

**EXPLORING THE FOUNDATION
PHASE EDUCATORS'
UNDERSTANDINGS OF
ASSESSMENT**

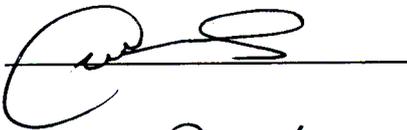
**By
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Submitted to the Faculty of Education
University of Kwazulu Natal.
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Education

Supervisor: **Dr. M. Combrinck**

December 2007

As the candidate's supervisor I have/~~have not~~ approved this dissertation for submission.

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is to explore assessment in the Foundation Phase by examining the relationship between the formal policy (NCS) and the actual practice of assessment in a school in Durban. The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of assessment techniques used by educators at the school and to explore its relationship with policy intentions. I decided to take a qualitative approach. The case study intends to provide an in-depth insight into the micro level of implementation and practice of the assessment policy.

Assessment in the Foundation Phase requires clearly defined criteria and a variety of appropriate strategies that enable teachers to provide constructive feedback to learners. Furthermore, it allows educators to report to parents and stakeholders. However, there has been little guidance as to how assessment is to be implemented. Yutar (2004) from the Daily News reported that our pupils cannot read. Another article that appeared in the Daily News by an unknown reporter (2004), revealed a lack of literacy ability of grade one learners. International press reports by Rafferty (1996), from the Times Educational Supplement reported that English pupils were “years behind”. This was supported by Carvel (1996), from The Guardian who also reported that “most pupils were failing testing at the age of eleven”. From these articles it is evident that there was a crisis in the education system both locally and internationally.

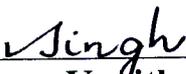
In South Africa the revision of the NCS had undergone modifications and the kinds of performance expected of learners were set out for assessment purposes. Educators are now required to make periodic judgements about learners’ levels of attainment against assessment standards as set out in the NCS document. The experienced participants in this study already know a lot about assessment and my study explores their assessment practice. Participants were observed when conducting assessment. Their assessment documents were analysed and semi-structured interviews were conducted. This study revealed that the participants became empowered about assessment only after the Government Gazette February 2007 (Department of Education, 2007) was made available to them. There was evidence that the participants conducted group assessment, peer assessment, individual assessment and written assessments. Continuous assessment was also taken into account when reports

on learners were compiled. The multi-cultured society of the school was also taken into consideration, by the participants, when planning assessments.

The study also revealed that assessment is not an isolated activity and that assessment is a central feature of the teaching and learning process. It is also part of our continual evaluation of the effectiveness of the school and that in turn is part of the accountability process.

DECLARATION

I, Vanitha Singh, declare that the research involved in this dissertation, entitled:
“Exploring the Foundation Phase Educators’ Understandings of Assessment”,
represents my own original work and does not contain material previously submitted
for the purpose of any degree or diploma.



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ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

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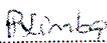
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I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project:

"Exploring foundation phase educators' understandings of assessment"

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years

Yours faithfully


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cc. Faculty Research Office (Derek Buchler)
cc. Supervisor (Dr. M Combrinck)

2007-08-14

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5. The University of Kwazulu Natal for awarding me with partial financial assistance.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABET- Adult Basic Education and Training

C2005- Curriculum 2005

CASS- Continuous assessment

LoLT- Language of Learning and teaching

NCS- National Curriculum Statement

O.B.E. – Outcomes Based Education

RNCS- Revised National Curriculum Statement

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. BACKGROUND: ASSESSMENT IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE

The education system in South Africa has experienced a total transformation. The introduction of outcomes based education (OBE) in South Africa has brought about many changes in assessment for the Foundation Phase educator. First it was Curriculum 2005 and after the findings of the Report of the Review Committee on C2005 were revealed the Revised National Curriculum Statement became policy. The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) is presently the formal curriculum in South African schools. As such, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) provides a framework for assessment in the Foundation Phase, based on the principles of outcomes based education. The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) also provides a structure by which management of schools' assessment records are regulated.

The learning outcomes and assessment standards are prescribed by the Department of Education at National level. These learning outcomes describe what learners should be able to do and the level at which learners should be able to demonstrate their achievements of the learning outcomes are described as assessment standards. Assessment standards further aim to describe the depth and range of learners' achievement. During each teaching situation, a Foundation Phase educator is expected to assess learners and allocate assessment codes to the learner.

2. ASSESSMENT POLICIES IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE

Foundation Phase assessment policies and documents provide broad guidelines and the general approach to Foundation Phase assessment but the implementation of the assessment tasks takes place in the classroom by the Foundation Phase educator. Prior to 2007, not many Foundation Phase educators were given guidelines to enhance the effective implementation of an assessment system that was congruent with OBE in general and the assessment policy. I was one of those Foundation Phase educators who were provided with little assistance in developing, organising, structuring and implementing an assessment programme in the Foundation Phase. The guidelines that were drawn by the Department of Education (Government Gazette 19640 of 1998)

had not reached many educators, including myself, in the classroom because policy documents were not easily available in schools. Many of the Foundation Phase educators were unsure about choosing appropriate assessment strategies and activities and uncertain about the recording of assessment.

According to the Report of the Review Committee on Curriculum 2005, as cited in Chisholm (2000), the Assessment Policy for General Education and Training Band Grade R to 9 and ABET (1998), assimilated an educational practice that emphasised assessment and administration. The Report of the Review Committee, as cited in Chisholm (2000), also noted that “too much time is being spent on assessment, leaving minimal time for classroom work and that there is insufficient attention to assessment in training”. The Educators Workload Report by Chisholm, Hoadley, Kivulu, Brookes and Prinsloo (Chisholm et al., 2005), also indicated that the planning, preparation, recording and reporting requirements of assessment in OBE constitute a major burden on educators and needs serious attention.

The Assessment Policy for General Education and Training Band Grade R to 9 and ABET (1998a) states that:

“It is expected that learners will progress with their age cohort”.

Foundation Phase educators were then faced with a difficult decision because this can be misinterpreted. It can be understood that if a learner needs more time to achieve particular outcomes, he or she needs not be retained in a grade for a whole year even though insufficient progress was achieved by the learner and he or she would not be able to cope in the next grade. This shift in policy is the divergence away from learners passing or failing at the end of a grade according to grade specific requirements. This necessitates a change in the end-of-year procedure for progression and could mean that a learner could be placed in the next grade even though he or she has not met the progression requirements. The Foundation Phase educator’s professional judgement is then disregarded.

Numerous evaluations and studies were conducted and the new policy guidelines on assessment, which was the National Protocol on Assessment for Schools in the

General and Further Education and Training Band Grade R to 12 (Department of Education, 2005) had been developed by the Department of Education. The document had been circulated to schools in October 2005. This resulted in an amendment of the recording and reporting process. It also prescribed that from the beginning of a learners' schooling (Grade R) to the end of the General Education and Training Phase (Grade 9) continuous assessment must be an integral part of the teaching and learning process administered within the guidelines of the Provincial Education Department. Additionally these guidelines must comply with National Education guideline policy.

3. THE CHANGING ASSESSMENT SCENE IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE

This change in the assessment scene presented a great challenge to many of the Foundation Phase educators because they were unfamiliar with the learning outcomes and assessment standards. Furthermore, for the first time, they were confronted with the concept of continuous assessment and a wide range of alternate assessment strategies that could be utilised in the Foundation Phase classroom. According to Jansen (1999), ideas of continuous assessment, borrowed largely from the United Kingdom, entered policy as early as 1995. However many Foundation Phase educators were unfamiliar with the term continuous assessment.

Broadfoot (1996) maintains that Governments around the world have begun to show an interest in the ways in which assessment can influence and even control teaching, as well as subsequent changes in curriculum and teaching. According to Fullan (1997) comparative research has shown that changes in educators' lives have resulted from the imposition of new measures and more accountability measures in assessment.

Associated with these changing assessment priorities are the developments in conducting assessment. These include attempts to improve classroom assessment practices, to strengthen links between assessment and learning, to provide for more continuous recording of learners' progress and achievements and the increase of responsibility for assessment to educators and schools, hence requiring more explicit training in assessment for educators. Many Foundation Phase educators did not receive any training to equip them for this transition in assessment practice. Therefore, records vary considerably from school to school in their assessment priorities, format

and the implementation of the assessment policy. However Mc Lauglin (1998) maintains that the “implementation problem” was discovered as early as the 1970’s by policy analysts. Foundation Phase educators found themselves interpreting and implementing the assessment policy as they understood it to be appropriate.

There are many learning outcomes in the Foundation Phase that are not best assessed by paper-and-pencil tests. There are also written tasks such as mathematical calculations, spelling, interpreting specific texts, worksheets and reading that have to be assessed.

Many Foundation Phase educators found themselves on the receiving end of relentless pressure to implement the Foundation Phase assessment policy. There were far-reaching changes in the way Foundation Phase educators assess the learners’ progress. The Foundation Phase educators have been encouraged to broaden their understandings of assessment so that learners’ progress can be determined via a variety of assessment tasks although there is an uncertainty about the terminology of assessment. There was a need to explain assessment related tasks to parents and management. The Foundation Phase educators had to be aware of what they were looking for or remarking upon when learners were being assessed. The assessment in the Foundation Phase must address learners’ in terms of their Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills development. Therefore the focus and purpose of my research study is to explore the Foundation Phase educators’ understandings of assessment in a particular school.

4. FOCUS AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The focus of this study is to explore the Foundation Phase educators’ understandings of assessment by examining the relationship between the formal policy (NCS) and the actual practice of assessment in a primary school in Durban. The purpose of the study is to examine the nature of assessment techniques used by educators at the school and explore its relationship with policy intentions. Further, it aims to determine whether Foundation Phase educators in multilingual classrooms are able or willing to adapt assessment practices to meet the changing demands of South African school education as prescribed by the NCS.

5. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Assessment in the Foundation Phase requires clearly defined criteria and a variety of appropriate strategies that enable educators to provide constructive feedback to learners. Furthermore, it allows Foundation Phase educators to report to parents, the management of the school and stakeholders. However, there has been little guidance as to how assessment is to be implemented. Consequently many Foundation Phase educators, including myself, have independently interpreted and implemented the assessment policy as deemed most appropriate according to personal experience. The manner in which I have implemented assessment tasks may not reflect policy intention. Against this background I decided to explore assessment in the Foundation Phase and the possible relationship between what the assessment policies intend and what Foundation Phase educators, including myself, at my school are implementing (practice). This study therefore aims to highlight the implementation of assessment as prescribed by the NCS, within the context of the classroom, by exploring the Foundation Phase educators' understandings of assessment.

6. METHODOLOGY

For my research study, I decided upon a qualitative research study. Within the qualitative research paradigm I will be able to find out not only what happens in the Foundation Phase in terms of assessment, but also how assessment is implemented and recorded. The research methodology in this research study is that of a case study as it will provide insight into the micro level of implementation and practice of the Foundation Phase assessment policy. It will also provide an insight into how and why Foundation Educators (implementers) respond to the Foundation Phase assessment policy in the manner in which they do.

My research study is a basic interpretive study which emphasises the interpretation of the Foundation Phase assessment policy. The method for data generation in my research study will be made primarily through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews and assessment document analysis. More specifically this research study intends to focus on the understandings of the individual Foundation Phase educator's

(the participant's) experience and perception of the Foundation Phase assessment policy used in the working environment. The participants in this research study were five Foundation Phase educators who taught for more than fifteen years. Since this is a small scale study, these seasoned Foundation Phase educators would certainly provide sufficient data and shed optimal light on assessment in the Foundation Phase. The methodology of this study will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

7. KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To explore the Foundation Phase educators' understandings of assessment, my research study focussed on three key research questions, namely:

- What are the Foundation Phase educators' perceptions of the assessment policy? (POLICY)
- What is the impact of the Foundation Phase assessment on the teaching process and the learning process?
- How do the Foundation Phase educators cope with the management of the Foundation Phase assessment process? (PRACTICE)

This chapter has focussed briefly on the background of assessment in the Foundation Phase, the policy of the Foundation Phase and the changing assessment scene in the Foundation Phase. It also highlighted the focus and purpose of the study, the rationale for the study, the methodology for the research study and three key research questions.

8. PREVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS TO FOLLOW

In chapter two, I outlined the literature review for the study, whilst in chapter three the methodological approach and conceptual framework is outlined. In chapter four analysis of the data gathered is discussed. Chapter five has a summary of the findings of the research study and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

Assessment is a highly contentious issue and it is a central feature of social and academic life. Writers, educators, parents and learners have questioned whether an assessment is an accurate measure of academic performance. The link between assessment and curriculum is not as straightforward nor is it simply established. There are many tensions inherent in educational assessment and current reforms have made this increasingly clear. One of the main areas in which education reforms have concentrated, has been education assessment. There are efforts in many countries to make assessment more authentic and to develop indicators of authentic learning.

The new emphasis on assessment as a tool to promote quality across a whole educational system creates additional demands. It is important for Foundation Phase educators to have a good understanding of assessment, the historical development of assessment internationally and an overview of assessment and change in assessment. It is also very important for Foundation Phase educators to have an understanding of assessment and measurement of academic performance, to have some knowledge of the implementation of an assessment policy and about the development of the assessment policy in South Africa.

It is also vital for the Foundation Phase educators to be aware of the assessment strategies in the Foundation Phase, frames of references and to be familiar with the assessment tasks of outcomes based assessment with regards to the Foundation Phase. Recording and reporting of learner performance is also a very important aspect of assessment in the Foundation Phase because this demands significant time and effort on the part of the educator. Understanding the different concepts of assessment is also necessary for the Foundation Phase educator. These aspects will be considered in my study with the focus being exploring the Foundation Phase educators' understandings of assessment. The possible relationship between what the assessment policies intend and what educators, at a school, are implementing and whether Foundation Phase educators in multilingual classrooms are able or willing to adapt

assessment practices to the changing demands of South African school education, will also be discussed.

2. ASSESSMENT IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE

Assessment is one of the most important aspects of Outcomes Based Education (OBE). In the Foundation Phase, assessment must be a positive experience for both learners and educators alike. As such, assessment is a fundamental component of successful teaching and learning. Assessment must not be viewed as an isolated activity. Therefore it is important to establish what assessment is, in the Foundation Phase.

