

BULLETIN

July 2014

Welcome, from guest editor Jenny Roberts (University of South Africa)



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1. Som Naidu, D. Lit (*Honoris Causa*)

This month we are pleased to announce that the Open University of Sri Lanka has recently conferred on our President, Som Naidu, the degree of *D. Lit (Honoris Causa)* for his contributions to Distance Education, regionally and internationally. He travelled to Colombo to receive the degree, and gave a convocation address. The following is extracted from the conclusion:

The current model of campus-based and face-to-face educational practice is increasingly becoming unsustainable, and there are many reasons for this. Foremost among these are the pressures that are at the heart of its funding model and the increasing availability of information and communications technologies that are opening up educational opportunities. There are many more routes for accessing educational content today (see Gallagher, & Garrett, 2013).

As a response to this, it seems that after years of existing on the periphery and competing for parity, distance education methods are appealing to mainstream educational provision. Conventional campus-

based educational organizations are adopting practices that were pioneered by distance education, not as a cheaper and poorer option, but as a sustainable and viable response to the pressures and demands facing the higher education sector.

You can read the complete address from the ODLAA website. :

<http://www.odlaa.org/images/pdf/som-naidu-convocation.pdf>

2. Development of new ODLAA strategic plan and website

The committee is continuing with its development of the strategic plan as reported in the previous bulletin. In particular, for the identified aspects of each of the identified focus areas of Membership, Continuing Professional Education, Partnerships, and Branding & Communication, we are outlining the rationales, identifying key short-term and medium-term targets and longer term aspirations, and deliverables.

If you have any suggestions or ideas you want the committee to consider as the draft strategic plan is developed, please send to our Executive Officer Joanne Scott at executive@odlaa.org

3. ODLAA Webinar for July

**Coming up in the ODLAA Webinar series:
Social Inclusion Challenges for Open and Distance Education
Friday 18th July, 1–2pm (Australian EST)**

Participants will be encouraged to join in discussion following speakers' individual presentations.

Speakers

Lisa McDonald is an interdisciplinary researcher in the Digital Futures-Collaborative Research Network at the University of Southern Queensland. She has a background in cultural studies, communication and media studies, and her current research explores digital practices in the daily lives of older (regional) Australians. This presentation will focus on the strengths which older people bring to the making of meaningful communities, and explore the notion of multiliteracies as a basis for inclusive communicative practices. (Further information about Lisa McDonald is available from: <http://au.linkedin.com/in/lisaamcdonald/> .)

Sherrill Whittington is an independent consultant and has over two decades of international gender experience, starting with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth of Learning, and served in various capacities in the United Nations as a specialist in gender equality and development. Sherrill has Masters degrees in Asian History, International Relations and Professional Education and Training, and has published on equality of access and outcomes for women in ODL, particularly how e-learning can be either an enabler or barrier to women's empowerment in developing countries. Sherrill will explore challenges for Social Inclusion in both Australian and international arenas, posing questions for providers of open and distance learning.

Susan Johns is the Research Officer Social Inclusion at the University of Tasmania, engaged in research and evaluation into alternative pathways to university, including enabling programs and vocational education and training (VET) pathways. Her presentation will focus on

technology as a double-edged sword for those engaged in alternative university entry programs – such students are often characterised by low levels of confidence and previous negative experiences of education. While distance and flexible learning may facilitate access to higher education for these groups, the mode of delivery and use of technology may also prove socially exclusive for some. The session will consider how social inclusion for students in enabling programs is mediated by flexible learning approaches, and will encourage participants to reflect on their own and their institution's practices.

Registration

The webinar is offered free of charge and open to non-members, so please distribute this invitation to any colleagues who may be interested. If you wish to attend the webinar, please register by emailing jo.osborne@utas.edu.au by **4pm Wednesday 16th July** (Australian EST) at the latest; include **ODLAA Webinar** in the Subject area. Details will be sent to you before the event about how to access and join in the webinar.

