

BERNARD MANDLA NGCOBO

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT OF THE ISIZULU LEARNING
AREA IN GRADE 9.

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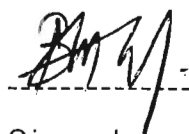
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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that "An investigation into the implementation of portfolio assessment of the Isizulu learning area in grade 9" is my own work and that all sources consulted and quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



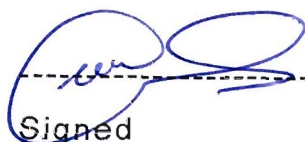
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2009

Bernard Mandla Ngcobo.

Statement by supervisor.

This mini dissertation is submitted with/without my approval.



Signed

Dr Combrinck M.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this piece of work to my parents, my mother, Nelisiwe Patricia Ngcobo and my father, Robert Moniwa Ngcobo. A special dedication is also attributed to my family, my wife, Sibongile Joyce Ngcobo and my two sons, Minenhle and Lwazi.

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ABSTRACT

The research on implementation of portfolio assessment as part of continuous assessment (CASS), came about as I noticed the enormous challenges faced by educators as a result of implementation of the new curriculum, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). As an educator, I have been curious to form an understanding of other educators' level of knowledge of the NCS policy as well as the extent of its implementation at school.

During the research process, I have focused on portfolio assessment in order to understand the level of other educators' understanding of this form of assessment of learners, as well as the educators' shortcomings in the implementation of portfolio assessment in the classroom.

The main findings of the research indicate a lack of understanding of the assessment policy amongst the educators. This tends to demotivate educators on policy implementation. This is more so as some of the educators interviewed indicated that they are not able to interact with the assessment policy document when planning.

Some of the recommendations include the involvement of the department of education to help develop educators at school level. This could be done by employing learning area specialists with the intention to assist in the development of educators at school.

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CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction

The demise of apartheid after the 1994 national elections heralded huge changes in the field of education. Previously education was divided along racial lines. When the Nationalist government came to power in 1948, they implemented the Bantu Education Act of 1948, which intended to make black people subservient.

Throughout the years, particularly in South Africa, the school curriculum as policy has always been used as the state mechanism to entrench its political vision. With the ANC government coming to power in 1994, the curriculum was transformed. The focus now shifted to the provision of education that promotes democratic principles and equality before the law. The intention was to unite all citizens of the country to work for a prosperous South Africa and, to achieve this goal, Curriculum 2005 (C2005) was launched in 1997, modeled on Outcomes Based Education (OBE) as the underlying principle.

In 2000, a committee was set up in order to review C2005. There was a lot of confusion and a number of concerns pertaining to the implementation. Chisholm (2004) argues that some of the problems with C2005 were the use of complex language, inadequate resources and a lack of teacher preparation and training. Gulting, Hoadley and Jansen (2002) argue that too much focus on integration of the various branches of knowledge resulted in the neglect of conceptual coherence and progress. This was crippling for crucial subjects like mathematics because there was a growing tendency to focus on non mathematics skills thus jeopardising the grasp of central skills and concepts.

Gulting et al. (2002), further argue that the new curriculum failed to specify what it was that teachers actually needed to teach. They claim that there was a danger of teachers missing out on delivering

content key to understanding and development. This in fact is what happened.

C2005 was reviewed and resulted in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) which became national policy in 2002 and was due for implementation in 2004.

According to Harley and Wedekind in Chisholm, (2004:192), the new curriculum was, as in the past, intended to serve as an instrument for a new political vision. The new NCS heralded revolutionary changes in education, particularly in terms of assessment of learners, because it called for a different understanding of teaching and learning. With the advent of NCS, there was a shift from traditional assessment practices which were mostly summative and norm referenced, to criterion referenced assessment which provides more information about learners' competences in particular areas.

The latest form of assessment, which is continuous in nature, and emphasises the learning process, is outcomes-based. According to Le Grange and Reddy (1998) continuous assessment (CASS) is more formative than summative. With CASS, the educator is challenged to utilise a variety of teaching and assessment strategies in class which results in a variety of skills being assessed amongst learners. Le Grange and Reddy (1998) highlight this fact when they argue that assessment must focus on the development of all the domains of the child which includes cognitive and psychomotor domains.

The National Policy on Assessment for NCS (1996) embraces the principles which lend weight to the assessment procedures. The listed principles highlight that assessment must be:

- reliable and valid,
- continuous,
- fair and transparent,
- flexible and focused.

The reliability of an assessment procedure is evident in how consistently the procedure produces the same information (Henning-Stout, 1994). Henning-Stout (1994) also define validity in assessment as the extent to which the assessment procedure measures what it intends to measure.

The assessment of learners must be continuous, implying that it must not be a once-off event and the learners must be assessed by the educator on a daily basis, either formally or informally. The outcome is that various skills are developed amongst the learners.

The assessment of learners must be fair in the sense that the level of development of the learners must be taken into consideration. It must be transparent, in other words, able to assess the skills that learners have been exposed to. The learners must be assessed on what they have been taught. They must not be caught off guard, but must be made aware of what is to be assessed and also how and when the assessment will proceed.

The assessment of learners must be flexible and capable of being focused on assessing all the skills that need to be developed in the learner. Assessment must allow enough room for creativity and innovation amongst learners and must be focused towards particular outcomes.

The creation of portfolios is significant for the educator who collects and keeps all the work done by the learner in class.