The definition of assessment has been the subject of many research projects and debates. I have also noticed that many people who are not Foundation Phase educators, (example parents etc.) not only lack a full understanding of how assessment is done in the Foundation Phase, but also have only a limited grasp of what assessment is in general. It is also relevant to look at the definition of assessment in the context of the multilingual, multicultural South African Foundation Phase classroom. A definition from the Assessment Policy in the General Education and Training Band Grade R to 9 and ABET (Department of Education, 1998a) states:

“Assessment is the process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about a learner’s achievement, as measured against nationally agreed outcomes for a particular phase of learning...”

The Draft Assessment Policy in the General Education and Training Phase Grade R to 9 and ABET (Department of Education, 1998b) recommends that during the Foundation Phase the emphasis of assessment should be placed on formative and continuous assessment of the learner’s work over a period of time. This policy also states that assessment in the Foundation Phase, should take place in an authentic context in a caring, non-judgmental environment. It should serve as a positive affirmation of the learner, acknowledging whatever competencies and outcomes the learner has attained to date, taking into account his or her previous performance levels. The policy further recommends that assessment in the Foundation Phase, should assist

with early identification of learners requiring additional support and under no circumstances should any form of assessment be detrimental to the development of the learner, for example no learner should fail, but should progress to the next level with their age group. The Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2007) reminds educators that assessment should be free from biasness with regards to gender, race, cultural background and ability. Furthermore, the Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2007) states that assessment of learner performance in the Foundation Phase should mainly focus on the Learning Outcomes and the Assessment Standards defined in the Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills learning areas. The Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2007) reminds educators that the learner's level of competence in Natural Science, Technology, Social Science, Economic & Management Science and Arts & Culture should be assessed in an integrated manner within the three Learning Programmes offered in the Foundation Phase.

In my opinion the views of the following writers are pertinent to assessment in the Foundation Phase. According to Malan (1997) assessment is universally conceptualised as a process by means of which the quality of a learner's achievements can be judged, recorded and reported. Judgements in the Foundation Phase can be made through continuous observation or through summative evaluation. Some Foundation Phase educators assess continuously, while others assess only when it is absolutely necessary. What is important is the manner in which assessment is conducted and at what point assessment takes place. If learners experience problems, assessment should help guide towards reconsideration and adaptation of the work being done and of teaching procedures which are being followed. This could assist Foundation Phase educators to rethink teaching methodologies. It is clear therefore, that assessment should form an integral part of the teaching and learning process in the Foundation Phase class. As such it should be planned, implemented, recorded and reported in a systematic, transparent and comprehensive way. Gober (2002) explains that assessment can mean different things to different people and prefers to define assessment as "taking stock of a situation". She believes that educators are required to evaluate the learners they teach and evaluate their academic growth and development.

Rowntree (1987) maintains that assessment is concerned with understanding and interpreting the learners' knowledge and skills via basic human interactions. In the Foundation Phase educators need to know each learner's weakness and strengths. Seiborger and Macintosh (1998) suggests that assessment itself is second to what occurs before and after it, and that the preparation which is done for assessment and the feedback that follows assessment is very important. They suggest that the work which is done beforehand in class must provide the useful skills to ensure learners acquire independence. It is this that makes assessment more meaningful. Likewise, they point out, that feedback from assessment provides profitable new teaching and learning opportunities, which aim to improve not only the capability of the learner, but of the educator as well, so he or she may be equipped to provide the customary assistance to their learners on an individual basis.

Assessment in the Foundation Phase, I believe, is part of the process of learning. Hence, assessment in the Foundation Phase needs to be functional, valid and reliable. It needs to challenge and stimulate learners to try harder, to aim higher and consequently to achieve better results. It is also apparent, according to my experience, that learners are better motivated to learn when they feel that they are part of the academic assessment process. The Foundation Phase educators are required to tell the learners what they are expected to do and how they will be assessed. Only by assessing learner's performance can a Foundation Phase educator establish whether, and to what extent, the learners have learnt. Foundation Phase educators have always assessed their learner's work, because it is the educators' assessment which assists in the planning of future lessons. This judgement on the assessment informs and directs educators towards an appropriate and effective means of presenting their subsequent lessons.

It is an advantage to the Foundation Phase educators to focus their energies on understanding and appreciating assessment. Their implications of assessment should be made to use creatively and to be flexible and those assessment methods that are known to work in the best interest of the learners should be widely used. Foundation Phase educators can then develop and refine assessment so that it is accepted and appreciated by outsiders, especially parents.

3. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ASSESSMENT: INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Assessment has always been a part of education. Hogan (2007) points out that oral quizzes existed in the schools of ancient Greece and Rome. He further mentions that in medieval education oral tests of competence occurred and in the 1940's testing was well established. During this period, Hogan (2007) goes on to explain, that various types of tests were used on a routine basis in the schools that are similar to those conventionally used tests familiar to us today. Studies conducted by Little and Wolf (1996), reveal that over the years international studies of assessment, have demonstrated shortcomings the difficulties present, in order to establish universal propositions about assessment and learning. The studies also point out the importance of understanding assessment in relation to economic and cultural developments.

Over the last decade, assessment has been transformational across the world. According to Hargreaves (1989), in assessment, there were trends towards strengthening of standardized testing. In addition, public examinations have been learner-centred in nature. Bernstein (1971) maintains that in primary schools, the educator did not experience diminished control of learners during a learner centred education programme but in fact it became more comprehensive. Bernstein (1971) explains, that the child's individual development became transparent and subject to assessment. He goes on to point out that in addition to performance, emotional behaviour and personal relationships were now also subjected to assessment. If assessment now permeated into the child's personal and emotional being, it also had the potential to have an impact on his or her actions too. However, this also meant that the privacy of the child had been eroded and wherever children went, they were open to assessment.

Hargreaves (1989) stresses that assessment, rather than curriculum or pedagogy was the prime focal point for educational change and the 1980's was the era of assessment-led education reform. Hargreaves (1989) also explains that in British schools, nothing else captivates learners and educators more than educational assessment, especially in the form of examinations. Learners' work needed to obtain a good assessment and educators' measure their own colleagues' competence by them. Much of the

curriculum is geared towards assessment. Broadfoot (1996) reports that assessment gives rise to competence, organises curriculum content, stimulates and regulates competition and maintains overall control over educational development and change. Broadfoot (1996) further explains that assessment practices and discourses are embedded in and emanate from cultural, social and political traditions and assumptions. She also maintains that these aspects affect policies in complex and often contradictory ways.

The rise of interest in assessment for learning in the United Kingdom, according to Gardner (2006), has produced a proportionate increase in theoretical practice in relation to educators' assessment of their learners. The United Kingdom's policy makers have only recently taken an interest in the aspect of the assessment that learners attained. One of the problems that had accompanied educational expansion in Scotland as revealed in Gray's (1983) study was that the examination system had been extended to encompass a wider section of the ability range. But, he goes on to explain, that this has only served to expose many learners to moderate or low ability forms of assessment of great difficulty and to exam-directed courses. This, in turn, has affected pupil motivation, particularly among the less able. Assessment however should be geared to motivate learners and guide them towards improvement.

4. AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT AND CHANGE IN ASSESSMENT

Assessment helps educators to support the learners and the learners to improve and progress. Presently in the Foundation Phase classroom, educators need to assess what progress learners are making towards the learning outcomes and assessment standards. According to Gipps, Brown, McCallum, and McAlister (1995) assessment theorists are using a "mind constructor" view of learning to suggest a move away from a notion of assessment as judging and categorising learners to a notion of assessment as feedback to support learning. Gipps et al. (1995) rightly concludes that many current educators have been successful students themselves in an earlier time where "mind as container" was the dominant view. A few of them are struggling to recast their own views to include the "mind as constructor" in their beliefs and practice. Therefore many educators see assessment as a difficult dimension in their practice to understand the change and implementation process. In order to explore the Foundation Phase

educators' understanding of assessment I align myself to the work of Fullan and Hargreaves.

Fullan (1997) states that real change requires individuals to alter their ways of thinking and their actions too will then be changed. If there is a change in an education system one has to start with the educators because they play an important role in the implementation of change. New assessment approaches need to be accompanied by educators engaging in assessment practice change and the change of attitudes and behaviour. According to Fullan (1997) all real change involves "passing through zones of uncertainty". He then explains that real change involves personal experience and a willingness to participate in the new initiative and identifies three critical aspects of change.

The first aspect, Fullan (1997) identifies, is that change has to be conceived as "multidimensional". Different "dimensions" of change must be catered for. In the case of the Foundation Phase educators, the assessment policy needs to be defined and discussed, workshops need to be conducted, different activities need to be learnt, changes of attitude must be accommodated and support in the form of human and physical resources must be offered. Ignorance of all the possible dimensions can help to explain why some aspects of change are implemented and others are not. The second aspect identified by Fullan (1997) is that educational change impacts on the individual educator's basic conceptions of his or her self competence. Dalton (1988) states, in his study, that one of the burdens that educators take on in the process of change is the "burden of incompetence". The third aspect involves a dynamic interrelation of the three dimensions of change which are the use of new material, the use of new teaching approaches and alterations of belief. Fullan (1997) further identifies six themes that are required for substantial change to occur. Educators who are to implement change must be aware of these themes which are: initiative taking, empowerment, staff development, assistance, monitoring and problem coping.

According to Fullan (1991), for effective school management, support and pressure are both necessary. He further explains that caring, shared vision and internal motivations need to be balanced. Fullan (1991) claimed that the change in assessment

policy will fail if it does not impact on the entire culture of the school. He believes that school-based assistance for educators is essential.

Hargreaves (1989) points out that there is no shortage of evidence that educational change is a difficult process. He further explains that change can often be undermined. He believes that changes may be poorly conceptualized and researched, too ambitious, too fast or too slow and that change should be dealt with in isolation. He also claims that commitment may not be sustained over time, parents may be opposed and leaders may be too controlling or ineffective. Therefore, he believes, that too many changes remain disappointing and ineffective. Hargreaves (1989) reminds us that there is a need to recognise that assessment serves other valuable and indispensable educational purposes.

5. ASSESSMENT AND MEASUREMENT

In the Foundation Phase not much attention is given to the influence of measurement on assessment. However a brief explanation will assist the Foundation Phase educator to better understand assessment.

According to Lubisi (1999) many people use the terms “measurement” and “assessment” interchangeably and he maintains that when one refers to assessment as measurement, one chooses a particular definition of assessment. Hopkins and Antes (1985) explain that measurement is understanding how to make observations. They believe that there are two aspects of measurement. These two aspects of measurement are to decide and define what is to be measured. When decisions about how to quantify something have been made, these two aspects should be clear enough for general interpretation about what is being measured.

Furthermore, assessment is used largely to serve the purpose of grading and ranking individual learners. Measurement on the other hand is concerned with assigning numerical scores or marks which educators record on a mark sheet. No lengthy explanations of each learner’s achievements are recorded, only the marks are awarded. The reporting of learner achievement is based largely on numerical scores. This kind of reporting is more concerned with the learner’s achievements rather than supporting

the learner in his or her quest to learn. In the Foundation Phase classroom marks are recorded on a mark sheet weekly for Mental Tests and Spelling Tests.

Our assessments in the past were based on assessment as measurement. Presently, with the new policy, there is a change where there is a move towards a broader view of assessment.

6. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN ASSESSMENT POLICY

A study of the implementation problem of policy was conducted by Mc Laughlin in 1998 at the Stanford University. In this study she draws our attention to the fact of the implementation problem of policy that was discovered in 1970s by policy analysts. In her study she reveals that the implementers did not always do as they were told and that implementation of the policy depended on how policy was interpreted and transformed by individual educators. Implementation was revealed, in her study, as a process of mutual policy adaptation and policies differed from area to area. This variability could have been seen as a warning of trouble in the system. However McLaughlin (1998) raised the possibility that variability could indeed be beneficial in signalling the presence of a “healthy” system, one that is shaping and integrating policy in a manner that best suits local resources. In other words, ‘adaptation’ replaced ‘adoption’. She also explains that other implementation research provided little understanding of educators’ realities and a limited idea of the influence that shapes what is actually happening or being implemented in schools and classrooms. The major challenge for analysis in her study, she admits, was that of linking macro and micro analysis and action. The study elaborated on the macro perspective on implementation and practice but provided little insight into how and why educators (implementers) respond as they do. It also frames policy questions and opportunities for policies and describes policy outcomes.

Young (2000) reminds us that assessment and qualifications, are among the most important components in any education system. According to Young (2000) assessment and qualification acts as a “compound instrument” that regulates the learner’s development and progress through the education system. He goes on to explain that together, assessment and qualification determine the advantages and

disadvantages of the system, and the degree of compatibility to the labour market. Assessment is the most important system for signalling systemic efficiency and accountability yet as Broadfoot (1996) explains that policy generators, policy implementers and policy critics remain isolated from each other, leading to a system that lacks communication.

Analysis of policy formation done by Levinson and Sutton in 2000 examines policy formation and implementation as a dynamic, overlapping process extended over time. They prefer to analyse policy in terms of how people appropriate its meaning. Appropriation, they explain, is a kind of taking a policy and implementing it as they understand it. According to Levinson and Sutton (2000), even an outright resistance to policy can be portrayed as a kind of appropriation. Since the 1960s education policy analysts have been changing theories and clarifying approaches. Odden (1991) identifies the 1960s as the “origins” of implementation studies in the U.S.A. which gave rise to a generation of scholars. This generation of scholars includes a study by Ball (1990) which emerged to complement and challenge the implementation process. Hammond (1996) reminds us that one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome in educational changes is the basic ways in which policy is conceived, developed and practiced. This also holds true for the assessment policy. Studies by Brown (2003) reveal evidence that there exists multiple interactive conceptions of assessment. The example he uses is that of an educator who believes that the prime purpose of assessment is to improve learning. Brown (2003) further explains that assessment can be viewed as a means by which the school’s accountability can be measured.

7. THE DEVELOPEMENT OF THE ASSESSMENT POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA

“Crisis” has often been used to describe the state of education in South Africa since the upheavals of 1976. Examinations have certainly not escaped the impact of the crisis to date. This has to be understood in political dimensions. However, in the past eleven years there have been many changes in educational policies and the question arises as to whether the implementation of these policies has been effective in achieving the desired results. Assessment had played a prominent role in the educational change because it influenced the entire educational reform purpose. One

of the driving forces behind educational reform is the desire to initiate improvements of standards and measure.

