

# A critical review of integrated assessment at Cape Peninsula University of Technology: A newsletter assignment

**A B S T R A C T** The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the success of an integrated newsletter assignment by analysing the narratives of the key role-players. The research included a critical review of teaching and assessment practices in order to bring about a change to the assessment. The results of this research indicate that certain improvements to the newsletter assignment are necessary in order for it to add value as a learning and assessment tool. This paper further emphasises the importance of changing assessment in a creative and dynamic way so as to adapt to the changing environment outside of the academic institution. The paper examines the principles of a typically good assessment in order to make informed adjustments to the newsletter assignment. Of particular importance are the reflections of the relevant stakeholders and how students learn through their interaction with others.

**Keywords:** Integration, curriculum, newsletter, discipline-based, outcomes-based, reflection, experiential, learning, activity-theory, assessment

## 1. Introduction

Assessment practice should be dynamic, evolutionary and adjustable. It should be open to change, critique and transformation, and adjustable to the needs of both the students and relevant communities. In response to this philosophy, assessment should be reviewed critically and continuously in order to improve teaching and learning practices.

Integrated assessment calls for collaborative partnerships to be established between lecturers who are involved in the integrated assessment, so that they can design criteria, compile the assignment instructions for students, co-teach and assess together.

In 2002 the lecturers of the first-year National Diploma: Human Resources Management (HRM) programme in the Business Faculty at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT, Bellville) started the process of integrating all the subjects (Personnel Management, Business Management, End-User Computing, English Communication and Statistics). To ensure effective integration, the lecturers from the different disciplines co-taught parts of the curriculum and designed some of the assessment tasks together. A newsletter assignment was designed to act as an integrated assessment tool to assess the teaching and learning units in the first module of the HRM course by collaboratively designing and compiling articles based on a community organisation. The original newsletter assignment (Garraway, 2005:219) has evolved to incorporate four out of the five subjects at the first-year level.

Integrated assessments introduce many challenges which are not the case when students' work is assessed by one lecturer. Lecturers may avoid integrated assessments because of difficulties to cooperate effectively with colleagues. One of the main aims of this article is to review the newsletter assignment as one example of an integrated assessment critically by using mostly the responses of students. As students are important stakeholders in the assessment process, they should play an integral part in assessment design. Lecturers need to access the responses of students for constructive change to occur.

The article also aims to determine how lecturers can also benefit from acknowledging their own critique of the newsletter assignment. By reflecting on possible solutions to the difficulties experienced, a more positive inclination towards integrated assessment may result.

The critical review process of the newsletter as an example of an integrated assignment was guided by the following questions:

- How do the lecturers and students conceptualise integration in the context of the newsletter assignment?
- How was the assessment criteria communicated to students?
- Which Critical Crossfield Outcomes (CCFO's) were attained by students? (ILLACSIG, 1996:44)
- What hampered students in their attempts to achieve the desired outcomes?

The responses of lecturers, students and a writing tutor were collected and analysed to enable a coherent discussion of the results. Recommendations for improving the newsletter assignment are presented in the article. The recommendations may be applied to other integrated assessment learning environments.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### *2.1 Curriculum in context*

In the traditional teaching and learning context in higher education, students were not part of the assessment planning and reviewing process. Assessment, in this context, remained firmly within the control of the assessor, with the assessed being excluded and only occupying a role at the end of the process. Pretorius (1998:vii) confirms the foregoing by stating that '... the traditional South African education favoured a curriculum that was too academic ... and did not keep in touch with the requirements of the sphere of work and possible future needs of both learners and the wider community'.

South African higher education is clearly moving away from this philosophy as the demands of a modern and highly technological society place pressure on educational institutions. In post-apartheid South Africa, the new approach to higher education focuses on preparing graduates to be effective and efficient in the workplace. As assessment serves as a means of measuring whether learners are ready for the workplace, tertiary institutions are under scrutiny from industry and quality assurance bodies such as the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC).

In response to this shift in higher education, the newsletter assignment was designed in a holistic manner across different disciplines so that it could mirror the workplace. In the workplace situation tasks often rely on multiple skills rather than the practical application of separate units of knowledge. The assignment assessed the teaching and learning units in the first module of the HRM course.

The newsletter assignment was used by the End-User Computing (EUC) and English Communication (EC) lecturers to make it easier for the students to gain access to content knowledge. This was done by reducing linguistic and technical obstacles. As a result, learners gained language skills and computing proficiency while engaging with relevant and realistic content.