According to Le Grange and Reddy (1998) "All the information about what the learner has done can be kept in a common portfolio which can be used for CASS by all the teachers in a given grade". Vavrus in Lubisi (1999) defines portfolios as "a systematic and organized collection of evidence used by the teacher and students to monitor growth of student knowledge, skills and attitudes". Two sets of

portfolios should be kept by schools, learner and teacher portfolios. According to the National Protocol on Assessment (2005), the learner portfolios should be used to:

- i. track progress, growth and achievement of the learner with regard to expected outcomes:
- ii. create an opportunity for the learner to reflect on his/her growth and development and the setting of goals for self-development:
- iii. and inform the learner about teachers' planning as well as intervention strategies.

A teacher's portfolio is a compilation and record of all the tasks for school based assessment.

1.2 Focus of the study

The focus of the study is on portfolio assessment as part of the new policy on assessment. The revolutionary changes in education brought about by transformation within the country, has brought about new challenges for both teachers and learners. This study focuses on implementation of portfolio assessment of isiZulu at Grade 9 level. The intention is to ascertain whether educators are able to implement portfolio assessment successfully. The focus on IsiZulu was also determined by the fact that it is part of the researcher's teaching specialisation.

1.3 Research problem

The means of assessing learners continuously is not properly implemented in previously disadvantaged schools. The researcher has observed that the assessment of learners and the reporting to the parents of learners' performances have focused only on summative formal testing programmes. This tends to place the learners in an untenable position in school, as some of the marks they accumulate through the year are not accounted for. These marks should also be included in the formal report to the parents.

The researcher has also observed during implementation of portfolio assessment, that there is no consistency between what is intended in the curriculum and the actual practice during implementation. There is no clear understanding amongst the teachers on policy matters which guide the proper implementation of portfolio assessment in the classroom. The researcher's interest is to examine the teachers' understanding of portfolio assessment.

It is only in Grade 12 where we have a formal programme of assessment to monitor continuous assessment as a result of departmental intervention. This indicates a lack of awareness in terms of assessment policy matters. This is not supposed to happen because the NCS maintains that various skills amongst all learners at school must be developed as a result of continuous assessment. This will be made possible by having created portfolios for each learner at school, particularly in Grade 9 as it is the exit point to Further Education and Training (FET). At the end of Grade 9, portfolio assessment in its formative capacity needs to have identified the skills possessed by individual learners as they move to various FET streams.

We do not have teacher clusters in Grade 9 where teachers are supposed to share information pertaining to their assessment programmes. This problem persists in all the other grades at school except Grade 12. The focus at school is on Grade 12, where the proper implementation of portfolio assessment is monitored by district specialists.

1.4 Research questions

The questions that the researcher intends to address in this study are the following:

- i. Do the teachers possess adequate knowledge and skills to implement portfolio assessment in Grade 9 - IsiZulu?

- ii. What challenges exist for teachers in the implementation of portfolio assessment in Grade 9 - IsiZulu?
- iii. What are the advantages and disadvantages for teachers in the implementation of portfolio assessment?

1.5 Research aims

The aim of the research is to determine the level of understanding of educators in relation to the implementation of portfolio assessment in the classroom. As portfolio assessment is part of CASS, which is criterion-referenced, the research study will unveil the challenges teachers face in the implementation of portfolio assessment in the classroom. The research will assess and highlight shortcomings and successes.

1.6 Research methodology

1.6.1 Introduction

A well-structured interview process needs to be carefully planned. For the sake of clarity, it is important for the researcher to highlight the methodology used. This section will be dealt with in Chapter 3.

1.6.2 Research design

The purpose of this research is to gather the information regarding portfolio assessment in Grade 9 – IsiZulu. This is a qualitative study because the researcher will be immersed in data collection. Once the data has been collected, it will be analysed by the researcher from particular evidence to present a consistent picture. For validity and reliability in qualitative studies, Silverman (1993) suggests that it is important for each interviewee to understand the questions in the same way. The interviewees will be given the same set of questions in the same manner.

Once the researcher has compiled the interview schedule, it will be piloted to fellow teachers at school. The intention here is that other teachers make comments about the questions asked.

The researcher will compile open-ended questions, which according to Silverman (1993), “enables the respondents to demonstrate their unique way of looking at the world – the definition of the situation”. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) maintain that, “the open ended questions will enable important but unanticipated issues to be raised”.

To reduce bias in this form of qualitative study, there will be no power play between the interviewer and the interviewed. This is because both the interviewer and the interviewee are teachers and share the same learning area. At the end of the interview process, there will be an analysis of the responses made by the teachers on the new policy pertaining to portfolio assessment.

1.6.3 Sample of the research

As mentioned, the purpose of this research is to examine the implementation of portfolio assessment, as part of CASS in Grade 9. The researcher will undertake to do purposive sampling. William (2006) says, “In purposive sampling, we sample with a purpose in mind. We usually would have one or more specific predefined groups we are seeking.” The researcher will initially verify that each respondent meets the criteria for selection. The sample will be comprised of Grade 9 teachers who are teaching isiZulu. Purposive sampling assists the researcher to acquire relevant opinions from the targeted population because they have been carefully selected.