4. Report on African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) Conference held 6-9 June 2014 at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

UNESCO supports Open MOOCs in Africa

UNESCO and the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) organized a high-level 1-day Workshop on the Globalizing OpenupEd Project on Saturday 7 June, 2014 within the 4th Conference of the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) held at the Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe from 6 – 9 June, 2014. The purpose of the Workshop was to introduce the innovative concept of openly-licensed Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) to the gathering of Vice Chancellors and senior open university officials, and to obtain a commitment to forming the Africa OpenupEd Project.

Defined as any type of educational materials in the public domain, or released with an open license allowing free use, adaptation, and distribution, Open Educational Resources (OERs) present Ministries of Education and educational institutions with a strategic opportunity to increase the quality of educational materials and using ICT to increase access to education especially for disadvantaged groups.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are characterized as free-of-cost, openly-accessible, online courses offered mostly by globally prestigious, traditional universities attracting 'massive' numbers of students. Like OERs, MOOCs also offer students, particularly those from developing countries with unprecedented easy access to high-quality, higher education.

The overall goal of the [Globalizing OpenupEd Project](#) is to reach out from the European OpenupEd MOOCs initiative to primarily open universities and their associations in other parts of the world, in order to inspire, explore and support them to establish similar partnerships working in a global network of linked initiatives.

This Africa Workshop is the first activity in Africa, a similar Asia Workshop will be held in October at the annual conference of the Asian Association for Open Universities (AAOU) in Hong Kong.

OpenupEd is the first and currently the only pan-European MOOC Initiative that has a number of distinctive features:

1. Embracing the ‘classical’ openness of the Open Universities world
2. Adopting an open licensing policy (which, however, is not yet in its full implementation)
3. Offering a self-paced instead of scheduled approach for part of its courses
4. Offering the option of formal credit for part of its courses (to be obtained from the providing university, and to be paid for)
5. Reflecting diversity in terms of language and cultural context (the current partnership spectrum is covering 11 countries and 12 languages)
6. Dedicated to high quality based on a long-standing record on open and online education.

Coordinated by the [European Association of Distance Teaching Universities](#) (EADTU) with an obvious starting focus on European Member States, OpenupEd is being led by Professor Fred Mulder, [UNESCO OER Chair](#).

With support from the European Commission, UNESCO is Globalizing OpenupEd in Africa working with the [Africa Council for Distance Education](#) (ACDE), and in Asia working with the [Asian Association for Open Universities](#) (AAOU).

The UNESCO Africa OpenupEd Workshop was co-chaired by Prof Mulder and Professor Tolly Mbwette, President of the ACDE and Vice-Chancellor of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT).

Over 30 very high-level delegates including 8 Vice Chancellors and Deputies, 2 of the ACDE Conference Keynote Speakers, and 25 senior officials representing over 20 institutions attended the Workshop. Background information on the OpenupEd Initiative was provided by:

- Fred Mulder, UNESCO OER Chair - [Globalizing OpenupEd](#)
- Abel Caine, UNESCO - [UNESCO Global OER Programme](#)
- Presentations on the current state of OER and MOOCs in Africa were made by:
- Dr. (Mr) Kassimu Nihuka, Open University of Tanzania – [The Status of the new OER Course on “Academic Digital Fluency” at OUT](#)
- Prof. (Mr) Temba C. Bassoppo Moyo, Zimbabwe Open University – [MOOCs and OpenEd at the ZOU](#)
- Prof. (Mr) Mohamed Abo Mohamed Emam, Open University of Sudan – [OER at the Open University of Sudan](#)
- Dr Jane-Frances Agbu, National Open University of Nigeria – [Course Portal at the National Open University of Nigeria](#)
- Prof. (Ms) Mpine Elisabeth Makoe, University of South Africa – [Africa’s Journey to Open Education](#)

Mr Abel Caine, UNESCO Programme Specialist for OERs was very pleased with the Workshop, “Demonstrating the immeasurable wealth of intellectual and professional expertise in the room, the delegates raised a large number of relevant questions and comments on the relevance and adaptation of OERs, MOOCs, and the OpenupEd OER-MOOC Initiative. We now have a refined Project Plan that is directly aligned to existing education priorities and education goals.”