## *2.2 Background literature*

South Africa's Curriculum Framework (Sweezy, 1998:49), suggests that an outcomes-based education (OBE) requires educators to move away from norm-referenced forms of assessment. Instead the focus should be on 'the ability of learners to do, to perform rather than simply being able to memorize or understand information'. The newsletter assignment had to measure the outcomes to be attained and not just be memory-based. Assignments that rely on the regurgitation of memorised facts and figures are reminiscent of past assessment practices.

According to Gouws (1998:81) Vygotsky's human socio-cultural activity and the process of internalisation stress that people play an important role in the development of others by the activities in which they engage as part of a cultural community. Vygotsky's concept of learning in groups suggests that being able to perform a task with others reflects a greater mental development than being able to do a task alone (Vygotsky, 1978:85). The culturally diverse and active students who share knowledge and resources to achieve their learning objective replace the solitary student who studies alone and memorises blocks of knowledge. The interaction of learners, not only with each other, but also with their surrounding community and environment, can provide an opportunity to assess important CCFO's.

Luria (1974:15) suggests that new knowledge is created through intricate patterns of social practice. This may take the form of new problems, modes of behaviour, methods of absorbing information and ways of reflecting reality. While students engaged with the newsletter assignment, the social interaction via the learning process played an important part in the construction of new knowledge.

The learning activity is made more dynamic and complex when there are multiple themes integrated into one major assessment. Integration can happen at different levels, not just at the level of subjects. The curriculum should emphasise both subject matter and the learner and should integrate content with the learner's prior experiences so that there are meaningful new

experiences (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998:245). The background and prior experiences of students should be an important consideration when designing learning tasks and assessment.

The criteria that follow were taken into account when critically reviewing the newsletter assignment:

- The importance, length, size or weight of the assessment – does it match the amount of work which has been done?
- The choice of the assessment technique – does it match the way in which learners have been taught?
- The instructions and/or questions given to learners – do all learners understand what they are expected to do or answer?
- The method of administering the assessment – are the conditions appropriate; is there enough time; do learners have access to the resources that they need?
- The method of marking – is it as objective as possible? Should the learners know how it is to be marked? (Siebörger, 1998:13)

The above questions contain essential components for lecturers who aim to review their assessments critically. A lack of transparency and accountability between lecturers and students can result in a negation of the above factors. Therefore the designing and execution of the newsletter assignment became an integral part of the assessment process.

### **3. Research methodology**

Lecturers had to ensure that the Essential or Critical Crossfield Outcomes (CCFO's) as proposed by the Department of Education (DOE) as of 16 September 1996 (ILLACSIG, 1996:44) were covered in the learning programme and were assessed. These critical outcomes are summarised as follows: problem-solving, teamwork, self-management, managing information, communication, use of science and technology and demonstration of an understanding of related systems (ILLACSIG, 1996:44). CCFO's place the assessment within a context that is relevant to the development of the learner. These outcomes were important design considerations in the development of the integrated newsletter. The level descriptors for the first-year level were also taken into account when designing the newsletter assignment.

In teams of three, students were required to design and write a newsletter for a community organisation. The newsletter had to contain three content articles (one group article and two individually written) which documented the purpose and history of the community organisation, marketed or reported on a recent event, and provided a description and discussion of their organisational structure. Although students were allowed to work in groups, they received individual final marks. The group members were required to divide the topics amongst themselves so that all the subject areas were covered. However, they had to ensure that they did peer sharing so that individual group members could integrate the different discipline areas.

After the writing tutor had formatively assessed the essays, students had to submit drafts of their essays to the content lecturers for commenting. Students were required to apply the comments to make changes to the essays and then transform the information into articles for the newsletter assignment. The target audience for the final dissemination of the newsletter was the community where the community organisation resided.

The data were collected between 2002 and 2004 by means of qualitative methods, as the input of the key stakeholders in the newsletter assignment was crucial. These methods were also supported by quantitative data via a questionnaire survey. Using a multi-layered approach enabled the researcher to triangulate the results of the study.

### *3.1 Participants*

The sample consisted of both students and lecturers in the HRM Department, Business Faculty (CPUT). All the students who participated in the study were registered first-year students at the former Peninsula Technikon, studying towards a National Diploma in HRM. The lecturers, who formed part of the integrated team, were all first-year lecturers in the HRM department. To ensure confidentiality, all input was recorded and stored anonymously.