The researcher has selected three schools on the basis of their academic achievements for the previous three years within the Port Shepstone district. The information was sourced from the

examination sub-directorate in the Port Shepstone district. One of the schools has been consistent in achieving a 100% pass rate for the previous three years. The second school has remained average by attaining a pass percentage of between 60% – 69 % and the third one has had a gradual improvement from 29% in 2005, and 40% in 2006 to 62% in 2007. In each of the three schools the researcher will interview one teacher. The researcher has chosen a school with poor facilities in a rural area, a school with limited resources in a township and a former Model-C school with adequate resources.

1.6.4 Data collection process

The data will be collected by means of semi-structured interviews. In each of the schools, as already mentioned, one educator will be interviewed. According to Bell (1993), the researcher should, “practise interviewing and managing the schedule to make sure the form of questioning is clear, does not antagonise the respondent and allows the researcher to record responses in a way that allows him/her to record responses in a way that can be understood when the interview is over”.

The administration of semi-structured interviews will take place on a one-to-one basis. The establishment of a rapport between the researcher and the respondent will ensure that the process remains confidential and particulars will not be disclosed.

During the interview process, the researcher will take notes, and will inform the interviewee about this before the start of the process. Audio tapes will also be used to pick up any information that might have been left out during note taking.

1.6.5 Research instruments

One of the instruments that will be used by the researcher is the interview schedule. The use of non-verbal cues also assists during an interview in deepening the scope for probing. During the course of the interview, the researcher will at times lead the respondent by extending the same question in order to probe deeper.

The researcher will inform the respondent about the purpose of the interview. An assurance will be made to the respondent that the details of the interview will remain confidential. Note taking will be done during the interview process. The respondent will be informed about this on time. This will eliminate suspicion.

1.6.6 Interview setting

The interviews will be conducted at the schools where each of the teachers is employed. Permission to hold the interviews would have been granted by the ward manager as well as the principal of each school identified. The appropriate time for the interviews is during school hours when the educator is not engaged according to the time table. It is not the intention of the researcher to cause disturbances at school.

Since the interviews are conducted on a one-to-one basis, the researcher will arrange with the principal of each of the schools to find a quiet room where the process can take place undisturbed.

1.6.7 Theory of the study

According to Mueller (2008), in portfolio assessment students are asked to reflect on their work, to engage in self-assessment and in goal setting. These are the most authentic skills learners need to develop to successfully manage their lives in the real world. The research is thus based on the theory of authentic assessment

as portfolio assessment is also performance based. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

1.6.8 Ethical considerations

The researcher writes letters requesting permission from the authorities i.e. Senior Education Managers (SEMs) and to the school principal. The researcher also liaise with the teachers, and give them more information about the purpose of the research to establish a relationship of trust. The three teachers that are interviewed by the researcher have given their consent.

The researcher also informs the interviewees about their freedom to withdraw from the process at any stage should they feel uncomfortable.

1.6.9 Limitations of the study

Vithal & Jansen (1997) refer to limitations as “the constraints imposed on a study, and an understanding of the context in which research claims are set”. The study focuses mainly on the implementation of portfolio assessment as part of CASS in Grade 9. The researcher conduct interviews with teachers who are strictly involved with Grade 9 at school and the research limits the participants to the learning area of isiZulu.

In one of the schools the teacher requested to be interviewed outside the school premises and the teacher had to be convinced that the interview needed to be conducted within the school during normal teaching and learning periods. The teacher selected from the rural school was unqualified, and the researcher had to build up his confidence to get him to participate.

1.7 Outline of the study

The researcher follows a particular pattern for ease of writing and reading. The pattern will be convenient for the reader as all the

steps are linked. According to Magi (2005), "...to comply with organizational procedure necessitates the research to fully describe the way the research has been planned, structured and executed in order to comply with scientific criteria."

This research study is divided into four chapters, and each of which deals with a particular theme.

- Chapter 1 introduces the research problem and focuses on the background of the study with some reference to purpose and some hint on methodology to be followed during the research.
- Chapter 2 focuses on the review of literature with the intention to facilitate a grasp on the conceptual framework that underlies the study.
- Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology.
- Chapter 4 is the analysis of data.
- Chapter 5 concludes the research by focusing on the findings and recommendations made by the researcher.

1.8 Conclusion

Portfolio assessment is part of the new assessment procedures as a result of the new policy on NCS. This research focuses on the implementation of portfolio assessment by teachers in schools.

The research intends to highlight the challenges to teachers brought about by the transformation in the curriculum which has impacted on the assessment of learners. Portfolio assessment is one assessment strategy which, whilst being continuous in nature also assists in the multilevel development of the learner. It is therefore the intention of this study to highlight the teachers' understanding and implementation of portfolio assessment as part of continuous assessment, particularly in Grade 9, as it is the exit point to Further Education and Training (FET).

The introduction of the new policy in education, namely the RNCS resulted in the advent of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) as the main underlying principle in education. Portfolio assessment, being part of the new policy in education, is also a new assessment strategy. This research focuses on the challenges which have arisen as a result of the introduction of portfolio assessment in education.

In the next chapter, the researcher conducts a thorough literature review on assessment and focuses on both local and global views on assessment of learners. This will be related to the new policy on the NCS. The researcher will pay particular attention to portfolio assessment as it forms an integral part of CASS.

CHAPTER 2

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In order to determine the success of any teaching and learning, the assessment of learners is a priority. Assessment is a tool used by the teacher in order to determine the shortcomings as well as the successes of any teaching and learning situation. The assessment of learners in the NCS is a process. This kind of process assists to inform some of the decisions that need to be taken pertaining to the performance of learners, as well as the attainment of all the relevant skills, knowledge and values.