The Workshop was live-streamed on [Zimbabwe Technomag](#) website, and concluded with a positive response for UNESCO and the ACDE Secretariat to present a first draft Work Plan at the ACDE Technical Coordination Committee on 13 July in Nairobi, Kenya, in order to provide input for the ACDE Executive Board Meeting the following day.

The medium term goal is to launch the Africa OpenupEd Initiative with at least 3 African universities offering fully open-licensed MOOCs by the seminal [World Education Forum](#) in Incheon, South Korea in May 2015.

5. Special themed edition of Distance Education Journal 2015

Distance Education

[<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/CDIE>]

Call for papers for special themed issue (Volume 36/2, May 2015)

Distance Education and Time:

Instructional and organizational implications for managing time, workload, and costs

Call for papers

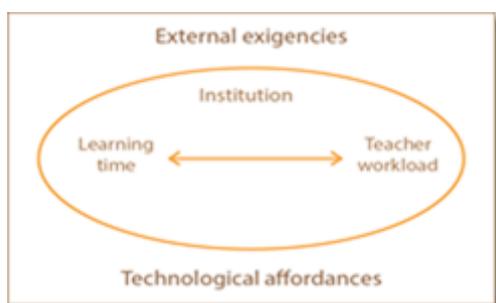
Drs. Elena Barberà, Thomas Hülsmann, and Jennifer Roberts (Guest Editors) invite contributions to the special themed issue of "*Distance Education*", Volume 36/2, which will be published in May 2015.

Focus of special theme

While time, as in learning time and teacher workload, seems critical in most forms of distance education (including higher education, open schooling or non-formal education), it has rarely been examined in a comprehensive manner. The journal *Distance Education* seeks to address this gap by inviting contributions to a special issue on the theme "*Distance Education and Time: Instructional and organizational implications for managing time, workload, and costs*".

Scope and types of papers sought

The figure below summarises the issues and questions that will be addressed by this themed issue.



Learner time

- Many distance learners are part-time learners who choose this mode of study because of the flexibility it affords. The time budget of such learners (divided between leisure, family, work, and study) is limited. Are the time-allocations specified for the courses offered manageable? What are the competencies in time management that students need for effective and efficient learning?

- What do we know about the effectiveness of learning tasks such as *attending, investigating, discussing, practising, articulating*, as well as the time implications of employing media/technologies in these tasks? What do we know about the effectiveness of *student-teacher interaction, student-student interaction and student-content interaction*? What time should be given for student-teacher interaction? Does student-teacher interaction add to a learner's workload? Should student participation be made mandatory? What are the time implications of these approaches?

Teacher workload

- In distance education the teaching function is disaggregated into different roles (researcher, course designer, tutor, teaching assistant, coach, technical assistant, etc.). How are the different roles remunerated? How does remuneration affect the cost structure of teaching?
- To what extent is time allocation contractually specified (e.g. time for research, teaching, administration)? Are such specifications realistic? How do teachers distribute their instructional time? How much time does course development take? Can it be significantly reduced by using OERs (and RLOs)? To what extent is teacher time absorbed by assessment? To what extent can assessment be automated? Are there forms of assessment which could reduce teacher workload?
- Does institutional dependence on scale economies curtail student teacher interaction even where it is perceived as a quality indicator? How does class size impact on teacher time and work load?

Institutional arrangements/organizational implications

- Do current teaching workload models adequately and equitably recognize the time needed for quality teaching? How is teaching compared to research valued? How is this reflected in remuneration and institutional performance indicators?
- What systems and instruments can be used to monitor and solve teachers' and/or learners' workload problems? One of the major instruments of monitoring workloads is the worksheet which is also used for activity based costing (ABC). How can such instruments help in solving workload problems, and to what extent do they compound workload problems through increased administrative work? Are there institutional structures for staff development on how to use technologies efficiently in order to implement institutional goals?