### *3.2 Research procedure*

The research tools used to gather the input are:

- student focus group, questionnaires to students and reflective debriefing
- reflective debriefing and questionnaires to lecturers

#### *3.2.1 Student focus group*

Ten first-year students were interviewed after the completion of the newsletter assignment. One lecturer conducted the focus-group interview while another observed and recorded the responses. The interview was semi-structured with open-ended questions. The aim was to ascertain the feelings and ideas that students had about the newsletter assignment. Interviews were used as a more interactive and immediate form of communication than writing.

#### *3.2.2 Questionnaires to students*

Data were collected by means of a questionnaire from first-year HRM students (N=42) about their experiences of engaging in the community newsletter assignment. The questionnaires were distributed in the classroom and returned immediately after completion. Ranked responses on the following themes were elicited from the questionnaires: scaffolding and expectations of criteria; tutorial support; computer and research skills; literacy resources; drafting as process writing approach; formative assessment; quantitative feedback; multidisciplinary content; contextualisation and holistic understanding of HRM; information application and transfer of knowledge; language skills.

#### *3.2.3 Reflective debriefing (students)*

A sample of twenty-five out of a class group of 60 students submitted written reflective statements on their impressions regarding the newsletter assignment. This method of semi-structured feedback encouraged students to focus on response to the newsletter assignment. Rich data that represented both positive and areas of difficulty were gathered.

#### *3.2.4 Reflective debriefing (lecturers)*

The lecturers participated in a peer sharing reflective session to give brief feedback on the implementation of the first-year academic programme. Part of the discussion centred on the integrated assessments, specifically the newsletter assignment.

The writing tutor was also a part-time English Communication lecturer for the Business Faculty. Her impressions of the assessment formed an important part of the planning and execution of the newsletter assignment including providing writing and technical assistance to the students. As she was not a full-time lecturer in the HRM department she was able to give a fresh perspective.

### 3.2.5 Questionnaires to lecturers

First-year lecturers completed questionnaires which focussed on the structure of the assignment, choice of assessment method, instructions given to learners, resources such as time, and the method that was used to teach towards the newsletter assignment. The questionnaires gave lecturers the opportunity to give detailed responses anonymously and in their own time.

## 4. Discussion

Siebörger's (1998:13) criteria were used to discuss and present the gathered data in the same order and categories as the research procedure:

- Firstly – student focus group, questionnaires to students and reflective debriefing (students), and
- Secondly – reflective debriefing (lecturers) and questionnaires to lecturers

### 4.1 Student feedback

The following responses were gathered from students:

#### 4.1.1 Student focus group

Students felt that they had put a lot of effort into the group assignment and were disappointed that even those students who put in minimal effort received the same mark of five per cent for the first draft as they did. This relates back to Siebörger's (1998:13) criteria that ask whether the weight of the assessment matches the amount of work which has been done. Lecturers had agreed to first give formative feedback on the written drafts and then jointly assess the newsletter assignment at the end of the assessment process. The evident discrepancy caused confusion and misunderstanding not only between lecturers but also between lecturers and students.

According to Hager, Gonczi and Athanasou (1998:57) integration occurs '...by having methods which assess a number of elements simultaneously'. However, according to these results, it appears that there were communication problems between the lecturers on the integration team and this hampered the students' own understanding of the newsletter assignment as an integrated assessment. Although students understood integration, many students as well as lecturers still approached the assessment as a combination of separate subjects rather than a merging of these elements. The former Peninsula Technikon workshop report of the Trans-disciplinary Research Niche: Language and Content Integration project report mentions that people naturally make links and connection across disciplines and they only think in boxes if they are taught to do so (2002:3).

For many students, group work provided an opportunity for them to interact with other students and to test their knowledge and opinions against those of their peers. Group work reaffirmed students' own individuality and identity and established their place not only in the

community outside the former technikon, but also within their academic community. The ability to work in a team is one of the CCFO's as proposed by the DOE. Students who work in teams, especially in their first year, feel more part of the student community than those who are isolated from their fellow students.