The NCS specifies learning outcomes to be achieved in each learning area. There are also assessment standards in each learning area which determines the minimum requirements for achieving the learning outcomes per grade. For the NCS, in order to assist teachers in their task to help learners perform according to their potential, various activities are maintained within the specific assessment standard.

Over the years various authors have focused on the shift in global assessment patterns. The researcher's review of the literature will focus on this shift as well as on the significance of these changes for a developing country like South Africa.

2.2 The changes in assessment and focus on outcomes

There has been a change in focus on assessment matters globally and also in South Africa. This change has been brought about by the transformation of the school curriculum. The focus has shifted from norm-referenced assessment, which traditionally is a comparison of marks attained by the pupils to a criterion-referenced form of assessment. Norm-referenced means that assessment is referred (measured) against a norm or an average. On the other hand, criterion-referenced makes judgements about learners by measuring

their work against the set criteria. In the NCS a learner's performance is measured against criteria as suggested by the learning outcomes and assessment standards. Criterion-referenced assessment maintains the prevalence of certain criteria that learners are expected to achieve in a particular grade.

Criterion-referenced assessment leads to a form of assessment which is qualitative in nature because the learner is actively engaged in the teaching and learning situation. It is a learner-centred teaching and learning encounter. The learner's creativity and thinking skills have primary significance. The learner is able to interact with the educator as well as with the other learners (Shepard, 2000).

Criterion-referenced assessment is a shift from theories in education which focus on the teacher as someone who knows everything in the classroom. The emphasis is on close assessment of students' understanding and feedback from peers and students. Self-assessment is a central part of the social processes that mediate the development of intellectual abilities, construction of knowledge and formation of students' identities (Shepard, 2000).

There is emphasis on daily assessment of learners which is continuous. This form of assessment focuses on the development of various skills amongst the learners. The use of portfolios at school is one of the attempts to provide more relevant assessments to enhance instructional decision-making and assessment of pupil progress (Sylvia, & Ysseldyke, 1995).

The change in assessment patterns has also been brought about by the shift in terms of the theoretical framework. Traditionally the focus has been on scientific measurement, meaning standardised testing of learners. Vygotsky is one of the social psychologists who proposed a move away from measurement. Vygotsky (1978) came up with the notion that, "what is taken into the mind is socially and culturally

determined". This gave rise to the constructivist paradigm, where the emphasis is on acquiring school knowledge for social benefit. Shepard (2000) says "School learning should be authentic and connected to the world outside of school not only to make learning interesting and motivating to students but also to develop the ability to use knowledge in real-world settings".

The changes in the form of assessment for learners have brought about new challenges for both learners and teachers. The type of assessment of learners prevalent in this country is aligned to the curriculum. According to the Qualifications and Assessment Policy Framework (QAPF, 2003), "The NCS grades 10-12 stipulate the learning outcomes and assessment standards" which are crucial in planning for assessment. The QAPF (2003) further spells out the key principles and values which are underpinned by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) which lays the foundation for the achievement of the goals of nation building.

Kelly (1999) says that we need to ascertain that, "assessment does not lead, but rather supports the provision of the curriculum". Assessment is validated by basing assessments on student performance and outcomes that relate to the curriculum and society at large. This is so because the NCS aims to ensure that the educational imbalances of the past are redressed. The NCS is principled on the recognition of the potential of all South Africans and seeks to remove artificial barriers to the attainment of qualifications.

As a result of the political changes in South Africa, a major paradigm shift has resulted in the provision of education in the country. The issue of concern which has posed a challenge to most educators, in the case of learning and teaching, is the shift from content in learning and teaching to a focus on outcomes. The assessment

standards for each learning area must be able to provide for the growth of the whole learner to achieve the desired learning outcome.

As a result of having a prolonged type of assessment in the form of CASS, the learners are in a good position to develop and learn to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that they have learnt. This is actually given emphasis by the assessment standards in each learning area.

The learners not only conceptualise the content of their learning, but also master skills, for example, communication, and problem solving and attitudes, for example, respect and self-image. This is one of the reasons that makes portfolio assessment authentic because the teacher and the student are able to monitor the growth of the student's knowledge, skills and attitudes as the learner is prepared to engage in real-world settings. This begins with the learner being involved in the performance of creating his/her own portfolio.

The outcomes encourage a learner-centred and activity-based approach to education. The RNCS builds its learning outcomes for the GET Band for Grades R-9 (for schools) on the critical and developmental outcomes that were inspired by the constitution and developed in a democratic process.

The outcomes are a determinant of the success of the process of learning and teaching. These outcomes are described as being critical or specific.

2.3 Outcomes in the NCS

2.3.1 Critical outcomes

The outcomes in education are described as critical in the sense that they are broad and cross-curricular. They ensure that learners gain the skills, knowledge and values that will enable them to contribute

to their own success as well as to the success of their family, community and society.

2.3.2 Specific outcomes

Specific outcomes imply that the focus is on what the learners will be able to do at the end of the learning experience. In the different learning areas specific outcomes describe what learners will be able to do on all levels of learning.

The next section deals with the definition of concepts that will dominate the study. These definitions will be of assistance to the reader by facilitating a quick understanding of the intentions of the researcher.