It is important to remember that assessment has a direct influence on teaching and learning. Therefore it is important that the changes in the assessment policy demand the complete support of educators. Detailed planning is also required for effective delivery. With the introduction of the new curriculum in January 1998, South Africans have been presented with a life-time opportunity to transform their assessment practices to fall into line with current educational policies that seek to transform education. In December 1998, when the Department of Education distributed the Assessment Policy in the General Education and Training Band Grade R to 9 and ABET (Department of Education, 1998a), it was found that educators struggled to understand the changes. In preparing this document, it was believed that the Ministry consulted widely with key stakeholders and the broader public. As a result the policy carries wide support and legitimacy. It was to serve as a guide to the provincial authorities in designing their own assessment policies and would therefore become a vital instrument for shaping educational practice.

However the ongoing and recent revision of the assessment policy indicates that it has been carried out with haste. Teachers and professionals responsible for curriculum and assessment development were undergoing professional development. It was clearly stated in that document that the policy will be promoted and professional development and support which will be necessary, for its success, will be provided. Just as curriculum transformation is not an event, so too, the transformation of established assessment practice involves a lengthy process of learning and professional development.

The Assessment Policy in the General Education and Training Band Grade R to 9 and ABET (Department of Education, 1998a) informs us that assessment in curriculum focuses on the achievement of clearly defined outcomes, making it possible to credit learner achievements at every level, whatever pathway they may have followed, and at whatever rate they may have required the necessary competence. Assessment in the curriculum, as explained in this document, requires the use of tools that appropriately assess learner achievement and encourage lifelong learning skills.

Continuous assessment (CASS), according to this document, in the South African policy is considered the best model to assess outcomes of learning throughout the system and enable improvements to be made in the learning and teaching process.

The literature on assessment in South Africa by Muller (2000) revealed that during the apartheid era, the assessment policy for learners other than those in the exit grade 12 was not specified. Muller (2000) also points out that, in practice, for many learners, assessment was “norm-referenced and summative”. The Assessment Policy for General Education and Training (Department of Education, 1998a) prescribes a shift from the “authoritarian” approach of assessment to one which is formative, standards-based and criterion-referenced. It was also prescribed that continuous assessment should be practiced in each learning area and there were guidelines prescribing exactly what should be done.

However, a summary of the findings, in the Report of the Review Committee on C2005 as cited in Chisholm (2000) explains that there is a lack of alignment between curriculum and assessment policy as well as clarity regarding assessment policy and practice. On the one hand too much time is being spent on assessment, leaving minimal time for class work and on the other hand there is insufficient attention on assessment in training and curriculum planning and design. This suggests the need for a coherent policy document on assessment aligned with the curriculum and containing clear guidelines and procedures. Furthermore, greater attention should be paid to assessment in the preparation for the new curriculum.

According to Chisholm (2000) the request for the Report of the Review Committee on C2005 was recommended for the streamlining of the curriculum to make it more implementable and paying greater attention to implementation strategies. This process of streamlining began in January 2001 and in April 2002 the Revised National Curriculum Statement became the official policy and was due for implementation in 2004. According to the Report of the Review Committee (L Chisholm et al., 2000) the C2005 falls short in that an appropriate policy on assessment needs should centre on the purpose of the assessment, teachers’ involvement in the design of assessment,

linguistic appropriateness of the assessment method and research into assessment practice and findings.

In the reconstruction of the curriculum and the assessment system, it was to help educators to recapture and redefine images of entitlement and to get an opportunity that formed much of the spirit of the educational improvement over the years. However the findings of the Educator Workload Report in South Africa (2005) reveal that international studies have highlighted how assessment changes have specifically impacted on educators' workload. Multicultural and multilingual classrooms provide both challenges and opportunities for educators. According to the Educator Workload Report in South Africa (2005) assessment requirements, reports, record keeping, management and supervision demanded a lot of time from the educators. All this was perceived as an increasing workload on educators. The Educator Workload Report in South Africa (2005) also reported that the uncertainty around what the Revised National Curriculum Statement entails is "generating significant uncertainty in the educational system". In 2004, the Minister of Education requested that a protocol on assessment for schools be drafted. The protocol would have to regulate recording and reporting in all schools and also reduce the workload of teachers. This National Protocol on Assessment (Department of Education, 2005) should have been implemented from January 2006. This protocol must be read with other national regulatory frameworks and guidelines, such as the Government Gazette number 29467 of December 2006 and the Government Gazette number 29626 of February 2007.

Assessment must not be seen just in terms of the individual life changes of learners, or whether they pass particular tests and examinations, or with what consequences, but rather in terms of the education system. Policy makers and researchers alike are focusing on the role that assessment can play in monitoring and raising educational standards across the system as a whole. This goal tends to be approached from very different perspectives. For policy makers the issue seems to be how to design an assessment system which embodies high standards and monitors performance through testing programmes- i.e. focusing on the procedures and products of assessment. For educators and assessment researchers the issue is more to do with how the process of assessment might assist learning in the classroom.

Goodwin (1997) reminds us clearly that despite educators' acceptance of the policy assessment is an ever present reality in their lives. According to Jansen (1999) it is not surprising for educators to believe that assessment is primarily about the learner and the school's accountability and once such conceptions are established, it is difficult to change them. While there is no lack of research on most of the major aspects of assessment, such as its effect on pupils or the advantages or disadvantages of various different measurement techniques, more fundamental questions of assessment in education, especially in relation to policy, have been left largely unexplored. This according to Broadfoot (1996) is because of a relative lack of interest in education assessment.

Assessment, in my opinion, is the core activity for education and will remain so. It is therefore, to the Foundation Phase educators' advantage, to fully understand assessment and the implementation process, especially in the multicultural and multilingual classroom. My study intends to contribute to the discourse on assessment in the Foundation Phase classroom within the context of the transforming education system and explore the Foundation Phase educators' understanding of assessment.

8. ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE

I have found that in The Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2003), there lacks an informed definition or explanation of assessment strategies. This lack of clearly demarcated terminology can be seen by the interchange of terms used to describe assessment strategies which at times are referred to as assessment tools, instruments, and other times as assessment techniques, kinds, methods or ways. It is therefore difficult for Foundation Phase educators to interpret. The Government Gazette released in December 2006 (Department of Education, 2006) and the latest Government Gazette released in February 2007 (Department of Education, 2007) also does not offer a clear distinction. For all intensive purposes, I have chosen to refer to informal assessment, formal assessment, self assessment and peer assessment as assessment strategies. Continuous assessment, learner portfolios, summative assessment, formative assessment and authentic assessment will also be discussed under strategies of assessment.

A wide range of assessment strategies may be used to measure learner performance. Foundation Phase educators can select these depending on the purpose of the assessment task. This will depend on the learning outcomes and assessment standards. The types of assessment strategies chosen must provide a wide range of opportunities for the learners to demonstrate improvement of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. There is a need to discuss the different strategies of assessment in the Foundation Phase with a view to eliminating possible disagreements and confusion.

8.1. INFORMAL ASSESSMENT

The Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2006) explains that informal or daily assessment is the monitoring of learners' progress. This is done through observations, discussions, learner-teacher conferences and informal classroom interactions. Informal assessment may be as simple as stopping the lesson to observe learners or to discuss with the learners how learning is progressing. Informal assessment should be used to provide feedback to the learners and to improve teaching. Educators may however, choose to record performance in informal or daily assessment tasks in some case to support the teaching and learning process. Lubisi (1999) stresses that informal assessment takes place inevitably most of the time. The educator's interaction with his or her learners is in fact nearly always an informal assessment for example, a word of praise or sarcasm, a smile or a rebuke, convey a valuation of the pupil or his or her work.

It emerges from Sieborger and Macintosh (1998) studies that informal assessment often, though not necessarily, takes place without the learners realising that it is happening, while the educator is aware of what he or she is assessing. The main use of informal assessment is to help learners by finding out how well they are coping and encouraging them to do better in a comfortable environment which is conducive to learning. Their research findings also reveal that it can be very helpful to keep a track of how each learner is doing. From experience I have found that although results for informal assessment need not be recorded, an educator may want to write down his or her reflections because it can guide the educator in shaping lessons to meet the needs of the learners. An informal assessment also helps learners to discover their own strengths and weakness.

8.2 FORMAL ASSESSMENT

The Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2006) makes it clear that formal assessment provides educators with a systematic way of evaluating how well learners are progressing in a grade and in a particular phase. The given examples of formal assessment include projects, oral presentations, demonstrations, performances, tests, and practical demonstrations. Further direction given in the Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2006) is that progression of Foundation Phase learners to the next grade should be based on recorded evidence in formal assessment tasks. This means that those tasks that are used for formal assessment are recorded and should be used to decide whether a learner should progress to the next grade. Educators are required to record learner performance in all formal assessment tasks.

In my opinion, learners are aware that they are being assessed during formal assessment. Young learners are less aware of being assessed in the beginning, but they soon learn about it, and before long most learners ask if marks will be awarded for all tasks. Formal assessment must always be announced to the learners before it takes place. This is important because formal assessments are used to develop a learners' profile over the years and will provide great motivation to the learner guiding him or her to give off his or her best.

8.3. SELF ASSESSMENT

From personal experience I find that Foundation Phase educators are expected to structure tasks and assignments in such a way that they will provide ample opportunities for learners to practice self assessment. Learners could for example be required to judge the quality of their own work before handing it in. If they consider it to be the best work they are capable of, they sign it, if not, they simply hand it in. Apart from encouraging learners to accept responsibility for their own learning, self assessment allows the educators to share in learners' expectations as well as achievements in a friendly, co-operative way. Chantler, Kannemeyer, and Moir (1998) maintain that learners are guided to assess themselves against the given learning outcome, which is an important skill for life-long self learning and improvement.

Learners need to be helped to reflect on their own performance and provide their own evidence of achievement. The advantage of this is that learners become self reflected and take control of their learning. They begin to recognise the limitations of their work. Chantler et al. (1998) reveals that learners become independent. Learners understand the whole process of assessment better if they are given the opportunity to assess their own work. As a result, in my experience I found, that Foundation Phase learners are then encouraged to continually improve their performance and some learners even strive for greater heights. Learners assess how well they have performed in terms of the outcomes that are expected. This helps learners understand the assessment process and take responsibility for their work. At the Foundation Phase level this could mean colouring in a face or ticking a phrase which shows how they feel about their work or reporting orally to peers or educator on how well they think they have done.

8. 4. PEER ASSESSMENT

Peer assessment allows learners to share in and contribute towards the efforts of their classmates. Such practices often lead to self reflection and more honest assessment of themselves and their own efforts. The criteria for peer assessment, according to Chantler et al. (1998) should encourage learners to reflect on their work and must be stated in ways that encourage them to compare their work to specified standards rather than to personal opinions. Information imparted during workshops at school emphasise that learners should develop peer assessment skills, assessing each other in pairs and groups. It must not be interpreted as learners marking each other's work by ticking or crossing answers and/or counting marks. The advantage of this is that learners are involved in the assessment process and not threatened by it. They are more likely to learn from this process. They become more accountable to each other. Chantler et al. (1998) also points out that those learners should be given the opportunity to comment on the work or performance of their peers. They should be shown how to make positive comments and also not to be critical. On grade one level, for example, they may comment:

“Sen-Jahir drew a beautiful car”, or “I like Vedantha’s story” or “I do not understand this word that Juggie used, “Is this the correct way to write it?”

8.5. CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

There is a strong emphasis on continuous assessment (CASS) which is designed, as the Department of Education (Department Of Education, 2002) explains, to support growth and the development of learners. A number of literature sources reviewed claim that continuous assessment impacts positively on teaching and learning. According to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2003), “continuous assessment is the chief method by which assessment takes place”. The National Protocol on Assessment for Schools Grade R-12 (Department of Education, 2005) states:

“Continuous assessment is an assessment model that encourages integration of assessment into the teaching and the development of learner through ongoing feedback. It is a model of assessment that is used to determine the learner’s achievement during the course of a grade or level...”

Continuous assessment covers all the principles of outcomes based education. However continuous assessment is not understood by all Foundation Phase educators. The literature reviewed also reveals a range of problems that are experienced by educators in implementing continuous assessment. Many Foundation Phase educators lack expertise required for continuous assessment. Layman (1994) claims that continuous assessment can ensure sustained teaching and learning and can contribute to overall improvement in student performance. Continuous assessment as suggested by Awomolo (1992) motivates learners towards consistent learning efforts throughout the course of learning since assessment accompanies learning. Bajah (1984) suggests that the concept of continuous assessment, let alone the modalities of implementation, remains unclear to many educators and those educators do not have a clear understanding of the mode of operation of continuous assessment.

In the Foundation Phase learners are assessed continuously throughout the school year because this enables the educator to monitor and understand learners’ progress closely. Continuous assessment takes place while learners are busy with class work. It occurs while learners reflect on their own work, when a learner’s peer supplies feedback on what he or she is saying, writing or doing or when educators make mental or even

physical notes of what they observe learners doing. Malan (1997) points out that the purpose of continuous assessment as it is practised in most classes daily is to monitor learning progress and to diagnose learning problems. As such, it is considered to be formative in nature. Thus it can be seen as having a formative role as the educator evaluates to improve teaching and learning.

It also emerges from this study that continuous assessment should be used only to monitor and provide feedback. While it may be used to collect evidence of learning process (by means of portfolios, for example) it should not primarily be used for grading or scoring purposes although it may have an influence on final decisions regarding promotion to the next grade. Malan (1997) states that continuous assessment should take place while learners are actively involved in daily classroom activities, while they are doing group work, searching for data, working on a group project, reading a book or responding to the educators and their peers.

8.6. LEARNERS' PORTFOLIOS

The evidence of the learner achievements of the continuous assessment should be stored in the learner's portfolio. The learner portfolios should include the learner's best work as well as initial plans, evidence of work done, samples of learners' work with comments by learner, reports from facilitator and parents. Portfolios can be built over a period of time and retained as visible proof of the development and improvement of learner achievement. A portfolio is a folder or file that contains samples of learner's work over a period of time. There should be samples of different types of work in the portfolio and there should be a clear indication of what the learner was expected to do, comments by the educators and also some evidence of self assessment. The National Protocol on Assessment for Schools in the General and Further Education and Training Band Grades R-12 (Department of Education, 2005) states that the, "learner's portfolio should be used to track progress, growth and achievements of the learner". In the Foundation Phase, portfolios can be used together with workbooks, which show a learner's progress through different tasks over a certain period of time. Cole, Ryan, and Fick (1995) defines portfolios as a systematic and organised collection of evidence used by educator and learners to monitor growth of the learner's knowledge and skills and attitudes. Cole et al. (1995) reminds us that

learner's portfolios can provide authentic and meaningful documentation of learners' abilities. The study also explains that curriculum, instruction and assessment via portfolios, go hand in hand, tying the three together effectively for learners.