Students admitted that they were given mark allocations and detailed criteria for each section. They appeared satisfied with the criteria and claimed that they were aware of what was expected. According to the students, not all the lecturers adhered to the assessment criteria when they were teaching and marking. In contrast, students were not always clear about the overall purpose of the newsletter assignment as an integrated assessment and what it was designed to achieve. This could be attributed to a lack of cohesion regarding the teaching of the separate units in the year programme and the outcomes of the newsletter assignment. Expectations are linked to outcomes and provide a guide for both student and lecturer. Students mentioned that the expectations of the lecturer should also match the students' capabilities and should not be pitched beyond the achievement threshold of the students. However, they agreed that assessments should also challenge them to reach a higher level of performance so that learning and development can take place. Another concern was the lack of resources that were needed to complete the newsletter assignment successfully. Students needed certain resources, for example access to computers with the correct programme, skilled laboratory assistants, printing facilities and transport to community organisations. Some students also experienced difficulties with saving their typed work as their computer disc space was too small. As a result, many of these resources were either unavailable or of an inferior quality. This is of serious concern and raises the issue of fairness. The amount of time that is allocated for students to complete an assessment should be directly related to the level of effort and work that the assessment requires. If these two components are not matched, the quality of the newsletter is compromised. Some students indicated that they needed and appreciated the academic assistance provided for them. Most of these workshops were not compulsory but were relatively well attended. Determining the level of assistance needed was even more difficult, as some students were skilled enough to work on their own.

Students had to interact with community organisations so that they could gain information for their essays. They reported both positive and negative experiences with the organisation. Some students indicated that they were under-prepared for this interaction and that some organisations were protective or defensive about the organisation.

Nevertheless, students learnt valuable life skills as a result of their visits to the organisations. This is relevant as the psychologist, Lev Semonovich Vygotsky in (Gouws, 1998:81) views social interaction as an important part of the internalisation of knowledge and through their experiences with the community organisations, students were raised to a higher level of knowledge. The relationship between the students and the organisations was compromised by difficulties in communication. Community organisations have a culture of their own, which can make them wary of the motives of outsiders. Students were not always aware of the protocols of the community organisation. For example, some organisations were unlikely to provide sensitive and confidential information as requested by the student.

Students were generally dissatisfied with the lack of feedback. The group essays were marked formatively but the individual essays were awarded a participation mark of five per cent with



no formative feedback. As a result, students were unsure about what adjustments they had to make to their individual essays.

Also highlighted in the focus-group discussion was that the first drafts of the individual essays were not returned soon enough. The students who handed in a draft of the essays to their content lecturers, felt that a final draft should also have been submitted to the lecturer for checking. Students were divided on the issue of being awarded a mark for written drafts. Some felt that a poor draft mark might negatively influence their final mark.

#### 4.1.2 Student questionnaire results

Some positive and critical feedback was generated by the questionnaires that were completed by 42 students. These results are discussed below:

Lecturers should provide adequate interventions and resources to assist students with acquiring the skills to meet the required outcomes of the assessment. Students who completed the questionnaires accepted that analysing the topic together with the lecturer in class provided direction on what to do.

Responses to the process writing approach were positive as (ninety-three per cent of a total of 42) students agreed that their results would be better if they could apply the process approach. An interesting result of the questionnaire was the response from sixty-nine per cent of the students who felt that submitting more than one written draft of the essay did not really help them with the newsletter assignment. Students seem to appreciate the value of the process approach, although it did not help those students who received no comments on their drafts.

The lecturer's feedback on the written drafts was received favourably by most students (eighty per cent) but sixteen per cent did not feel that it helped with their final draft. Most of the learners (seventy per cent) wanted marks to be allocated to every stage of the writing process. In addition, eighty-five per cent of the students agreed (thirty-three per cent strongly) that when an assignment is written, they should submit multiple drafts. The process approach did not work as well as it could have but students still believed that drafting could be applied to other assignments.

Most students (seventy-nine per cent) found they had learnt more about the content subjects by submitting more than one draft. With the draft process, the students are forced to consider the comments to enable them to make meaningful changes to the assignment. Comments can therefore be seen as a conversation that the lecturer or tutor has with the student.

Almost all the students (ninety-one per cent) felt that they had learnt about language usage and the structuring of the newsletter assignment. This is important considering that the language profile of the students at the former Peninsula Technikon was mostly second language English speakers. The drafting process afforded them the opportunity to improve their language before a final submission of their work.

#### 4.1.3 Reflective debriefing

Some unplanned but positive learning opportunities resulted from the newsletter assignment. Students mentioned that engaging with the newsletter assignment led to the acquisition of



additional skills. The student teams were also responsible for the collection and recording of the information from their selected community organisations. This taught them time management and to take responsibility for their own learning which is line with the CCFO's.