2.4 Definition of concepts

2.4.1 Introduction

This section lists the definitions of concepts used in assessment. These concepts are not defined by the different authors within the global context, but they have the same implications. This serves to highlight that assessment is a global phenomenon used for the same purpose of achieving learning outcomes aimed at transforming society. All the concepts have an influence on portfolio assessment.

2.4.2 Assessment

Rowntree and Page (1987) in their definition, say "...assessment in education can be thought of as occurring whenever one person, in some kind of interaction, direct or indirect, with another, is conscious of obtaining and interpreting information about the knowledge and understanding, or abilities and attitudes of that other person". To some extent or other it is an attempt to know that other person. In this light, assessment can be seen as human encounter.

2.4.3 Portfolio assessment

Portfolio assessment is evidence of learners' achievements for continuous assessment. According to Pahad (1997), portfolios are "a useful way of gathering evidence about a learner's growth and development. A portfolio is just a name sometimes given to a collection of examples of work, together with reflections or thoughts by the learner about his or her learning development". Portfolios document growth and development of each individual learner. This concept will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

2.4.4 Norm-referencing

According to Marsh (1997), this form of assessment is used to compare students' performance in specific tests and norm-referencing is aligned to summative assessment. Norm-referencing is understood as the comparison of marks attained by learners in order to determine how well each one is doing.

2.4.5 Criterion-referencing

Marsh (1997) also refers to criterion-referencing as a means whereby information is obtained about students' performance in terms of certain criteria that have been set. Once the skill level for a particular task has been defined (the criterion) it is presumed that a student will persevere until it is attained.

Criterion-referencing maintains that there are certain criteria that learners are expected to achieve in a particular grade. This is highlighted in the new curriculum where the emphasis is on achievement of outcomes in each of the learning areas. The new policy on assessment is also based on the achievement of outcomes. This kind of assessment provides more information about a learner's competence in a particular area.

2.4.6 Authentic assessment

Henning-Stout (1994), defines authentic assessment as being reflective of performance on tasks that are meaningful to the learner. Cole, Ryan and Fick (1995), define authentic assessment as a principle which holds that students should demonstrate, rather than be required to tell or be questioned about what they know and can do. Authentic assessment is based on the actual learning experiences of students who participate in activities that have meaning and value for them. Portfolio assessment is authentic in nature.

2.4.7 Assessment tasks

Assessment tasks are concrete performance tasks designed to be part of regular classroom instruction (Marsh 1997). They are activities designed to assess a range of skills and competencies. For example,

- assignments
- tests and
- examinations, which may include one, two or three papers.

2.4.8 Moderation

The QAPF (2003) describes moderation as the process which ensures that assessment of the outcomes described in the NCS Grades 10-12 is fair, valid and reliable. It is also a means of ensuring that national standards are applied in assessments carried out by providers. Moderation is the process of verifying the results of continuous assessment by external assessment.

2.4.9 Learning outcomes

The QAPF (2003) defines the learning outcome as an intended result of learning and teaching. Learning outcomes describe the knowledge, attitudes and values that learners should acquire by the end of learning.

2.4.10 Assessment standards

According to the QAPF (2003) assessment standards are the criteria that collectively provide evidence of what a learner should know and be able to demonstrate in a specific grade. They embody the knowledge, skills and values required to achieve the learning outcomes.

2.4.11 Validity

Henning-Stout (1994), defines validity as the extent to which an assessment procedure measures what it is intended to measure. "A task which claims to assess a learner's conceptual understanding, but requires memorized answers, will be invalid" (Malan,1997). Malan (1997) further states that the assessors (and learners) must be very clear about the purpose of the assessment tasks if the validity of the assessment is to be beyond question.

2.4.12 Reliability

The reliability of an assessment procedure is evident in how consistently the procedure produces the same information. The outcome of an assessment procedure should indicate that the same thing was assessed amongst the learners using the same assessment tool (Henning-Stout, 1994). Malan (1997) says a test or assessment task should produce the same results every time it is used to assess learners' work, irrespective of who the assessors are or when/where the assessment takes place.

2.4.13 Dynamic assessment

Dynamic assessment is by definition involvement in a dynamic interaction which focuses on the child's processes for learning or ability to interact with a competent adult (Lunt, 1993). Shepard (2000) says dynamic assessment is finding out what a student is able to do independently as well as what can be done with adult guidance.

In the next section the researcher highlights the intentions of the National Policy on Assessment.

2.5 The South African policy on assessment

The curriculum is legislated as the state's mechanism for providing education to its citizens. It is therefore imperative for the country to develop its own policy on assessment which serves to provide a framework for assessment and qualifications for all public schools and community based sites. The assessment policy serves as a guide pertaining to assessment matters in all the learning areas at school.

The QAPF (2003) defines assessment as the process of making decisions about a learner's performance. Assessment involves the gathering and organising of information as evidence of learning, in order to review what learners have achieved. Assessment informs decision-making in education and helps teachers to establish whether learners are performing according to their full potential and making progress towards the required levels of assessment standards (QAPF, 2003).

The assessment standards in each learning area define the minimum requirement for achieving the learning outcome at a specific grade. We can make assessments in many different ways depending on what we would like to find out.

The next section discusses the different types of assessment formats used by educators in schools.

2.6 Theoretical aspects of assessment

2.6.1 Different types of assessments

There are various ways of assessing learners. The different types of assessment are performed deliberately with the intention of achieving particular outcomes as identified by both educator and

learner. In this section the researcher examines the various forms of assessing learners according to various authors.