Learner's portfolios must contain artefacts of learners' progress, as well as their reflections on both their learning and chosen artefacts. Learners must feel ownership of the portfolio, so they need to have decision-making power about selected artefacts. Sieborger and Macintosh (1998) agree that learners are given the responsibility of keeping a portfolio of everything that they have done. This study also reveals that most educators claim that portfolios are an authentic way of assembling evidence for assessing learners. This gives the learners some control over their assessment (both by allowing them make the selection and by allowing them to see what they need to do to improve). Seiborger and Macintosh (1998) also explain that each learner's portfolios differ in the Foundation Phase classes. A big strong envelop is often a good way of keeping a learner's portfolio, or a flip file or other types of files would also be suitable. From experience it is advisable that in the grade one class each learner might be given a small cardboard box (such as a peach box or the lid of a duplicating paper box), or a plastic filing tray in which to keep the work which has been done.

8.7 SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Summative assessment takes place when a piece of work in the Foundation Phase class has been completed. Summative assessment includes the marking, grading and scoring of exercises, projects or tests which are set with the specific purpose of determining how much or how little learners know about the work which has been completed. It could also include judgements of models, show and tell, art work, dramatic presentations, and story telling. Summative assessment can be regarded as having a more judgemental nature. According to Gardner (2006), summative assessment (assessment of learning) has been part of education for centuries. Summative assessment provides as the term suggests, as Gardner (2006) points out, a summary of achievements at a particular point and it is a necessary part of an assessment system as it provides information to those with an interest in learners' achievements: mainly parents, other educators, employers, management and learners themselves.

Summative assessment also enables the Foundation Phase educator to know how much a learner has achieved at a certain stage. The Foundation Phase educator listens to reading, for example, in order to decide whether or not the learner can go to the next grade. A Foundation Phase educator must keep in mind that summative assessment takes place over time at the end of a learning experience. It determines if a learner is able to move to a new section of a learning program. The advantage of the summative assessment is that it gives an overall report of learners' competence in relation to a specific learning area. Results can be recorded and used as evidence when reporting to parents or learners.

8.8. FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

The purpose of formative assessment according to Malan (1997) is to give some feedback to learners and educators about learning progress, or the lack thereof. In the Foundation Phase classroom educators could for example, allocate a mark or a symbol to a piece of work, respond to a learner's work by means of verbal comments, plot learner's progress on a graph or chart or write a profile of a learner's achievements based on the assessment of more than one piece of work. Gardner (2006) refers to formative assessment as assessment for learning. Her study reveals that the word "formative" was used to identify assessment that promotes learning by using evidence about how far learners have gone, in relation to the goals of their learning, to plan the next steps in their learning and know how to take them. The study assures educators that formative assessment is concerned with both difficulties and positive achievements. An educator must keep in mind that formative assessment also gives information in order to help learners to grow and make progress. An educator might listen to a learner reading as to know how to help improve reading or to encourage and correct the learner. Formative assessment monitors and supports the process of learning and teaching. It is used to inform educators and learners about the learner's progress so as to improve teaching and learning.

8.9. AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

According to the South African Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2007) authentic assessment refers to assessment that aims to assess knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in contexts that closely resemble actual situations in which that knowledge and those skills, values and attitudes are used.

Some researchers use the term performance assessment for authentic assessment. Authentic assessment is concerned with the assessment of those learning outcomes which value what people do in real life simply explained as human authentic activities. Cole et al. (1995) reports that a fundamental authentic assessment principle holds that learners should demonstrate, rather than be required to tell or be questioned about, what they know and can do. Hence, authentic assessment usually is classified as performance based. Cole et al. (1995) also identifies authentic assessment as a powerful evaluation idea which focuses on the desired curriculum outcome. Therefore, actual complex performances of reading, writing, researching, problem solving, creating and speaking evidence must be included. This study, also points out that authentic assessment must be integrated into instructional practices. Malan (1997) explains that performance assessment is the name given to direct and systematic observations of actual learner performance (demonstration of competence), or to evaluation of completed products (models). During performance assessment learners are engaged in activities that require them to demonstrate specific skills or develop specific products. In the case of the Foundation Phase the demonstrations can take place in a controlled environment such as the Foundation Phase classroom, Foundation Phase playground or on a field trip (real-life environment) where the complexities faced by learners are much higher. The performance assessment is also called authentic assessment, because of its real-life connotations. Performance assessment has the following characteristics:

- ❖ Learners are asked to perform, produce, create or do something
- ❖ Problem solving skills
- ❖ Learners are provided with the opportunity to present and explain their work.

Gober (2002) makes it clear that authentic assessment is a term currently used by educators when discussing the best ways to take stock or evaluate the learners' progress. Authentic assessment can be defined as the process of documenting and

evaluating growth and development, over time, using real-life situations. It shows what children can do, what they know and what they understand. In her studies she found that educators are beginning to realize that this type of performance assessment gives a more accurate picture of who the child is, and how the child is growing and learning.

9. FRAMES OF REFERENCES

Maree and Fraser (2004) explains that assessment processes are “measurements” essentially and are framed in terms of the purpose to give meaning to the processes and measurements. The two main frames according to Maree and Fraser (2004) are norm-referenced and criterion referenced assessment. According to Lambert and Lines (2000), educators need a mechanism or a way of referencing the judgement. He explains that the two ways of referencing assessment are using norms and criteria.

9.1. CRITERION REFERENCED ASSESSMENT

Criterion referencing, Lambert and Lines (2000) explains, is the principle of defining what is required before a test is set, and then judging against those criteria. Criterion referencing, according to him, is comparing a learner’s achievement to a list of possible levels of achievement.

Wolf (1995) explored criterion referenced assessment and theoretical assumptions which all assessment systems share. In Wolf’s (1995) studies, it is noted that when constructing criterion referenced tests one must adhere to a domain or item specifications. It is important because since one is going to use the test to make statements about someone’s concrete abilities in a particular area then the two have to match. If they do not match then one cannot use the results to make a definite statement about someone’s behaviour or progress. One has to remember that criterion referenced assessment measures how well a learner performs against a standard or criterion rather than against another learner of the same grade. Criterion referenced assessment involves educators and others making judgements about learners’ performance in the classroom. Criterion referenced assessment is described in many Foundation Phases resource books as a type of assessment which has an impact not

only on how assessment results are interpreted and used, but also on how assessment tasks are constructed. In criterion referenced assessment the norm which has to be attained is not a predetermined mark but the demonstration of a particular ability or competence (specific knowledge, skills or understandings). The descriptions of the ability that learners have to demonstrate are referred to as criteria and because learner performances have to be measured against the criteria, this form of assessment is called criterion referenced assessment.

According to Conner (1991) criterion referenced assessment can be seen as being concerned to tell educators what they need to know and it is related to the curriculum. Criterion referenced assessment provides explicit information on what the learners can and cannot do and what the learner needs to be taught. The tests can be short. Maree and Fraser (2004) reveal that criterion referenced assessment consists of certain criteria that learners are expected to achieve in a particular grade. They explain further that these are related to learner's competence in particular areas, skills acquired and attitudes expressed and developed over time. The Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2003) points out that in the Foundation Phase, criterion referenced assessment ensures that assessment is open and fair to every one.

9.2. NORM REFERENCED ASSESSMENT

According to Lambert and Lines (2000) norm referenced is a term used to describe a system of assessment that judges the performance of an individual within a group against the whole groups' performance. Sieborger and Macintosh (1998) states in simple terms that comparing a learner's achievement to what other learners have done is norm referencing. Malan (1997) believes that norm referenced assessment does not refer to the way in which tests or assessment tasks are constructed but to the purposes for which the results of the assessment are based. The results could for example be used to determine whether a learner's performance is average, below average or above average. Educators compare individual learner achievements with those of other learners. Norm referenced assessment has been criticized by Conner (1991) because he believes that some learner must always be at the top and some learners must be at the bottom. This means that norm referenced assessment is concerned with

comparing performance of the learner in some “ability” area with that of peers and it is unrelated to the curriculum. The results according to Conner (1991) have few teaching implications and the norm referenced assessments are usually time consuming. Maree and Fraser (2004) reveal that this approach does not say much about what the learner has mastered or understood but seems to focus on how much of the content knowledge the learner knows.

10. ASSESSMENT TASKS IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE

Educators should look constantly for ways to improve the assessment of their learners. Learning must be made more meaningful to learners. There are few things which are more rewarding for an educator than devising an improved way of assessing learners, to put it into practice and to experience the new insights and enthusiasm which can accompany its implementation and feedback. In undertaking assessment of learners it is important to be clear whether educators are assessing their work against predetermined criteria or whether educators are trying to place them in relation to other children and their work. This depends on the assessment tasks. Seiborger and Macintosh (1998) studies suggest that for effective learning there are a number of ways in which learners can become involved in the assessment and feel that the assessment is theirs as well as the educator’s. The learners can choose as to whether to write a test or to do a project, to work individually, in pairs or in groups, to speak about it or to have some say about when and how it takes place.

10.1. TESTS

There is still a place for tests, provided that they are only one of a variety of assessment methods used. Foundation Phase educators can draw up their own tests or use activities from the Resource Books. According to the Curriculum Guidelines Language, Literacy and Communication Senior Phase (Department Of Education, 2002), tests can be used for formative or summative purposes. Formal tests have always been part of the process in our schools. Learners sometimes do better in tests if they have done tests of the same kind before.

10.2. PRACTICAL ASSIGNMENTS

These assignments could include planning of models as well as building of models, scientific experiments, reports and records of findings. Progress is demonstrated in a step-wise manner. Practical assignments demonstrate clearly how well learners understand and have mastered certain specific concepts and how they translate these into practical implementation. Foundation Phase resource books explain that learners can do experiments, draw and construct models to demonstrate their understanding and how they have applied their knowledge.

10.3. INTERVIEWS AND ORAL PRESENTATIONS

An interview, according to Curriculum 2005 Guidelines Language, Literacy and communication Senior Phase (Department Of Education, 2002), is probably the oldest and best known means of eliciting information directly from learners. Learners present work in written format that they have researched before an oral presentation. Learners learn to plan and think before they speak. They learn to speak from notes and how to structure interviews or researched findings for oral presentations. These tasks can assess the learners' understanding of issues, the amount of research that has been done and the communication skills of the learner.

10.4. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

These assignments involve letters, essays, lists, comments, arguments, filling in forms, writing CV's, reported findings of research projects, poems, recipes, stories, summaries and mind maps. This method can show how learners understand work. In addition, it can demonstrate learners' thinking, writing and communication skills and how they structure facts. According to Chantler et al. (1998), in the past too much emphasis was placed on individual written assignments. Written assignments are useful only when they are part of a wide range of different assessments. They can demonstrate the learners' writing and thinking skills.

10.5. GROUP PROJECTS

A number of learners (2 or 4 or 6) work together on a task. According to Lubisi (1999) group projects enable a number of learners to work together on a complex problem that requires planning, research, internal discussion and group presentation. Teamwork can be assessed through observation. Learners' abilities to plan and complete tasks are monitored. Leadership skills can be demonstrated. From my experience I find that projects are an excellent way of assessing progress in different areas. Learners can be assessed on what they know, how they have gained the knowledge and how well they can apply it. They can also be assessed on how well they have worked as a member of a team and how well they have followed instructions. They can be assessed not only on the content of their work, but also on their abilities to work co-operatively in teams.

11. RECORDING AND REPORTING OF LEARNER PERFORMANCE IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE

Communication between school and parents has become a very important issue in education. Recording of the learners' progress is also very important. Recording and reporting are communication devices for relevant stakeholders. They can be used to support the educator's memory, to develop links between parents and schooling, to promote teamwork and to further understand the needs of learners. According to Maree and Fraser (2004) recording and reporting are closely linked but are still separate activities. Maree and Fraser (2004) maintain that recording assessment is the detailed record keeping of learner's performance and reporting involves the presentation of the information about the learner.

The Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2007) has very clear guidelines as to the way reporting and recording in the Foundation Phase has to be done. The Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2007) also states that the language in which recording and reporting is done should be in accordance with the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) and national codes must be used for recording and reporting purposes. Comments should be used to qualify learner performance. As set

out in the Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2007) the national codes and descriptors for recording and reporting in the Foundation Phase are as follows:

Table 1: Codes and descriptors for recording in Foundation Phase

RATING CODE	DESCRIPTION OF COMPETENCE
4	Outstanding/ Excellent Achievement
3	Satisfactory Achievement
2	Partial Achievement
1	Not Achieved

11.1. RECORDING

Recording as suggested in the Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2006) is a process in which the educator documents the level of a learner's performance and in South African schools. This should indicate the progress towards the achievement of outcomes set in the National Curriculum Statement. This document also explains that records should be used to monitor learning and to plan ahead and educators are required to record learner performance in all formal assessment tasks. According to the Department of Education Assessment Policy in the General Education and Training Band Grades R-9 & ABET (Department of Education, 1998a), cumulative evidence of learner achievement must be recorded and these records should accompany all learners throughout their learning experience. The requirements for formal recorded assessment for the Foundation Phase as emphasised in the Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2007) has been set out in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Number of formal recorded assessment tasks for Foundation Phase

LEARNING PROGRAMME	TERM 1	TERM 2	TERM 3	TERM 4	TOTAL
<i>Literacy</i>	4	4	4	4	16
<i>Additional Language (Optional in Grades 1&2)</i>	2	2	2	2	8
<i>Numeracy</i>	3	3	3	3	12
<i>Life Skills</i>	1	1	1	1	4

All records should be kept in school and must be available at all times. A Foundation Phase Educator must have an assessment portfolio. According to the South African Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2007), the educator's portfolio means a collection of all planning of assessment, including the assessment tasks and assessment tools for both formal and informal assessment. It should include record sheets as well. Clemson and Clemson (1996) claims that an inadequate record may not only be a sign that an educator is not taking his or her assessment role seriously, but may also be an indication that learners' achievements and potential do not matter to the educator. In short, scrappy records may mean that the educator simply does not care nor has an idea of the importance of assessment. Johnson, Hill, and Turnstall (1992) alleges that how best to keep records on learners' progress is a challenge to many educators.

11.2. REPORTING

Reporting as suggested in the Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2007) is a process of communicating learner performance to learners, parents, schools and other stakeholders. As explained in the document, learner performance can be reported in a number of ways such as report cards, parents' meeting, school visitation days, parent-teacher conferences, phone calls, letters, class or school newsletters, etc. A formal report card should be sent to parents at least once a term. In some cases the report card is often the only means of communication between the school and parent. Nowadays there is a tendency to invite the parents to discuss the school report card. It may be merely an invitation to sign the report card to indicate that it has been received and parents are free to make a comment on the report card or an appointment can be set up so that parents and educators can interact on a more personal level.