The responses of the students reflected their individual and collective perspectives of the learning experience. These responses have to be viewed in comparison to the feedback generated by the lecturers and writing tutor.

#### 4.2 Lecturer feedback

The data that were collected from the lecturer and writing tutor yielded the following results:

##### 4.2.1 Reflective debriefing

According to the writing tutor:

*... all the lecturers involved in the integrated assessment were not equally involved in the lab.*

She reported that the necessary computer skills were lacking when they were required. However, the students were very enthusiastic and highly motivated during the tutorial sessions. According to her:

*This healthy atmosphere could be attributed to the visibility of the English lecturer as well as the lecturer's assistant, who both had a good knowledge of the programme, and handled queries as they arose.*

Parkerson (2000:129) notes that 'The relationship between student and senior student writing consultant is less formal and often less intimidating, than that between lecturer and students, and facilitates a positive affective environment'. Therefore a writing tutor and lecturer's assistant are valuable resources which can assist lecturers with their large and complicated assignments.

The writing tutor proposed that more time be allocated for tutorials to ensure the application and reinforcement of skills and theory learned in lectures.

##### 4.2.2 Questionnaire results

HRM lecturers were divided on whether to assign students to a community organisation or to allow students to choose their own organisation. When students choose an inappropriate organisation, much time and energy were lost in an effort to reassign the students. Student teams could, as an alternative, negotiate with the lecturer when choosing their community organisation.

The lecturers organised workshops for students such as writing workshops, library information tutorials, computer workshops and writing consultations as part of the intervention strategies that were designed to help students. Generally speaking, students acknowledged that they found the workshops beneficial and a good learning experience. Some students requested more assistance and more focussed workshops. The lecturers felt that the tutorials should be closely linked to the workload and content of the course and not be focused on isolated or extra tasks. They also agreed that lecturers should team teach so that students could make links between the lecture content and that of the tutorials. They advised that the tutor should be familiar with the field of HRM and the requirements of the course.

The lecturers recommended that students be given valuable feedback in the formative stages of the newsletter so that students can make the suggested improvements to their assignments. If these recommendations could be adhered to, many of the difficulties relating to commenting and feedback on student drafts can be alleviated.

Individual lecturers assessed only his or her section of the assessment instead of the whole assessment. So the marking of the newsletter was not really done in a holistic way. This is particularly significant especially as not all the lecturers formatively assessed the students' drafts. This showed a lack of consistency towards the marking of the newsletter which the students noted.

## **5. Recommendations**

A critical review of an intervention has to be undertaken so that teaching practice and assessment design can be improved. The findings suggest that although the newsletter assignment provides multiple learning opportunities, it has a number of problem areas that require attention. Only when these problem areas are addressed, can the newsletter assignment be regarded as a valid assessment instrument. Despite these limitations, the newsletter assignment can be considered to be an effective means of assessing students as evident by the positive learning experiences reported by the students.

The recommendations have been structured in the following order: the integrated assessment; understanding group dynamics; resources; criteria, outcomes and expectations; the essay drafting process; tutorials and workshops; and links with community organisations.

### *5.1 The integrated assessment*

A staff member who is experienced at integrated assessments could conduct workshops on the problem areas relating to integration. To resolve conflict and tension between lecturers on the integration team, the faculty management should ensure that there is a regular time slot that is allocated for meetings where planning, feedback and reflection, workshops with students on the integrated newsletter assignment and joint assessment of the newsletter assignment can occur. The lecturers should confirm all information on the assessment before it is imparted to students. Lecturers and students should also use technology to maintain contact with one another, for example electronic mail or through the institutional website. The website will enable lecturers to update information regarding the newsletter assignment on a continuous basis.

### *5.2 Understanding group dynamics*

Lecturers should discuss the benefits of conflict and the idea that not all conflict is negative with their students. Students should be guided on issues relating to group work, especially how to overcome possible pitfalls and how to understand the different group roles. These issues could be dealt with in a workshop on group dynamics. Lecturers should plan for reflective sessions where student teams give feedback on their group's progress. Students should write a performance report on their group members. This would encourage a sense of responsibility and accountability.

Students should be given an opportunity to choose their own organisations to work with, under the guidance of the lecturers. These choices should as far as possible be taken from a list

of organisations that has been compiled by the lecturer. The list would facilitate improved control over the project by the lecturers. Students should be cautioned by the lecturers to choose their group members carefully taking into consideration personality, cultural and other differences.