Technological affordances

- Digital technologies can increase or reduce workload. They can also be used to support interaction, both between student and teacher and among students. Student teacher interaction, in particular, contributes to the variable cost per student and hence could possibly erode the much needed scale economies. To what extent are digital technologies used as a productivity tool (i.e. reducing teacher workload per student), or as a quality tool (i.e. for increased student teacher interaction where this form of interaction is perceived as enhancing teaching quality)?
- How does computer marked assignments, quizzes, e-portfolios or peer assessment impact on teacher workload? More efficient assessment methods, at least for formative assessment, may free teacher time for other tasks. For example, blending automatically graded quizzes with learning analytics may allow more targeted interventions which would not erode scale economies.
- Internal reallocation of time may lead to falling standards (grade creep). How is quality monitored and maintained within an institution?

Guest Editors

Elena Barbera, PhD (ebarbera@uoc.edu), is Research and PhD Program Director at the eLearn Center at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain where she leads e-DUS group (e-Distance Education in Universities and Schools) which has since 1996 launched more than twenty national and international funded projects and produced about a hundred publications. Her research is focused on e-assessment, learning strategies, teaching and learning processes in online contexts, and time factors in e-learning.

Thomas Hülsmann, PhD (huelstm@unisa.ac.za) is a Visiting Researcher at the University of South Africa. Thomas received a MSc Mathematics from the University of Bielefeld, a MA (Education and International Development) from the IoE London and a PhD from Oldenburg University. After working in several African countries, Thomas worked in Cambridge, UK as a Research Officer for the International Research Foundation for Open Learning. He has been Director (on the Oldenburg side) of the *Master of Distance Education and eLearning* program (a program jointly offered by the University of Maryland University College and the Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg).

Jennifer Roberts, PhD (buckjj@unisa.ac.za) is a senior researcher at the Institute for Open and Distance Learning at the University of South Africa. She has undergraduate qualifications in Statistics and Sociology, a Masters degree in Tourism Development and Management, and a D. Lit. et Phil. Dr Roberts is the first South African to be elected to the executive committee of the *Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia (ODLAA)*.

How and when to submit the initial call for proposals and in what form?

15 August 2014	1-page submissions (for articles, reflections and reports) due to Dr. Jenny Roberts < buckjj@unisa.ac.za >.
30 August 2014	Review of all proposals and authors notified of accepted proposals.

*Your one page expression of interest should indicate the working title of your paper, an explanation of how the work relates to the proposed theme, the type of paper including an outline of its methodology, and the names and affiliation of the authors. The expression of interest to contribute to this themed issue should be sent to **Dr. Jenny Roberts** buckjj@unisa.ac.za on or before 15 August 2014.*

6. ODL activities at the University of South Africa (Unisa)

The Institute for Open and Distance Learning (IODL) is an academic unit of Unisa, charged with the responsibility to undertake pragmatic and reflexive research. This is in response to the growing demand not only for higher degree qualifications and professional studies in Open and Distance Learning niche areas, but also in strengthening ODL practice at Unisa.

The Institute for Open and Distance Learning is housed in the College of Graduate Studies and is part of the portfolio of the Vice Principal: Research and Innovation. It is a research intensive institution committed to provide leadership in innovation and excellence in ODL research. Listed below are a few of the current initiatives that are taking place in the IODL.

The IODL at Unisa recently welcomed the following new academic staff to the Institute:

Dr Thomas Hülsmann who has joined the IODL as a research professor,
Professor Tom Brown formerly of the Midrand Graduate Institute in Johannesburg and
Professor Ramu Naidoo from the University of Venda.

I. Searchlight Research Project

The Searchlight Research Project (SRP) was initiated by the Institute for Open and Distance Learning (IODL) to operate under the wider umbrella of the ODL Research Task Team of SENREC. This initiative came about in response to the low ODL research outputs from academic staff at UNISA. In spite of research forming one of the core job responsibilities of academics at UNISA, academics report that their time for research is diminishing as administrative and teaching workloads escalate. This has been compounded by the proliferation of policy and planning initiatives in higher education that have placed additional demands on staff time. The SRP aims to serve as a two pronged support network in research writing, namely:

- Support from colleagues and friends on an emotional level,
- Practical and technical advice from well established academic colleagues, with impressive publication track records.