Most schools have their own format of the report card and it is up to the individual schools to decide upon the exact design of the report card. However the Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2007) provides an example of a report card for the Foundation Phase which requires the following information e.g. name of school, year, term, name of learner, date of birth, learning areas, codes and descriptor, comments, dates for school closing and opening, signature of principal, educator, parent and it provides the national rating code as set out in Table 1. Space for the school stamp is

also provided. Being a formal document, and one which is liable to be produced as evidence, it is obvious that care must be taken as to what comments are made by the educator. It must be acceptably phrased as well as accurately written. Often Heads of Department have a style of writing, the report comments. In some schools it is considered friendly to use the learner's first name. Keating (1969) makes it clear that the results of the assessments on the report card should be based on a range of different kinds of evidence, including tests, work in exercise books, files or flip files, individual or group projects and records of spoken presentations. Johnson et al. (1992) points out that the London Local Education Authorities work, reveals that the report card is required to reveal to parents what the learner has learnt and what the learner is good at or may need help with. In other words, a report card communicates the academic progress of the learner to parents.

12. CONCLUSION

Assessment in the Foundation Phase must not be seen as an isolated activity. It is an essential element of teaching and learning, and contributes towards the effectiveness of any school. Assessment is an ongoing process and an important part of each of the Foundation Phase learner's educational experience. It is through a careful selection of assessment activities, assessment tasks and assessment strategies, by the Foundation Phase educator, that will make the assessment process appropriate and meaningful. Foundation Phase educators are being held increasingly accountable for their learners' progress and classrooms have become open to examination by parents, management, and other visitors. In my next chapter I describe the methodology on how I planned to gather information about the Foundation Phase educators' understandings of assessment of a particular school and the conceptual framework.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

A research methodology describes the activity of the research study and how it proceeded. Patton (2002) reveals that a good methodology leads to a successful research study with accuracy and usefulness. This chapter describes and accounts for the research method and approach used to explore the Foundation Phase educators' understandings of assessment in a school in Durban.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The qualitative study was the chosen approach because it enabled me to explore and gain insight into the Foundation Phase educators' understandings of assessment in this particular school. According to Merriam (1998) questions of understanding are appropriate for qualitative research. In qualitative research the understanding of reality is really my (the researcher's) interpretation or understanding of assessment in the Foundation Phase. I intend to obtain an in depth understanding of the Foundation Phase educators' in this particular school. By conducting the qualitative research, I am not interested in educators' surface opinions as in survey research, but I want to know how Foundation Phase educators conduct assessment and what they understand about assessment in the Foundation Phase and whether they implement the assessment policy.

My interest in this topic stems from my experience of being an educator in the Foundation Phase for twenty seven years, and still finding difficulty in implementing the assessment policy fully. Large classes, with learners from unique home backgrounds, diverse cultures and of different levels of performance pose great challenges in demonstrating competence in monitoring and assessing learner progress and achievement. Furthermore I find it difficult to utilise a multitude of assessment intervention strategies to address specific needs of all learners.

My study is a basic interpretive study with its emphasis on experience and interpretation of the Foundation Phase assessment policy. More specifically, this research intends to focus on the understandings of the individual Foundation Phase educators' (the participants') experience and perception of the Foundation Phase assessment policy and their experience in their day-to-day working environment. This interpretive research was employed to probe the everyday experience of implementation of the Foundation Phase assessment policy in the classroom.

The design type or genre is a case study. I chose a case study because I intend to provide an in-depth insight into the micro level of implementation and practice of the Foundation Phase policy in a particular school. Following Yin's (2003) view of a case study, I hope that this case study will provide a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles. I will strive to portray what it is like to be in the Foundation Phase classroom conducting assessment and to describe the participants' views and feelings of assessment in the Foundation Phase classroom. Henning (2004) explains clearly that in a case study the main assumption is that a phenomenon is investigated as a bounded system. In my study the phenomenon is the exploration of the Foundation Phase educators' understandings of assessment and the bounded system is the group of Foundation Phase educators in a particular school. In this case study I intend to provide detailed data about the Foundation Phase understandings about the assessment policy. It emerges from studies by Denzin and Lincoln (2003) that a case study relies on interviews, observation and document analysis.

My triangulation strategy intends to collect data through a combination of semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis. This triangulation will remain the principle strategy to ensure for validity and reliability in my research study. My research study will be able to provide the findings yielded by the observation with the semi-structured interview and the document analysis. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), triangulation is the display of multiple, refracted realities simultaneously. I was able to get a variety of responses from the three methods of data collection on the issue of assessment in the Foundation Phase. This triangulation

strategy allowed me to cross reference data collected and to facilitate the emergence of similarities, common trends and themes for my research study.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In my attempt to gather data to explore the Foundation Phase educators' understandings of assessment the concepts of summative assessment, formative assessment, authentic assessment and continuous assessment will be regarded as key concepts for this research study. These concepts will therefore form the conceptual framework for the study. Holliday as cited in Hennings (2004), defines a conceptual framework as covering the "mean features of the research design". Hennings (2004) describes the conceptual framework as an "alignment of the key concepts of the study". The key concepts will be discussed very briefly in this chapter because it has already been discussed in detail in chapter two.

3.1 SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

According, to the Curriculum 2005 Guidelines (Department Of Education, 2002), summative assessment gives an overall picture of the learner's progress at a given time, at the end of term, or on transfer to another school.

3.2 FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Formative assessment, according to the Curriculum 2005 Guidelines (Department Of Education, 2002) monitors and supports the process of learning and teaching. It is used to inform educators and learners about their progress so as to improve teaching and learning.

3.3 AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

Authentic assessment would include what Grange & Reddy (1998) call, as quoted in Maree and Fraser (2004), "assessment strategies that test more than what is possible with pen and paper testing". They list portfolios, projects and practical tests, amongst

others, as possible alternatives. According to Lubisi (1999) authentic assessment is also referred to as performance assessment.

3.4 CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

According to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2003) continuous assessment provides growth and development of learners, provides constant feedback and gathers evidence of learning achievement with regards to learning outcomes and assessment standards. The Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2003) also states that it is difficult to assess all learners at the same time especially in large classes. Comments should therefore be made on only a few learners per day.

4. DATA GENERATION

I intend to get the interpretations of reality in the Foundation Phase classroom and my attempt is to access it directly through semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis will be used to gather data, in the interpretations of reality of implementing the assessment policy, in the Foundation Phase classroom.

4.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

In my research study I planned to relate to what other Foundation Phase educators in a particular school had to say about implementation of the assessment policy. Furthermore there was a need to have greater flexibility and freedom for the specific purpose of obtaining relevant information with regards to assessment in the Foundation Phase. It was also necessary for participants to easily and freely discuss sensitive issues. A semi-structured interview will provide me with the above requirements.

A semi-structured interview, as explained by Kvale (1996), is an interview with the purpose to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee, with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon. The researcher would also be

able to probe initial responses. Semi-structured interviews, according to Knight (2003) can be highly structured and used for the purposes of reality. Therefore the interviews had to be carefully planned and piloted so that I would be able to gather sufficient data for my study. Continuing with Knight's (2003) study he also points out that semi-structured interviews can be conceived as data collection devices which attempt to capture response of people to questions that are carefully standardized and intended to be minimally interceptive.

When planning the semi-structured interview the researcher has to keep in mind that the interviewer will only be an instrument for the administration of the interview schedule. The interviewees are given the power and responsibility to make known their truths and hopefully they will make the effort to do so. Smith, Harre, and Van Langenove (1995) reminds us that although the researcher has a set of pre-determined questions in the interview schedule, the interviews must only be guided by the interview schedule rather than dictated by it. In this case study the semi-structured interview schedule was clear, accurate, specific and easy to understand. Simple terminology was used in asking the questions so that participants had a clear understanding of the questions and answering was not a difficult task. The participants were not intimidated by complex terminology.

Participants were given the opportunity to set the dates for the interviews. They were also given the opportunity to choose where they wanted to be interviewed. I drew up an interview schedule indicating when the Foundation Phase educators were to be interviewed but this changed so often because of the various school activities. The interviews were to be held where participants were comfortable and they all agreed for it to be held in my classroom. Stenhouse (1975) has advocated sitting side-by-side rather than face-to-face as if to symbolise the fact that interviewee and interviewer together face a common task, rather than confront one another. So I decided to sit side-by-side. Walker (1985), on the other hand, believes that sitting side by side creates communication difficulties and that people facing one another talk more freely and fluently, given the support of non-verbal signals. But by sitting side-by-side I found that we spoke at ease and freely and most importantly we were comfortable.

Prior to the commencement of the semi-structured interviews, the participants were reminded once again, about the purpose of the interview, the issue of voluntary withdrawal and how their confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured. Interviews were audio-taped conversational style with the permission of the participants. They were reminded that they could refuse to be audio taped and that I was prepared to take extensive notes of what was been said. The interviews lasted for about thirty minutes to thirty five minutes.

I found that after conducting the semi-structured interviews that the participants found themselves re-thinking about what they said. In fact one of them admitted that she was aware of the gap between what she wanted to say and what she was able to say. One participant indicated that by participating in this study she was finally given a chance to air her views. The fact that the participants showed concern indicated to me that the semi-structured interviews left a mark on the participants. However the visible data, such as facial expressions of disgust or acceptance, hand gestures, nodding and smiling, were lost. I received off-the-cuff data in my interviews. Two interviewees approached me after the interview to notify me that they should have said something else instead of what they said because they thought about the answer afterwards and forgot to mention some ideas that they had. The participants made an effort to tell the truth but they also had the freedom to lie. I noticed that one interviewee felt pressurised to be different and interesting.

However I achieved my goal and that was seeking information on my part and the participants supplying the information. There was a good rapport and plenty of empathy evident during the semi-structured interview. As an interviewer I realised that I had to be a skilled listener. I was aware at all times that I must not risk allowing the interviewee to go on talking and leaving me uninformed about things that might be of considerable research interest.

4.2 OBSERVATIONS

Observation in this research study, of Foundation Phase educators conducting assessment, was appropriate because I required data on the physical setting and the management of the assessment process. Morrison, in Cohen, Manion and Morrison

(2001) rightfully claims that observation enables the researcher to gather data on the physical setting (classroom) and the human setting (Foundation Phase educators, being observed conducting assessment).

Henning (2004) reminds us that observation may be brief and serve only as a discreet tool for gathering information. However it must be planned before hand and organised into a detailed observation schedule. This planning and organising is time consuming. One needs to remember that collecting observed data is relatively easy, only, after planning the observation schedule well.

Lankshear and Knobel (2004) reveals in their studies that observation involves carefully planned, deliberate and systematic examinations of what is taking place, who is involved and where everything is happening. My observation schedule was carefully planned under the direction of my supervisor and I was going to observe pupils and educators engaged in the assessment activity. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) also make a useful distinction between descriptive, focused and selective observation. Descriptive observations, he explains, tend to be quite general to begin with, concerned with describing the setting, people present and activities taking place. In my research study, this entailed the Foundation Phase classroom where the educator was conducting assessment with learners. Focused observation, according to Lankshear and Knobel (2004), involves the ways things are related. I focused on the implementation of the assessment task and whether it was in keeping with the assessment policy. Selective observation, Lankshear and Knobel (2004) explains, occurs when researchers can purposefully focus during their observation on particular aspects that capture their attention. My observation schedule assisted me to select particular aspects to capture my attention. I also had to observe whether assessment was taking place formally or informally. Behaviour of learners also had to be observed and also how the educator was managing working with forty five learners. So I planned my observation schedule accordingly. The observation schedule comprised of part A and part B. Since this was a small scale study and being a novice researcher I had only five criteria in part A and nine criteria in part B. The basic sets of criteria were chosen very carefully and I was confident that it would provide for the data required.

The observation was to take place in one grade R class, one grade one class, one grade two class and one grade three class. When I conducted my observation learners had to be engaged in the assessment tasks. The educators were briefed in advance as to what my aims were and this took up a lot of time because educators needed to be assured that this was not an evaluation on them but it was for the purpose of my research study. Some educators were uneasy about the observation. They admitted that they were uneasy about providing for all my aims but I assured them that it was fine and that they should work as they normally do. My observation schedule was well structured and I knew in advance what it was I was looking for. I needed to observe the classes at least twice and after much patience I managed to get the opportunity to visit the classes twice.

Cohen et al. (2001) explains that observation data are attractive as they afford the researcher the opportunity to gather “live” data from “live” situations. My basic set of criteria for observation afforded me the opportunity to gather “live” data from a “live” situation. I was given the opportunity to look at what is taking place when assessment is being conducted. Being in the classrooms allowed me to fulfil my aim and gather the data I required.

4.3 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Document analysis was my next method of collecting data. Documents that I was referring to were written records of the assessment of the Foundation Phase educators in this particular school. There was a need to determine if the participants were implementing the assessment policy and whether this implementation was in keeping with the National Curriculum Statement. The Government Gazette (Department of Education, 2007) was examined by me to see if the participants were adhering to the requirements as set out in this document. The use of this document was not only to be for its content value but for the purpose of implementation. This would also assist in determining whether the participants were fully implementing the assessment policy as required by the National Curriculum Statement guidelines on assessment for the Foundation Phase.

The documents were easily available from the participants and the documents analysed in my research study were the recording documents of the Foundation Phase educators with regards to assessment. In this particular school there was uniformity in record keeping and all participants had the same documents. The participants all kept an assessment portfolio which contained all documents related to assessment. It was their responsibility, they claim, to ensure that the information in their assessment portfolios were kept up to date. The participants' assessment portfolios were a file. They admitted that this was the most suitable and user friendly storage system.

Their portfolios contained the tasks for assessment as well as the planning that informs the development of these tasks and the records of assessment of the formal tasks. Informal assessment tasks were also listed. As part of their planning and preparation of assessment they provided an indication of the learning outcomes and assessment standards assessed in each task. The dates on which the assessments were conducted and completed were also recorded. The participants believed that this would allow them to observe the development and progression of learners over time. A copy of the school's assessment policy and the NCS was also filed in this assessment portfolio for easy reference. The formally recorded assessment tasks were clearly marked and indicated in the participants' portfolios i.e. their assessment files. Two participants used coloured paper while the others used stickers for this purpose.