### *5.3 Resources*

Curriculum development is a cyclic, never-ending process in the same way as society is always changing. Certain resources though are needed to facilitate and accommodate these changes. The lecturers should explore how their faculty management and other structures on their campus could support their project. For example, they could consider the option of using institutional transport or investigate other means of funding to transport the students to the community organisations. Lecturers should make sure that the laboratory assistants are skilled enough to give them the required guidance. It should be the responsibility of the lecturers to educate themselves about what resources are available to students before they implement an assessment. It is unfair to students to demand high quality assessments without addressing the inadequacies in the resources.

### *5.4 Criteria, outcomes and expectations*

Lecturers should devise a time-plan of due dates and workshop times for big assessments like the newsletter assignment so that students can apply time management. The students should be made aware of the additional benefits of doing a practical assessment as many of the skills can be used for other assessments and as a marketing tool in their curriculum vitae. Students should be given time to absorb the details of the assignment and lecturers should then discuss the criteria and the outcomes with students. Students should be encouraged to give inputs relating to mark allocation, criteria and expectations. If students do not possess the necessary skills or expertise to complete the newsletter assignment, then they should be provided with training.

Lecturers as well as students should adhere to the criteria as presented in the assessment design. Students will become demoralised about the assessment and will lose trust in their lecturers if they perceive that lecturers are not adhering to the stipulated criteria. Any problems or difficulties with the assessment (like the management styles) should be discussed openly with lecturers in the feedback sessions.

### *5.5 The essay drafting process of the newsletter assignment*

Lecturers should make a decision about how to assess drafts and they should not deviate from what has been decided. Instead of awarding marks for drafts, lecturers could award marks for research diaries, logs or journals of their research activities. This would encourage students to appreciate the value of learning as a process rather than a means to gain marks.

Lecturers should consider teaching each other the individual subject criteria so that the marking of the newsletter assignment is truly integrated. They should approach the commenting of drafts seriously and responsibly. Lecturers should apply time-management by setting due dates which makes allowances for marking time and redrafting.

### *5.6 Tutorials and workshops*

Not all the lecturers were committed to attending and organising the workshops for students. Lecturers did not link the newsletter to the work done in the classroom, and found it difficult to determine who needed extra help with the newsletter. The computer skills needed for the

newsletter were insufficient. Students had a positive attitude towards the workshops, possibly because these were contextualised and not generic. There were mostly positive responses to the workshops and students appeared motivated and enthusiastic. Students however, felt that the skills needed for data collection were not dependent on these workshops.

The lecturers should appear at all workshops and should take an interest in the assessment. If this type of commitment is not possible, then the newsletter should be revised to accommodate this. Lecturers need to be aware of the demands and expectations of their roles and these must be decided upfront. It may be wise to appoint an external chairperson to mediate and chair meetings so that there is some order and accountability on the part of the individual lecturers. The content covered in lectures and tasks should relate to the outcomes of the newsletter assignment. Students should be able to apply their computer skills that they learn in class to the newsletter. If additional computing skills are required, external expertise can be used to train the students.

The workshops and tutorials should remain optional for students. This will ensure that they remain aware that the workshops will not be used as a monitoring device but are organised to assist them with their newsletter. Being given the choice to improve their skills will give students the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning.

### *5.7 Links with community organisations*

An assignment guide, outlining the relationship and expectations of both students and the community organisation, should be developed so that both parties know the rules, goals and policies. By involving the community organisation more in terms of decision-making, suspicion will be minimised. Lecturers should spend more time on preparing students for the visit to the community organisations, especially in the area of improving their interviewing skills. In order for the newsletter to be considered as a valid form of assessment, the suggested improvements would have to be implemented.

## **6. Conclusions**

Curriculum development is an infinite process in the same way that society continuously undergoes transition (Scheepers, 2005). Higher Education institutions have to adapt to these changes by creating an environment that is conducive to curriculum change. This can be achieved through the provision of the required resources.

Integrated assessments, like the newsletter assignment, can bridge the gap between the community organisations and higher education institutions in South African. Students are given a relevant learning experience which enhances their understanding of the theoretical concepts. Community-based assignments present the opportunity for students and academics to become actively involved in their community organisations while still meeting their intended teaching and learning goals.

By collaborating with their peers in terms of teaching and curriculum design, and by 'listening to the critical voices' of their students, lecturers in the higher education context can reflect critically on their teaching practice and can therefore improve their current pedagogical practices.

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