2.6.1.1 Baseline assessment

Baseline assessment is assessment usually used at the beginning of a phase, grade or learning experience to establish what learners already know. It assists educators with the planning of learning programmes and learning activities (NCS document GET: Grades R – 9).

2.6.1.2 Continuous assessment

Malan (1997) says this form of assessment takes place while the learners are busy with ordinary class work. This form of assessment occurs while learners reflect on their own work, when a learner's peers supply feedback on what he/she is saying, writing or doing, or when teachers are making mental (or even physical) notes of what they observe learners doing or saying or not doing and saying.

This is an ongoing process that measures a learner's achievement during the course of a grade or level. It provides information used to support a learner's development and enables improvements to be made in the learning and teaching process. Malan (1997) further states that this form of assessment is considered to be formative in nature as it is developmental and informs teachers and learners about their progress.

Olivier (1998) whilst commenting on the formative nature of continuous assessment says that this form of assessment is carried out for the duration of learning, as the learner progresses towards the outcome. Formative assessment or 'assessment for learning' involves both teacher and learner in a process of continual reflection and self-assessment. Formative assessment is interactive in that the teacher uses thought-provoking questions to stimulate learner thinking and discussion.

2.6.1.3 Diagnostic assessment

Diagnostic assessment is similar to formative assessment, but its application will always lead to some form of intervention or remedial action or programme. It shows up either learners' strengths and weaknesses or inappropriate teaching methodologies. When it is used to find out about the nature and cause of remedial barriers to learning, it should be administered by specialists and followed by expert guidance, support and intervention strategies.

2.6.1.4 Ipsative assessment

Ipsative assessment is when progress is judged against previous performance. The judgement is tailored to an individual's achievements. This is another type of formative assessment. Overall and Sangster (2007), refer to concept maps, where children identify what they know and what they need to know next, as a good illustration of a response to ipsative assessment.

Earlier on, the researcher gave a definition of assessment by Rowntree and Page (1987), as a human encounter involving a deliberate obtaining and interpreting of information about the knowledge and understanding, or abilities and attitudes of another person. This relates to the definition of assessment as given by the QAPF (2003), namely, "a tool that assists the educator to establish whether learners are performing according to their potential in order to reach the required levels of performance as outlined in the assessment standards". Assessment therefore becomes a continuously planned process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about the performance of learners.

Le Grange and Reddy (1998), define assessment as a tool used to make judgements about a learner's performance. This involves gathering and organising information about learners in order to make judgements and decisions about their learning. It appears that the educator cannot make these judgements without utilising specific

forms of assessment. These forms of assessment are used continuously as they inform the educator about the teaching and learning process. This then makes assessment an integral part of teaching and learning as it becomes a process of making decisions about a learner's performance.

Malan (1997) concurs with this definition when he notes that judgement can be made through continuous observation or through summative evaluation. He further extends his definition when he makes mention of the purposes of assessment. He says that the results of assessing a learner can be reported quantitatively or qualitatively and can be used for promotion, screening or formative purposes.

In his book, 'Assessment in Education' Lubisi, (1999) argues that assessment is a tool designed to equip educators, which implies that as a result of assessing the learners, the educator becomes aware of the strengths and weaknesses within the teaching and learning encounter. As an educator, one must have extended knowledge and skills for reflecting critically on assessment matters. This is because of the shift in assessment of learners from the traditional way of pencil and paper only and summative in nature, to new techniques brought about by transformation which has resulted in changes in education.

The next section outlines the distinction between summative and formative assessment.

2.7 The distinction between summative and formative assessments

Riding and Butterfield (1990), make a clear distinction between the two forms of assessment, namely summative and formative.

Looking at formative assessment, they say "It refers to evaluation made during the instructional phase to inform the teacher about the progress in learning and what still needs to be learned". On the other hand, summative assessment is the terminal measurement of performance at the end of instruction. This makes summative evaluation different from formative evaluation in terms of purposes as some of the purposes for summative evaluation could be certification, grading and selection at the end of the year (Lubisi 1999).

Formative assessment is not a once-off event as is summative, but takes the form of a dialogue between the learner and the teacher which occurs continuously throughout the year. The form of engagement between the learner and the educator is loosely structured as both participants have an input on the determination of the agenda to be discussed. With summative assessment the intention is to measure learning outcomes in terms of an individual's performance at the particular point in time when he/she is examined.

Summative assessment gives an overall picture of the learner's progress at a given time, for example, at the end of the term. Olivier (1998) says this form of assessment takes place at the end of the learning period, and is used to confirm that learners have met the set standards. Malan (1997) says "summative assessment can be regarded as having results which are more judgemental in nature because they are often used for promotional purposes". Summative assessment includes the marking, grading and scoring of exercises, assignments and or examinations which are set with the specific purpose of determining how much (or how little) learners know about work which has been completed.

2.8 The role of assessment in society

There is an apparent need to improve the content and the form of assessment to justify its effective role in society. All the activities

within the classroom should aim at socialising the student into the discourse and practices which they learn in the classroom. Shepard (2000) says the most obvious reform has been to devise more open-ended performance tasks to ensure that students are able to reason critically, to solve complex problems and to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts. This needs to be taken care of by the educator whilst designing the assessment tools to be used in portfolio assessment. The educator must at all times focus on the learning outcomes as well as on the assessment standards as contained within the NCS policy as a guide for the design of the assessment tool.