In recording for reporting purposes on learner achievement national codes were used. The following national codes were used:

- 1- Not achieved
- 2- Satisfactory achievement
- 3- Partial achievement
- 4- Outstanding

Whatever national code was chosen for a learner, the participants also wrote a comment because they believed that the National code became more effective when combined with a comment. The participants also believed that there was more likely to be an improvement in achievement when learners were given a written feedback rather than marks only.

The participants were aware that their portfolios had to be available on request at all times for moderation and accountability purposes. The Head of Department examined the assessment file regularly. If the analysis of the assessment policy, were omitted from my research study then there would have been many unfilled gaps. This analysis also helped me to set out to gather purposeful data, record them in detail and then prepare them for analysis.

5. POPULATION/SAMPLING/SELECTION CRITERIA

According to Merriam (1998) in qualitative research, a sample is selected on purpose to yield the most information about the phenomenon of interest which is assessment in the Foundation Phase as in my research study. This sample comprised of four experienced Foundation Phase educators, (one grade R, one grade one, one grade two and one grade three educator), and the Foundation Phase Head of Department. They were all Indian females because in this particular school, the Foundation Phase educators comprised only of Indian females. Their ages ranged from thirty six to forty nine years and all had over fifteen years of teaching experience in the Foundation Phase. They were exposed to the old method of teaching and the outcomes based education method. A small sample was selected precisely because I intended to explore their understandings of assessment in the Foundation Phase in depth. Furthermore sample size is also determined to some extent by the style of the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001). Studies by Cohen et al. (2001) further reveal that in the qualitative style of research it is more likely that the sample size will be small. I was confident that the Foundation Phase educators chosen would be able to identify issues and problems directly implicated with the assessment policy. In my research study I wanted to concentrate on issues and concerns that arise directly from practice in the classroom with regards to Foundation Phase assessment and to develop it as a case study.

I chose site sampling and according, to Van Manen (1990), site sampling is based on identifying groups of individuals at a site for research purposes and in this research study it involved educators in the Foundation Phase. Five seasoned Foundation Phase educators would certainly provide sufficient data for a small scale study and shed

optimal light on assessment in the Foundation Phase. The five educators identified were willing and available to participate in my research study.

6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ethical issues of informed consent and confidentiality involved in the interviews were cleared with the five participants verbally and by means of a letter, explaining what it was I was doing and why I was doing this research study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001). The participants were also reminded that the research would do no harm to the research subject, whether directly or indirectly.

Lankshear and Knobel (2004) studies reveal that within educational research, ethics is concerned with ensuring that the interests and well-being of participants are not harmed as a result of the research being done. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) also highlights that harm can range from participants experiencing affronts to their dignity and being hurt by conclusions that are drawn about them all the way through to having their reputations or creditability undermined publicly. The participants were assured that the information I was collecting would be confidential, that they would hold the right to refuse permission for it to be printed. I also mentioned that as far as possible I would provide transcripts and replay recordings to the participants if they so desired. I emphasised to each of the participants that I had no intention of trying to influence anybody involved, either positively or negatively. I further stressed that I was only interested in obtaining and exploring their understanding of Foundation Phase assessment. I also reminded the participants that their names, name of their school or other means of identification will be deleted from the data released on individuals. The participants were also informed, verbally and in writing that they were not obliged to take part in the research study and were free to withdraw from the study at any point. All the participants agreed to be interviewed. They also agreed that the interview could be audio-taped and transcribed. They were once again assured that their confidentiality would be respected, they would not be identifiable by anyone reading transcripts of their interviews.

They felt at ease after the detailed discussion of the ethical issues surrounding my research study. A good qualitative study, according to Merriam (1998) is one that has been conducted in an ethical manner.

7. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS RELATED TO FIELDWORK

Gaining access to the school was not a problem as I had anticipated. An appointment was made with the principal, I explained my study and she agreed that I could conduct the research study at that particular school. The letter of permission was signed and I was ready to conduct my research.

However the time factor was the greatest challenge. All educators were busy after school hours and home visits were impossible because they all had family commitments. So I had to be flexible and constantly change my semi-structured interview schedule and observation schedule to suit us all. Keeping to the semi-structured interview schedule proved to be most difficult. There were many changes because of the recovery programme, during the July vacation in 2007, after the educators strike, during June 2007. During the semi-structured interviews the noise from outside the classroom was on tape and this created some difficulty when transcribing the interviews. When tape recording the interviews I noticed that one participant was very uncomfortable and later discovered that she had a phobia for tape recordings. After the interview she insisted on listening to the tape recording, not because of the data given but to listen to her voice. It was also noticed that the participants found themselves re-thinking about what they said. Two admitted that after the interviews they were aware of the gaps between what they wanted to say and what they were able to say. They explained that when asked a question they answered what came to mind but, after the interview, they felt that they could have provided a better answer and a clearer explanation. The fact that the participants showed concern indicated to me that the semi-structured interviews left a mark on the participants.

In one observation session the observation was going on smoothly until, a disruptive learner caused a problem and a lot of time was taken by the educator to attend to the matter. The other learners took a while before they settled down. During one observation session I noticed, the Hawthorne effect, where this particular educator

was trying harder and behaving differently because she knew that she was being observed and being part of a research study. Another educator made great effort to maintain strict discipline during an assessment activity because the learners were constantly reminded by her that I was watching. During the observation I tried taking field notes but because of the large classes, of forty five learners, it proved to be difficult. I could not have my head buried in writing and hence miss many activities and reactions. To video tape the observation seemed impossible because of the overcrowded classes. I must admit that it was a challenge to select data.

Document analysis also posed a problem. All assessment portfolios were to be examined at school, after school hours, because participants were constantly using them for recording purposes. I did not want to rush the participants and had to wait until they had finished their recordings.

Merriam (1998) explains that data are not “out there” awaiting collection. He goes on to explain that data are always constructed by researchers during the research process. As a novice researcher I found it a great challenge to construct data during the research process. I also found that data selection has to be selective and this proved to be a challenge. Data collection is intrusive and time consuming, and participants can easily be made to feel under pressure, inadequate and invaded. I also found it a challenge to answer to educators who were not approached to participate in my study. It seemed as if all the Foundation Phase educators wanted to participate in this study. Therefore, as to not disappoint anyone I decided to conduct a pilot study with the others who were not chosen to participate in the research study. I did not need to interview all the Foundation Phase educators, in that particular school, simply because of the limits of time and data overload.

As a novice researcher I certainly encountered unforeseen difficulties, conflicts and time constraints. But I tend to look at these aspects as personal deficiencies arising from insufficient experience and probably insufficient knowledge and preparation. As a researcher, what I would ideally wish to do and what was possible was obvious in this small scale study. Time was the fundamental constraint in the gathering of data.

8. CONCLUSION

The selected educators who were observed and interviewed play an important role in this study because they provided data. Van Manen (1990) points out that by using personal experiences it can be a good starting point and my experience in the field of teaching was a useful tool in selecting the research participants. Working together in a professional educational setting with the researcher's colleagues was advantageous in this research situation as it created an environment for most of the participants to answer the research questions without hesitation, distraction or interfering external pressure. They understood that we were all in a similar situation trying to understand the Foundation Phase assessment policy.

CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS OF DATA

1. INTRODUCTION

As stated in previous chapters, this research study explores the Foundation Phase educator's understandings of assessment. This case study gave the researcher a rich experience of the reality of what goes on in each of the Foundation Phase grades in this particular school with regards to assessment. The educator's practices of assessment and assessment tasks were the focus of organising data and analysing the rich data that was collected. The selected educators were interviewed, observed and their assessment documents were analysed. These approaches were used to gather data in order to explore the Foundation Phase educator's understandings of assessment. The data generated were categorized into four broad themes, namely, the educator's perceptions of the assessment policy, impact of assessment on the teaching process, impact of assessment on the learning process and the management of the assessment process. The observation of the educator's lessons where assessment tasks were conducted and analysis of their assessment documents helped to confirm the assessment practices at this particular school and this also assisted to compare and contrast data collected. Each theme is presented along with examples of data on which it is based and the inferences drawn from them.

2. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants to gather data on the Foundation Phase educator's perceptions of the assessment policy, the impact of assessment on the teaching process, the impact of assessment on the learning process and the management of the assessment process.

2.1 EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ASSESSMENT POLICY

The participants interviewed indicated that they had a copy of the Department of Education's assessment policy. One participant stressed that she had several copies of this assessment policy, one copy in her assessment file, one copy in her preparation of

lessons file, one copy in her personal file, one copy in her assessment profile, one copy in her assessment information file and one copy on her classroom wall. This was confirmed when the participant's class was visited for the observation and when document analysis was conducted with her assessment records.

All participants revealed that they had been involved in formulating the school's assessment policy. However, they pointed out, that they have not received any support from the Department of Education for the implementation of the assessment policy. It was only in the year, 2007, when a guideline on assessment from the department was made available to them. Prior to the year, 2007, they depended on each others views on how to implement the assessment policy in the Foundation Phase. Presently the educators in the Foundation Phase utilize the assessment policy from the Department in conjunction with the schools assessment policy as a basis for planning of assessments. This is done during the Foundation Phase meetings. During these meetings of the Foundation Phase educators, a discussion also takes place as to what is going to be assessed and what forms the assessment would take, so that there will be uniformity amongst all the Foundation Phases classes in this particular school. There will be uniformity in assessment tasks and the recording of the assessment. One participant made it clear that this particular school only formulated an assessment policy in the Foundation Phase this year (2007) and that previously the educators conducted assessment as what they perceived to be the best way to assess learners.

The semi-structured interviews revealed that the Foundation Phase educators at this particular school share their experiences of assessment and try out the methods of assessment used successfully by the other Foundation Phase educators. This sharing of ideas, according to one of the participants, gives her the confidence that her assessment tasks are authentic. On the other hand, a participant commented, that she needs to air her views not only at the school's Foundation Phase meetings but at meetings conducted at the Department's level as well. Her reason being that although the Foundation Phase educators at this particular school already knew quite a lot about assessment they were not experts in the field of assessment. She felt that she needed guidance from the Department of Education in order to make classroom practice of assessment perfect. She further explained that she wants to find out what

she does not know and needs to know, and to be pointed in the right direction to do something about it.

Three participants admitted that the assessment policy had improved their practice. They made it clear that the assessment policy helped them to be more focussed on the assessment standards. One participant revealed that previously she had no guidelines, with the result her assessment was not structured in an orderly manner. But this year she is more focussed and works towards the assessment standards. Another participant pointed out that the school's assessment policy has helped her to now focus on the assessment standards that she did not previously focus on because she thought it was not important and that actually made her task of assessment more difficult. She further explained that the school's assessment policy guided her to enable learners to be able to demonstrate an understanding of diverse cultures and religions. The school's assessment policy, she feels, is now more structured.

Two participants on the other hand indicated that the Department of Education Assessment Policy has not improved their assessment practice at all. They pointed out that assessment was always done in the past. This Assessment Policy, assessment tasks, is either too simple or much too difficult. Some learners cannot fulfil the requirements of the assessment standards especially with the learners whose mother tongue is not English. A participant believed that this assessment policy is not totally practical. She explains this point made by her by pointing out that too much recording is required and unnecessary assessment standards have to be covered. This increases the workload of the Foundation Phase educators. Catering for all the learners' needs also increases the workload of the Foundation Phase educators. She further explained that in this particular school there existed a far greater linguistic and cultural diversity in the learner population, and this also caused difficulty in re-orientating the Foundation Phase educators thinking and practice. The guidelines provided in the assessment policy are not practical because they did not take into consideration all these types of problems that arise in reality.

It is clear from the data collected from the participants that there are a few common factors that have hindered the implementation of the assessment policy. The common factors that have emerged include class size, lack of space in the classroom, language

barriers, discipline, diverse cultures, age related factors, socio-economic conditions and lack of audio visual aids.

The participants mentioned that the major factor that hinders the implementation of the assessment policy is the large numbers of learners in the classes. They all found it difficult and stressful to control the forty five learners. According to the participants too many petty complaints arise due to the overcrowding of the classroom. One participant made it clear that the lack of space in the classroom made group work and group assessment very difficult especially if it involved practical tasks. She stated that she tried to improvise by taking learners outside the classroom, onto the catwalk next to the classroom, to do the group work but it then became difficult to supervise learners that were left in the classroom and some of them did not do their work, behaved badly and disrupted the other learners. One participant revealed that she did not even attempt peer assessment or group assessment anymore because of the lack of space in the classroom and the large numbers of learners. She attempted to re-arrange furniture to make space but this further caused chaos.

A participant believed that because we live in a country with eleven official languages, learners are expected to learn languages other than their own. We have a situation in this particular school, according to the participant, where some learners enter school without being able to speak and understand the language of instruction of the school which is English. She feels that this is an unfortunate situation because she is unable to speak the learner's mother tongue. The participant then has to ask the help of the school security officer or the cleaning staff to assist her to conduct the assessment task with the learner and this according to her is time consuming. Linguistic appropriateness, from her viewpoint, greatly hinders the implementation of the assessment policy. Another participant expressed her concern about young learners' language abilities, that are limited, and this, according to her may result in the misunderstanding of instructions which would, in turn, lead to false assessment results.

Discipline, according to all the participants, also hinders the implementation of the assessment policy. They all claim that they have a few disruptive learners in their classrooms and feel that these learners actually need professional help, like from a school psychologist, and in this particular school such help is not available. One

participant felt strongly that there are far too many learners that lack discipline and this makes assessment tasks very difficult for the educator to control and complete on time. While I was observing lessons where assessment tasks were conducted I found evidence of these disruptive learners. From my observation I found that some of the learners needed constant reminders to keep on working, to pick up their litter, to sit up straight and to stop disturbing other busy learners. This certainly added to the educators' responsibility in the classroom. I also observed that one learner sang while engaged in the assessment task. The learner found it difficult to heed to the numerous reminders of the educator to stop singing in the class while the other learners were busy with their assessment tasks.

Responses that have emerged about age related factors include that learners are sometimes disadvantaged when they are not working with other learners who are of the same age group as themselves. The example that one participant used was that of being in a grade one class, in this particular school, where some learners have not even turned seven whereas others are already seven years old. This, according to the participant, meant that the educator is required to work with a class of seven year olds who will need to be thinking about the work across a six year range. The educator has to set assessment tasks keeping in mind that the six years old and seven years old have to be catered for.