In addition to supporting a culture of scholarship and enhancing research activities at UNISA, the outcomes of the SRP include the following:

1. Improved teaching at UNISA as an ODL institution through reflexive research projects by its academics
2. Research capacity building as more and more academics and others engage in reflexive research
3. An increase in ODL research output
4. Academics engaging in multi disciplinary research resulting in teamwork and cross fertilisation of research capacity
5. The establishment of communities of practice in different colleges and units
6. Academics using communities of practice as a platform to validate and discuss research projects and publications in a safe and conducive environment
7. The breaking down of the myth and fear of research through the belonging to, and participating in research based communities of practice
8. The establishment of an ODL research database for UNISA

The SRP is research focussed and targeted at all UNISA academics interested in ODL research including postgraduate students and professional administrators' research group members from all UNISA constituencies.

II. The Research Café



Research Café

This is a new initiative aimed at bringing together all staff who are interested in research within the framework of the 'Changing Role of Staff in ODL'. The objective is to allow researchers to discuss, debate and conceptualise their projects in an unthreatening and supportive environment. The first café was held in June and presentations of completed and ongoing projects were given. These included a paper presented by Prof Adèle Bezuidenhout and Dr Jenny Roberts on their research findings from a literature review on the roles and competencies of Distance Educators, a discussion by Dr Thomas Hülsmann on the academic workload project at Unisa and Professor Ignatius Gous on the MindWise ODL project which concentrates on the inclusion of metacognitive teaching and learning strategies in ODL and the implications it has on the role of the lecturer.

III. Unisa representation at the Eden conference

The Eden Conference which was held in Zagreb, Croatia in 11-13 June 2014, was opened by Ivo Josipovic, the president of Croatia.



Two Unisa academics presented papers at the conference. Prof Paul Prinsloo (with co-presenter Sharon Slade, *Open University, United Kingdom*) presented a paper titled ***Educational Triage in Higher Online Education: Walking a Moral Tightrope.***

Professor Ignatius Gous gave a poster presentation on Positive Constructive Daydreaming, a metacognitive teaching and learning strategy in an ODL context. It was titled: **Dream of and for success – Positive Constructive Daydreaming as an integral part of the Mindwise Edu-engagement teaching and learning program at the University of South Africa.**

