey that I undertook in preparing to become an accredited assessor for SAQA and my attempt at integrating the BWS exit-level outcomes into the Social Work curriculum. I have elaborated on the Specific Outcomes in which one needs to demonstrate competence by developing and presenting a portfolio of evidence on a particular learner. I described how I SAQAFied a particular Social Work course at a fourth-year level entitled Advanced Intervention in order to meet the criteria for the accreditation to become an assessor and in order to incorporate the new exit-level outcomes. I considered the pros and cons of SAQAFying the curriculum and conclude that, although there are problems with outcomes-based assessment, it does allow for a rigorous approach to assessment and has the potential of democratising teaching and learning.

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