Socio-economic factors also emerged as a factor that hindered the implementation of the assessment policy. According to three of the participants, learners that are in their classes do not carry lunch to school and are often hungry. So lunch has to be provided for them and this becomes the educators' responsibility. Some learners do not have stationery such as pritt, scissors coloured pencils and the school does not provide this and this also becomes the educators' responsibility to provide the necessary stationery for the learners.

Another factor that hinders the implementation of the assessment policy is audio visual aids. According to all the participants' audio recording and video recording which will be so valuable for assessment are not available at school. One participant felt that video recordings of learners' activities during assessment will certainly assist to point out to learners how they can improve and this can improve the assessment

results. Another participant believed that learners could observe their behaviour patterns, behaviour of speakers and non-speakers. This, according to her will assist in developing good listening skills in learners who have poor listening skills and the learners themselves can see where they went wrong. She also pointed out that a video recording could provide a comprehensive means of assessing learners' activities especially in the large Foundation Phase classroom. Another participant explained that a video recording could also provide means by which an individual educator's judgement could be compared to the views of other educators via a group viewing session and follow up discussion. She concluded that this video recording could also assist an educator with the recording of the assessment tasks especially if it was for an observation. The participants strongly felt that not having the video recording or audio recording can really hinder the implementation of the assessment policy.

2.2. IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT ON THE TEACHING PROCESS

All the participants admitted that assessment had helped them better recognise the progress of their learners. According to the participants learners were now being assessed on a regular basis and the assessment tasks have helped to recognise the levels at which the learners were performing. One participant found that peer assessment, observation, group assessment, oral assessment and written assessments, assisted her to evaluate the planning and effectiveness of her teaching. She further explained that assessment served the purpose of reinforcement and feedback to the learners so that the learners knew how they were getting on. She also believed that her assessments guided her to provide the child with more difficult work of the same kind allowing the learner to use the skills and ideas already developed and as a result extending them. Another participant stated that assessment provides her with the evidence that confirms the learners' competence and this allows her to move the learner on to something different.

One participant believed quite strongly that assessment helps her to serve as part of her accountability when she provides information to the parents about their child's progress. She mentioned that she also used the learners' portfolios as the visible proof of the development and improvement of learner achievement. According to her, assessment also helped her to provide learners with an indication of their individual

achievements and progress and maybe give them an idea of ways in which they can improve their results. One participant responded by stressing that assessment informs her and enables her to decide what a learner should do next and carefully plan her tasks. Assessment, she felt, allows her to make decisions about lesson planning being more effective as the learners' progress can be easily recognised. She explained that the information gathered about learning numeric concepts, for example, over a certain time enables the educator to become aware of the learner's progress and definitely influences her planning of further experiences. She added that she uses many ways of collecting information about her learners and this assists her to better recognise the progress of her learners.

One participant reminds us that in the Foundation Phase there has always been difficulty in testing young learners accurately. She feels strongly that she cannot agree fully that she is able to recognise learners' strengths and weakness and problems since implementing the assessment policy. The use of tests, according to this participant, is not always reliable. Informal observation provides her with a more accurate evaluation of literacy and life skills. She finds that the use of checklists can serve as a guide for observation and helps her to keep track of learner's progress. She indicates that in her experience she finds that correcting or criticising learners' work does not facilitate their progress.

However, the other four participants claim that they are better able to recognise the learners' strengths, weakness and problems since implementing the assessment policy. One participant reveals that her assessment results become her guidelines for planning her teaching process. She states that because an educator has to assess the level of development, potential and behaviour of every learner in the Foundation Phase class, the educator can plan activities to fulfil every learner's needs. She also uses her assessment results as a starting point when planning her lessons and choosing her assessment standards and learning outcomes. She also claims that the assessment results are important to her because it gives her a clear direction to plan her remedial work.

Another participant pointed out that since implementing the assessment policy she now has a more clear direction in lesson planning and can plan her lessons to be

appropriately tailored to address learners' strengths and areas of weakness. Furthermore, she is able to support learners in their areas of weakness so that they can improve next assessment results. After all, according to her, the assessment of learners is also a reflection on her as an educator and of the school.

One participant makes it clear that since the implementation of the assessment policy she is able to recognise the learners' strength, weakness and problem areas and this has improved her teaching methods. According to her, the improvement of teaching is regarded as a very important reason for assessment which in turn is regarded as a cornerstone for effective teaching. This participant further claims that in order to be able to meet the needs of every learner and to help them to achieve their full potential, the educator must have a through knowledge of each individual learner. For learners to become confident and positive towards learning it is also very important for an educator to offer support to those learners who are struggling to cope. Remedial work must be done with the learners who are struggling so that they can cope with the work. They must also be given individual attention.

Responses that have emerged with regards to recording the observation of learners is that one participant indicated that observation is one of the most important methods of gathering information about a learner in the Foundation Phase class and observation is more than mere looking and seeing. A checklist must be used for observation and that can be done while assessment is in progress. Although assessment is to do with record keeping information about how well the learners are doing, it has to be done after school hours. After all, according to this participant an educator has to record in an orderly manner and this takes time and adds to the workload of an educator. Furthermore, in this particular school no educator is allowed to sit during contact time.

Another participant confirmed this statement about an educator not being allowed to sit during contact time and she records observation roughly and then redoes the recording after school hours in her assessment file and she too feels that this just adds to an educator's workload and is time consuming. She also mentioned that large numbers makes recording difficult. According to this participant, learners have to be watched all the time and as soon as the educator's head is buried in the book and the learners are not watched discipline suffers. One participant alleges that the informal

assessment actually helps learners to recognise their own strengths and weakness and formal assessment helps the educator to recognise learners' strengths and weakness.

All the participants indicated that assessment in the Foundation Phase has assisted them in planning future assessment programmes. One participant reported that when she plans assessment she also takes into account that many learners in her class don't have stationery. So when planning activities she has to think about what stationery the learners have. This participant also believes that the number of assessment tasks is now more quantitative in nature than qualitative. She feels that the number of assessment tasks for the term is a bit too many. Another participant reported that as an educator you become more aware of the personal needs of the learners and what methods of assessment would be more appropriate, workable and do-able. This has to be considered, according to her, because assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase class. The common factor that interferes with learning, she admits, was language and she had to be assisted by the other Foundation Phase educators to plan assessment tasks especially for learners who could not speak English. The other participant explained that the assessment assisted her in finding the direction for future planning of the lessons. She suggests that the activities of assessment itself are not as important as what comes before and after it but the preparation which is done for assessment and the feedback that follows up.

All participants claim that assessment enabled them to explore the curriculum more fully. They admit that they do assess more practical work than before and that they place more emphasis on skills and processes. One participant admitted that in previous years she did not conduct fieldwork but now she conducts fieldwork, although she encounters one major problem and that is to control the large number of learners in her class. Two participants felt that because they were not given guidance from the department they had to read the policy documents carefully and make constant reference to it when preparing their lessons with the result this constant reference enabled them to explore the curriculum more fully.

2.3 IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT ON THE LEARNING PROCESS

One participant explained that assessment has now a positive experience and a fundamental feature of teaching and successful learning. Assessment according to her helps the educator to support the learner and improve the progress of the learner. Another participant said that assessment is a central feature of the learning process. By careful consideration of assessment procedures we can improve learners' learning experience. Assessment assists in central procedures for establishing and monitoring the accountability process. This participant further explained that educators today are being held increasingly accountable for their learners' progress and assessment is the central feature of the teaching and learning process. By careful consideration of the assessment process we can improve learners' learning experiences as well as satisfy the demands of accountability.

Assessment tasks need to challenge and stimulate learners to try harder, to aim higher and achieve better results. The learners are better motivated to learn when they feel that they are part of the process.

A participant pointed out that assessment helps learners review their learning and the learners build their individual strengths throughout the assessment process. Learners tend to maintain standards if they are given constant feedback about their progress. However the educator must be tactful and must always present a positive feedback to learners. This helps learners to take responsibility of their own learning and understanding of what is required of them. When learners are given a positive feedback about tasks they tend to enjoy the tasks. There is evidence when learners progress that they apply the knowledge and skills that they gained in assessment. Being in the Foundation Phase the learners' attitudes vary towards assessment results. Some learners show great joy with good results while others show disappointment with themselves but there are also those that simply don't care about the results.

2.4. MANAGEMENT OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The participants explained that the school's assessment policy states when the assessments are to be conducted. The school's assessment policy also states how often

assessments should be conducted and this is all in keeping with the Department of Education Assessment Policy. The types of assessment are planned in advance so learners do not get bored with only one type of assessment. Assessments should be planned, implemented, recorded and reported in a systematic way. One participant makes it clear that it was only in this year (2007) that she followed a more systematic approach to assessment because this was the only year that the Foundation Phase educators drew up an assessment policy. She admits that it is very important to plan assessments in advance and by doing this it also helps to plan lessons in a more structured fashion and observe learners' progress of learning. This planning also helps this participant to become more aware of what form her assessment are to be prepared and also assists her to understand what is expected from the learner at the end of a particular time frame.

Participants all agreed that although there was a time frame allocated for tasks, but they cater for the slow learners and allow them extra time to complete a task. They all admit that they are not strict with the time allocation for the tasks. When it comes to dates for the projects some learners bring their projects earlier because they have completed it and some learners bring their projects later than the due dates. One participant pointed out the learner is not even penalized for not adhering to the due dates because one has to consider the learners' home backgrounds. They have to recognise the effort that the learner put into the work.

All participants agree that their school has developed a more systematic policy of assessment only this year (2007). The school's assessment policy guides the Foundation Phase educators as to when an assessment should be conducted and due dates for the submission of the schedules. One participant pointed out that previously there was no such thing as the school's assessment policy and emphasis was only placed on schedules and reports to parents. Now there are set dates for summative and formative assessment. However she reminds us, that these dates only act as guidelines as to when such assessment should be completed. Another participant felt that the systematic approach of assessment, this year, was only possible because all the Foundation Phase educators, at this particular school, made the effort to draw up the school's assessment policy and this involved a lot of effort on the part of the

educators. She also pointed out that they had to consult the National Curriculum Statement.

Three participants agreed that this school has created opportunities for the assessment exercise to be transparent and that their learners were clear on assessment criteria. The other two participants believed that their learners were far too young to be able to understand assessment criteria and felt that they should just concentrate on the aspects that the learners should be tested on and not really worry about explaining the assessment criteria to the learners because they felt strongly that this was time consuming.

All participants were in agreement that the school created opportunities for parents to be informed on procedures of the assessment and were provided with a detailed feedback after assessments were conducted. According to the participants reports were issued on a quarterly basis in other words at the end of each term. Parents were also invited to an open day for the parents to raise issues of concern and the educators had to inform parents of their plan of work for the term.

Two participants mentioned that continuous assessment is practiced in each learning area and the NCS provides guidelines prescribing exactly what should be done and according to these participants this is strictly adhered to. Furthermore they believed that informal assessments are being continually conducted in the course of daily teaching. So the participants felt that educators do assessment all the time, even though all is not recorded in the assessment file but assessment is taking place and when it comes to the final assessment all this is taken into consideration. One participant firmly believed that when considering what forms of assessment are to be used in any situation it was necessary to consider two questions. According to her the questions to ask are who needs to know and what information is needed. She claims that this is most important to consider when deciding what types of assessment strategies to employ in the classroom.

Observation was regarded by all the participants as unproblematic. But they revealed that educators need to explore the skills of observation. Observation requires a well planned observation schedule or one that has already been planned. All the

participants admitted that they preferred to use an observation schedule that has already been planned and these are usually found in Teachers Guides and Foundation Phase resource books published by reputable publishers. These observation schedules assisted them further to develop observational competence in the classroom. They used observation schedules for formal assessments, practical activities and in problem solving activities.

Their oral work comprised of story telling, show and tell, make and tell, telling the class a riddle, phonic work, flash work all of which were normally assessed by peers. Written work such as sentence construction, story writing, daily news, diaries, book reviews, film reviews and language exercises were assessed as group assessment. Other forms of testing, either formal or informal activities, were assessed by the educators themselves. This included quizzes and projects. There was a definite need for the educators to assess these activities. One participant admitted that she experienced a problem with peer assessment because she had found, on numerous occasions that, some learners tend to cheat by changing the answers. Another participant finds assessment open and transparent but sometimes self assessments are a problem because learners say they understand a concept or method but the assessment results reveal that they do not understand the aspect.

Four of the participants felt a need to re-arrange their classroom furniture when engaging in assessment. They re-arrange their classroom furniture when learners participate in creative activities or when they do dance movement or respond to movement to a variety of rhythms and changes in tempo in sounds, songs and stories. Classroom furniture is also re-arranged when learners need to participate in drama, listen and move creatively to music or when learners respond to fantasy ideas through movement and to express their feelings and moods. On the other hand two participants made it quite clear that it was impractical to re-arrange furniture because they have limited space in their classroom, so they just go outside to do these activities and they felt re-arranging furniture in the classroom causes a lot of chaos in the class and learners then find a chance to misbehave.

3. OBSERVATION

Observation of assessment activities were conducted in a grade R, a grade one, a grade two and a grade three class. The assessment activity in the grade R class was based on sequencing of pictures of a story, the grade one class assessment activity focussed on learners identifying, drawing and colouring the South African flag and the grade two assessment activities involved solving money problems involving totals and change in rand and cents. The question that the grade three educators developed and used for the assessment activity was based on mathematical number sequence, 2D and 3D objects and word problems.

The assessment tasks set were in keeping with the requirements of the assessment policy of the Department of Education. Learners were purposefully occupied. All the participants were able to maintain discipline throughout the lesson although a few learners needed to be reminded to focus on the assessment task. In the grade two and grade three classes some learners were reminded more than once to concentrate on their activity. When there was a need to discipline the disruptive learners, statements, such as “No talking/ no playing/no clicking of tongues and complete all your work”, was made by the participants. These disruptive learners were further encouraged to take responsibility for their work and they were reminded that they will be rewarded for their effort and good results. It took some time in the grade three class for learners to settle down to work after the disruption. The few learners in grade R and grade three classes that needed assistance from the participants to complete their assessment tasks were duly assisted by the educator. However the participants guarded against the kind of assistance they gave the learners as they reminded the learners that this assessment task should be viewed as a follow up activity to the work covered during the learning tasks.

My observation revealed that the educators did not change seating arrangements when engaging in assessment. The assessment activities were conducted as the learners were arranged in their normal seating positions. The educators followed a systematic approach to assessment and the educators kept precisely to time allocation for the assessment tasks. Only the grade three participants allowed learners extra time to complete the assessment task.