Formal dynamic assessment (Vygotsky, 1978) which forms Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), emphasises the social mediation to learning whereby the adult educator leads the learner to an understanding of the way of life of his/her social group by means of imparting moral values to the learner. The child learns at school, and so becomes assimilated in the social group with which he identifies.

Kelly (1999), refers to political connotations within the curriculum, and states that assessment can be used as a political mechanism for changing and controlling the curriculum. This is prevalent in the South African situation where the changes in government in 1994 brought about a new curriculum coupled with new policies in assessment. Wiggins (1998) maintains that the guidelines for what goes on in the portfolio must be dictated by the demands of social evidence not by the desires, standards and interests of the student. The outcomes of the transformation curriculum in South Africa (C2005) does not emphasise the development of the individual for his own good, but the student learns for the development of the whole country.

The skills, attitudes and values imparted to the learner and exhibited by means of portfolio creation and maintenance assists the learner to develop creatively, with the goal of developing an understanding of his/her environment. Wiggins (1998), says that “the skills developed in the learner as a result of portfolio assessment, are not only those that are focused on his/her desires, his own set standards and interests, but the assessment outcomes also aids the development of the skills, values and attitudes that will assist in the development of everyone”.

2.9 Principles of assessment

Fundamental assessment principles are used to enhance student learning. Knowledge of these principles assists the teacher to be effective when planning. These principles can be achieved when teachers learn about conceptual and technical assessment concepts, method and procedures and apply these fundamentals to instruction. In the following sections, the researcher highlights some of the principles of assessment from various sources.

2.9.1 Good assessment is valid

The intended and unintended consequences of assessment need to be examined with appropriate evidence that supports particular arguments or points of view. All evidence gathered from activities and tasks must relate to the learning outcomes specified. The evidence demonstrates that learning outcomes have been achieved.

Validity in assessment implies that once the teacher has planned for an assessment activity, the tools used by the teacher must be able to assess what the teacher actually intends to assess. “The test, examination or assignment should serve the purpose for which it was designed” Malan (1997). Hogan (2007) refers to validity in assessment as, “the extent to which the measure gauges the trait, ability, skill or attitude we intend to measure”.

2.9.2 Assessment influences motivation for learning

Wiggins (1998) uses the term 'educative assessment' to describe techniques and issues that teachers should consider when they design and use assessment. His message is that the nature of assessment influences what is learned and the degree of meaningful engagement by students in the learning process. He contends that assessment should be authentic, with feedback and opportunities for revision to improve rather than simply audit learning. Le Grange and Reddy (1998) says "self assessment encourages self-reflection on the part of the learner and enables the learner to take greater responsibility for his/her own learning. Self-assessment, therefore, enhances learner motivation.

2.9.3 Good assessment enhances instruction

Sheppard (2000) highlights the promotion of assessment as something that is integrated with instruction and not an activity that merely audits learning. When assessment is integrated with instruction, it informs teachers about what activities and assignments will be most useful, what level of teaching is most appropriate, and how summative assessments provide diagnostic information.

2.9.4 Good assessment is fair and ethical

All the exercises and tools used during assessment must not present barriers to achievement. The QAPF (2003) says "the standard of assessment or examination should never be compromised, nor should the learners ever be given an unfair advantage over their peers". The assessment tasks must be free from bias and provide equal opportunities to learn. It must focus on the rights and responsibilities of the test takers, and also be able to test individuals with special needs. The transparency of an assessment activity and the level of understanding of the learners are considered during planning. The assessment activity should not be seen as a means to punish, but to develop. It is for this reason that the assessment tools

used must be comprehensible. Learners should also be made aware of the format and style of the test contents to allow for transparency.

2.9.5 Good assessment uses multiple methods

The QAPF (2003), states that the alternative methods of assessment are designed to equalise opportunities for all learners. Assessment that is fair and valid must be able to elicit learners' understanding using multiple methods. A complete picture of what learners understand and can do is put together as a result of the different approaches to assessment. Important decisions should not be made on the basis of a single test score. There is a need to understand the entire range of assessment techniques and methods, with the realisation that each has limitations.

2.9.6 Good assessment must be reliable and consistent

Reliability as a basic principle in assessment is according to Durrheim and Wassenaar (1999), the degree to which the results are repeatable. Individuals will score similarly on reliable measures on numerous occasions. These authors extend their definition by stating that the same set of results will be obtained repeatedly in replications of the study if the study is reliable. Hogan (2007) also cautions that we need to assure that the assessments we make have an adequate degree of consistency. Reliability of an assessment activity implies that it is consistent and reproducible. This is shown by the achievement of the same results over time, over instruments and over different groups of respondents.

2.9.7 Assessment must be continuous

Assessment must be continuous and must be able to support the growth and development of the learner (NPA 1996). Continuous assessment assists the teacher to monitor the progress of the learner and thus gauge the value of learning. The close monitoring of learners assists both the learner and the teacher to observe whether teaching and learning is succeeding to achieve the outcomes.

2.10 Purposes of assessment

The National Policy on Assessment (NPA), whilst addressing the assessment of learners according to the NCS, maintains that the assessment of learners should serve the following purposes:

- i) Maximise the learner's access to knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as defined in Curriculum 2005.
- ii) Determine whether learning is taking place and whether difficulties are being encountered.
- iii) Report to parents and other stakeholders on levels of learners' achievement.
- iv) Provide information for evaluation and review of learning programmes.
- v) Determine whether teaching and learning is successful and leads to the stated outcomes.