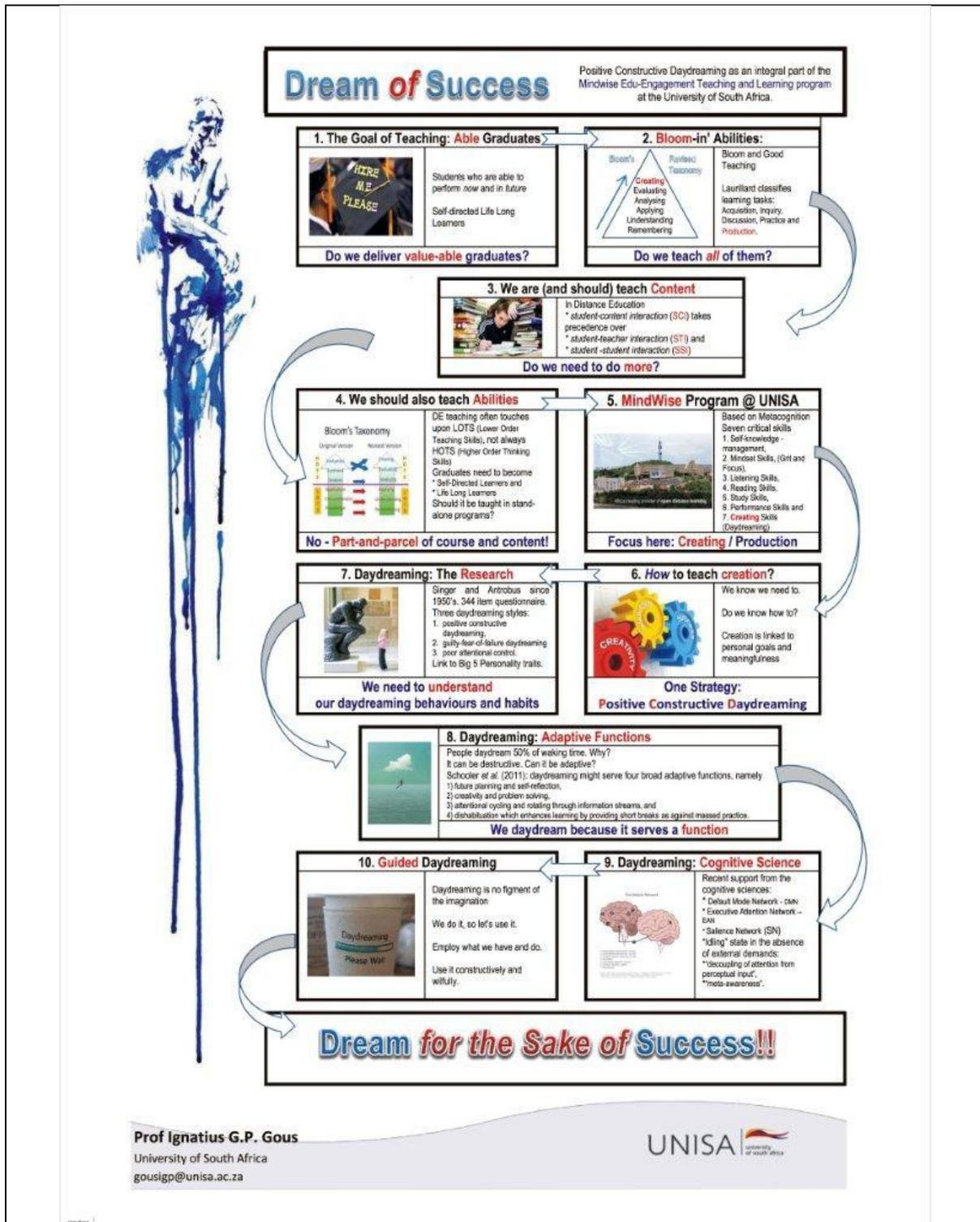
Daydreaming (also called Mind Wandering) is usually seen in a negative light as failure of cognitive control which impedes performance. Research has shown, however, that people spend as much as 47% of their waking hours in daydreaming. If it is so costly, why do people continue to do it? Why would humans develop this ability if it has no positive adaptive benefits?

Singer and Antrobus have been researching daydreaming since the 1950's. On the basis of results from a 344 item questionnaire, they identified three broad daydreaming styles: 1) positive

constructive daydreaming, 2) guilty-fear-of-failure daydreaming and 3) poor attentional control. They also succeeded to link these daydreaming styles to the Big Five Personality traits.

While it is true that daydreaming might be distracting and dysfunctional, research by Schooler *et al.* (2011) indicated that daydreaming might serve four broad adaptive functions, namely 1) future planning and self-reflection, 2) creativity and problem solving, 3) attentional cycling and rotating through information streams, and 4) dishabituation which enhances learning by providing short breaks over against massed practice.

This poster is presented below and elicited many discussions and debates by delegates from all over the world.



IV. Unisa participation in the Australian Council on Open, Distance and E-Learning (ACODE) project

Dr Lydia Mbatia and Prof Mpine Makoe from the IODL have been engaged in a research project organised by the Australian Council on Open, Distance and E-Learning (ACODE). The purpose of the ACODE Benchmarks is to support continuous quality improvement in the area of e-learning at an institutional level. The ACODE benchmarking framework is intended to provide a workable structure for institutions to improve the quality of their service and support in learning and teaching when using e-learning technologies. Unisa was one of the 26 ODL institutions engaged in a benchmarking research project on technology-enhanced learning. The findings were disseminated at the ACODE summit which was held in Sydney on 1-3 June 2014, and the Unisa delegates presented their part via Skype which meant they had to be up at 2am for their presentations. According to Mbatia and Makoe, the exercise proved very useful in self-assessing Unisa in relation to other institutions with regard to Technology Enhanced Learning processes, systems and practices.