Most of the learners were prepared sufficiently for their assessment tasks and only a few had to borrow stationery. Learners understood the assessment tasks because all the participants clearly explained to the learners what was expected of them to complete the tasks. Learners were given clear explanation of the assessment criteria on which they were to be assessed. The participants seemed to be aware of those learners whose first language was not the language of instruction (i.e. English) and the participants made an attempt to ensure that those learners understood what was required. All learners understood so there was no need for the participants to instruct learners in another language. Most of the learners coped with the assessment tasks. Assessment tasks in grade R and grade one were not graded. However the assessment tasks in grade two and grade three were graded so that the lower ability learners could attempt some of them and the higher ability learners would be challenged. There was clear evidence that only the grade one assessment task catered for cultural diversity. The learning outcomes for this grade one assessment task was that the learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to constitutional rights and responsibilities and show an understanding of diverse cultures and religions

My observation also revealed that assessment tasks were mostly conducted in a relaxed environment that encouraged learners to view their assessment task as a follow up activity to the work covered during the learning task. The classroom's environments were conducive to learning and reference charts were on display on the classroom walls. In the grade three classroom the participant walked around the like an invigilator, the only difference was that she stopped to assist those who needed assistance. This participant also ensured that all learners completed their work before collecting the scripts.

From my observation I concluded that the participants had a good understanding of outcomes based assessment and the relevant departmental policies as well as a good understanding of the relevant assessment principles. There was a lot of evidence to suggest that the participants attempted to embrace all forms of assessment as listed in the National Curriculum Statement document. There were clearly defined assessment criteria. The learning outcomes that were being tested were brought to the learners' attention when necessary and attempts were made to identify different levels of

learner performance, for example, by using questions of varying difficulty. In my observation I found no evidence that learners did not do well because of their poor English skills because the participants did their best to accommodate this barrier in assessment practices because they inquired from learners if they understood what was required of them. The participants utilized and seemed to appreciate the potential of the well- structured assessment tasks as set out by the NCS document to help learners learn effectively.

The well structured assessment tasks with the marks allocated indicated to me that there was a need for the participants to produce marks for the end of term feedback to parents and management. They were serious about their accountability. The participants enforced discipline in their classroom and showed concern for order in the classroom while the assessment task was in progress. The well designed assessment tasks contributed to support the learning of the learners. The participants' approach to the assessment tasks were clearly influenced by their experience as Foundation Phase educators. Being experienced Foundation Phase educators there were no communication barriers because they had a good knowledge of the assessment theory. Although it was relatively short, observation evidence indicated that the participants' assessment practices were successful. The participants' observed assessment practices appeared to be highly consistent.

The observation provided authentic data that could not readily be obtained through the semi-structured interviews, for example, the participants would not admit that there was a need to raise their voice at least once during the assessment task to get the attention of the disruptive learners, which of course was not in the policy.

4. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Recording of assessment in the Foundation Phase is an important aspect of assessment. Analysis of the participants' assessment documents was undertaken to provide additional insight into each participant's assessment practices. The participants in this study recorded their assessment by using an Assessment File and the Learners' Portfolio.

All the participants utilized the Assessment File in which performance of the learners are recorded. The Assessment File contained the learner's name, dates of assessment, name and description of the assessment activity according to the learning outcome and assessment standard, the results of the assessment activities and comments for support purposes. The comments were used by the participants to develop support strategies for learners. Codes were used in expressing how learners were performing against expected assessment standards and learning outcomes. The assessment file contained a detailed record of the assessment undertaken and how the learners performed in terms of the assessment standards. This assessment file is used to record evidence of performance of the learners' needs to contain enough details in order for the educator to have personal knowledge of the learner. The participants' assessment file was clearly divided into the relevant sections and the contents were relevant to the purposes of recording. Duplication was avoided and a detailed record was kept of the learner's performance, based on the assessment made by educators, peer group or the learner himself or herself.

The learner's portfolio is also an important tool for record purposes and reflects the development as well as the improvement of the learner. From reviewing the learner's portfolios, there appeared to be a collection of evidence of the learner's assessment activity which included drawings, cutting and pasting, collages, written assessments etc. belonging to the learner. Incomplete work was also placed in the learner's portfolios. The learner's portfolio included a table of contents, description of the task and the learning outcomes and assessment standards. Each activity was clearly dated. By examining the dates of the assessment activities there was visible proof that these portfolios were built over a period of time from the beginning of the year. This was the evidence of learner achievement for continuous assessment. This collection was kept in a file. The portfolios were unique to every learner as every learner is different.

It was evident that the participants in this study kept records of assessment that were easily accessible and provided insights into individual learners' progress. The participants were able to align recording assessment with policy and apply reporting of assessment as stipulated by Department of Education Assessment policy. Their records included information on the holistic development of the learner, such as academic achievement as well as the development of values and skills.

5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has focussed on the analysis of data gathered on Foundation Phase educators' perception of the assessment process, the impact of assessment on the teaching and learning process and the management of the assessment process. The chapter that follows will present the findings of and recommendations to the study.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research study was to explore the Foundation Phase educators' understandings of assessment. The research study intended to provide Foundation Phase educators with a degree of clarity in the assessment process, in this period of considerable change. However, one needs to remember that the process of assessment is determined by the National Curriculum Statement, and should always be upheld and supplemented in this form.

2. FINDINGS

The findings in this research study are important because they can provide some indication of how the Foundation Phase educators can be assisted to deal with assessment challenges they now face.

The summary below provides information on some of the main findings of the study.

2.1. EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ASSESSMENT POLICY

- Reaction to the demands of assessment in the National Curriculum Statement resulted in an increased amount of uncertainty at this school, until February 2007 when the Education Bulletin was made available to the school.
- It was found that although participants were now able to focus on assessment there was an increase in the workload for the Foundation Phase educators. Much of the paperwork that Foundation Phase educators are required to do is designed to ensure that assessment occurs regularly, requiring that Foundation Phase educators indicate the completion of assessment standards and learning outcomes and provide a detailed recording of the results. This increase in the workload of educators was also noted in the Educator Workload Report in South Africa (2005).

- It is also important to note that there was a need for specialists in the field of assessment in the Foundation Phase. These specialists should be available to assist and guide Foundation Phase educators in the assessment process.
- Some Foundation Phase learners cannot fulfil all the requirements of the assessment standards especially by the learners whose first language is not that of instruction (i.e. English).
- Many Foundation Phase educators expressed that the other factors that hindered the implementation of the assessment policy are large number of learners in a class, lack of space in the classroom, poor discipline, diverse cultures, age related factors, socio-economic conditions and the lack of audio-visual aids in the classroom and other resource limitations.
- By assessing learners on regular basis, educators are able to recognise progress of learners and this influences the planning of future assessment tasks.

2.2. IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT ON THE TEACHING PROCESS

- It was found that assessment helped the Foundation Phase educators better recognise the progress of the learners and the assessment results provide a more clear direction in lesson planning.
- It is also important to note that some participants pointed out that observation is the most important method of gathering information about a learner in the Foundation Phase class.
- A participant suggested that the assessments itself are not as important as what comes before and after it but rather, the preparation which is done for the assessment and the feedback that follows up. This is in correlation to the findings of Seiborger and Macintosh (1998) in which they also emphasised the importance of proper preparation and feedback during assessment.
- All participants claimed that assessment enabled them to explore the curriculum more fully.

2.3. IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT ON THE LEARNING PROCESS

- Many Foundation Phase educators admit that they are held increasingly accountable for learner progress.
- The participants admit that assessment is the central feature of the teaching and learning process.
- The participants believe that the Foundation Phase learners tend to maintain standards or improve standards of achievements if they were given constant feedback about their progress.
- The participants found that learners' attitudes vary towards assessment results.

2.4. MANAGEMENT OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- The participants agree that assessment should be planned, implemented, recorded and reported in a systematic way.
- It was found in this study that parents are provided with a detailed feedback about assessment.
- Some participants felt that the records are kept for the Foundation Phase educator's own use and others felt that the records are used to monitor the progress made by learners and for accountability purposes. Jansen (1999) and Brown (2003) have also found that educators believe that assessment can be viewed as means by which the school's accountability can be measured.
- It is also important to note that reporting involved the presentation of the information about the learner and his or her subsequent academic progress.
- Foundation Phase educators viewed the recording and reporting of information about the learner's progress as an integral part of the assessment process.
- The participants believed that there is a need for assessment to be open and transparent and assessment must not be viewed as an isolated activity.
- The participants believed that re-arranging furniture when engaging in assessment activities were optional and was left to the individual educator's choice and views depending on what required resources were available and that there was sufficient space.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study reveals that there is a dire need for support from the Department of Education. There is a need for regular workshops to be conducted by the Department of Education on assessment strategies to ensure its effective implementation. These workshops should empower the Foundation Phase educators on assessment. It is important that the Department of Education utilize the services of experienced and competent Foundation Phase educators and policy makers in the workshops so that maximum benefit can be derived by the Foundation Phase educators.

Foundation Phase subject advisors should ensure that the Foundation Phase cluster groups, (network of Foundation Phase educators in an area) are functioning efficiently and meeting on a regular basis so that new ideas and problems concerned with assessment can be addressed. This should foster co-operation among Foundation Phase educators on assessment issues. Many of the interpretations represented by the participants' comments implied that there should be visits by the Foundation Phase subject advisors on a regular basis to schools to ensure that schools are adhering to the implementation of the Foundation Phase assessment policy. Assistance should be offered to schools experiencing difficulties in the implementation process.

Parents require the learners' assessment information. Parents have to become major role players in educational assessment by becoming more knowledgeable about how to construct and evaluate their own children's assessment at school and at home. The Foundation Phase educators who can talk sensibly to parents about assessment related concerns will find that they are able to establish more effective educational rapport with parents. Assessment literate Foundation Phase educators should attempt to provide parents with assessment knowledge. Assessment should be used to get sufficient information about learners' achievement and how they can improve their performance and this should form the basis for the information given to the parents.

There is evidence, in this study, that the assessment has been concerned with the recording of information about the learners. The Foundation Phase educators find themselves in an educational arena completely dominated by accountability. Therefore the recording of assessment should emphasize achievement and have

positive remarks rather than a negative result. The recording is time consuming but it should be a natural and valued part of the learning process. Electronic record keeping should be made available to all Foundation Phase educators to minimise time spent on updating records. This time can be utilised in a more profitable manner aimed towards enhancing learning in the classroom.

The learners should play an active part in the assessment process. Learners should be clear about what is expected of them and have some understanding of what is necessary to achieve success. Learners must also know how they can assess their own achievements. When Foundation Phase educators plan assessment tasks they must take into account the wide range of individual learners' needs including those associated with the learners' vernacular and cultural background. As Foundation Phase educators see how learners approach assessment tasks they learn about their own teaching methods. The more information Foundation Phase educators obtain about how learners perform the more capacity they have to rethink and evaluate their teaching methods and to improve with time. Assessment should only take place in the Foundation Phase class after an instructional sequencing that has been pre-defined by the Foundation Phase educator. In this way, all individuals involved can experience the benefits of an organised and structured learning process.

4. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the aims of the process of assessment, are diagnostic (to help learners learn), to help Foundation Phase educators evaluate the effectiveness of their own teaching and to provide information of the learner's progress to parents and management. The focus of the Foundation Phase educators was on recognition and acknowledgement of learner achievement. The participants, in this study, tried their best to implement the Department of Education's assessment policy despite the barriers. Their experience and dedication assisted them in overcoming most of the obstacles they encountered. The Foundation Phase educators were successful in forming a link between the assessment process, the teaching process and the learning process. The Foundation Phase educators at this particular school coped well with the management of the Foundation Phase assessment process.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE FOUNDATION
PHASE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT AND FOUR FOUNDATION PHASE
EDUCATORS**

A. EDUCATOR'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE ASSESSMENT POLICY

1. Do you have a copy of the Department of Education's assessment policy for the Foundation Phase?

2. Have you been involved in formulating the school's assessment policy?

3. In what ways have you received support in trying to implement the Department of Education's assessment policy?
 - ...in terms of choosing modes of assessment?
 - ...in developing assessment skills?
 - ...were you provided with an opportunity to air your concerns about assessment?

4. Do you feel that the Department of Education's assessment policy has improved your practice?
 - ...in what ways?
 - ...why not
 - ... did it re-orientate your thinking and practice?

5. What factors have hindered your implementation of the Department of Education's assessment policy?
 - ...class size?
 - ...language barriers?
 - ...lack of material and physical resources e.g. textbooks and paper to run out worksheets?

D. MANAGEMENT OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

11. Do you follow a more systematic approach to assessment?
 - ...do you plan when assessment should be conducted?
 - ...do you plan in advance how often you do an assessment?
 - ...do you plan the types of assessment to offer?
 - ...time allocated for tasks?
 - ... due dates for collection of tasks?
 - ...do learners adhere strictly to due dates?

12. To what extent has your school developed a more systematic policy of assessment?
 -to determine when assessment should be made?
 -to determine when marks are to be submitted?

13. Has your school created opportunities for the assessment exercise to be transparent?
 - ...are learners clear on assessment criteria?
 - ...are parents informed on procedures, provided with feedback?

14. What types of assessment strategies do you employ in your classroom?
 - ...group assessment?
 - ...peer assessment?
 - ...educator assessment only?

15. Is there a need for you to re-arrange your classroom when engaging in assessment strategies?
 - ...group assessment?
 - ...peer assessment?

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE (A)

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE (B)

PART B

OBSERVATION RECORD: (USING NARRATIVE)

1. Did the educators change seating arrangements when engaging in assessment?
2. Did the educators follow a more systematic approach to assessment? E.g. keeping to time allocation for the assessment task.
3. Were learners prepared sufficiently for the assessment task? Did they have their own pen/pencil, ruler, pritt and scissors?
4. Did learners understand the assessment task?
5. Were learners given clear outcomes based criteria according to which the work would be assessed?
6. Was there a need for learners to be instructed in another language?
7. Did learners cope with the assessment tasks?

8. Were the assessment tasks graded?

9. What did the assessment task focus on?

10. Were different types of assessments used to cater for all learners?

11. Did the assessment task cater for cultural diversity?

12. Did the educators cope with large number of learners in their class and practice direct supervision?

13. Describe the classroom environment while assessment was in progress?

14. Did the educator engage in recording of the assessment in the classroom?

15. How did the educator view the assessment task?

INFORMED CONSENT

***PERMISSION TO CONDUCT
RESEARCH AT SCHOOL***

INFORMED CONSENT

***PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE
IN RESEARCH STUDY***