Marsh (1997) states with regards to the purpose of assessment, that a diagnosis of the learning that has occurred, and monitoring of progress are the major reasons for assessment. The diagnosis should help each student understand his/her weaknesses and also guide the teacher about where to direct his/her instructional energies. The diagnosis often relates to planning for future instructional purposes. Planning for actions to take place in the future will assist the educator in varying his/her approach to instruction.

The more frequent and varied the assessments used, the more informed the teacher will be about the grades to assign to students. Assessments often result in the assignment of a grade. Lubisi (1999) refers to grading as one form of stratification whereby learners are divided according to their ability. On the basis of marks obtained by the learners in such tests, they are ranked into positions. Black et al. (2003) see grading as having a negative impact at school, because "it appears to have the prime purpose of instilling competition among the learners instead of placing the focus on personal improvement".

Hogan (2007) mentions the certification of student learning as the most common purpose of assessment. The primary purpose of most teacher made tests is to certify student learning. Certification serves as an indication that a learner has actually completed a particular set period of study. At the end of the period of study, having been assessed successfully, the learner is then awarded a certificate as a symbol of achievement. Lubisi (1999) highlights that underlying certification is the assumption that performance in the certification assessment is predictive of a learner's performance after the certification. According to Black et al. (2003), the idea of providing learners with certificates is to give information about the students which they themselves, prospective employers, and those controlling admission to further stages of education, can use in order to make choices.

Assessment can also be used to predict students' eligibility for selection in future courses. Lubisi (1999) gives the example of matric examinations which are assumed to be able to predict learners' performance in higher education. According to Lubisi (1999), prediction can take place over a long period of time without certificates being issued. The case in point is the use of stanine tests that are used to assess the potential of a learner. As a result of performance indicated by the aptitude test results, a learner is able to pursue a particular career and is offered guidance as a result of the prediction. When assessment is used for the purposes of selection, the intention is to get the best possible candidate. According to Lubisi (1999), in a school situation, prior performance of a learner in a previous class, particularly in subjects like mathematics, is used as criteria for selecting suitable students to enrol for subjects in the next grade.

Another purpose of assessment is evaluation. McDaniel (1994) refers to evaluation as making judgements about the value of methods, works, solutions or ideas. It involves the use of criteria and

standards for appraisal. Evaluative judgements will reflect the internal consistency and carefulness that a product or communication exhibits. Lubisi (1999) refers to this as a process whereby people make some form of judgement. With evaluation, the intention is to find out what is working and what is not working.

In the next section the researcher focuses on the utilisation of portfolios towards the assessment of learners. The focus will be on the contribution of portfolios in teaching, particularly as they document the growth of learners who are continuously assessed. This is so because with the NCS, the focus is also on the development of multi-skills in learners which is enhanced by portfolios.

2.11 Portfolio assessment

Portfolios are becoming increasingly widely used as vehicles for continuous assessment. Vavrus in Lubisi (1999) define portfolios as “a systematic and organized collection of evidence used by the teacher and student to monitor growth of the students’ knowledge, skills and attitudes”. Lubisi (1999) further argues that as portfolios contain many entries, they can be used to evaluate a full range of cognitive skills. Portfolio contents assist both teacher and learner in formative and summative assessments.

As a result of the fact that learners are involved in the creation and design of their portfolios, this serves as a source of inspiration for the learners to organise their academic work which shows achievement and progression.

Venn (2000) also defines a portfolio as “a systematic collection of learners work and related material that depicts a learners’ activities, accomplishments and achievements in one or more school subjects”. The collection should include evidence of learners’ reflection and self-evaluation, guidelines for selecting the portfolio contents, and

criteria for judging the quality of the work. The goal is to help learners assemble portfolios that illustrate their talents, represent their writing capabilities, and tell the stories of their school achievements.

The use of portfolios in assessing learner performance is a move away from standardised tests towards 'authentic' assessment which stresses the productive use of knowledge rather than the reproduction of knowledge.

Cole, Ryan and Kick (1995) define portfolio assessment in educational theory as "the principles that children and adolescents should demonstrate, rather than tell about what they know and can do". This definition, according to these authors makes portfolio assessment fundamental to 'authentic assessment' or 'performance assessment'.

According to Shaklee, et al. (1997), "As a result of 'authentic assessment,' information or data is collected from various sources, through multiple methods, over multiple points in time. Portfolio assessment allows the development of skills application". The learners are able to grow in terms of experience as they are required to obtain information beyond what can be provided by standardised or norm-based tests. The content of portfolios (artifacts) could be drawings, photos, videos and audio tapes. Performance assessment implies that the learners have to be engaged with the sources of data in the compilation of their portfolios. The sources include parents, staff, and other community members. The learners themselves have to be engaged in self- reflection as a way of assessing their own performance. Portfolio assessment is a practical strategy for systematically collecting and organising data.

The use of a portfolio by a learner induces an ability to acknowledge his/her strengths and shortcomings in learning. It is transparent. It

serves as a source for motivation and raises a sense of responsibility for the learner. This is because the learner is made aware of the set outcomes and also the deadlines for his/her accomplishments.

Paulson, Paulson and Meyer (1991), specify the use of portfolio assessment as being related to the monitoring of students' mastery of the core-curriculum. Portfolios can enhance the assessment process by revealing a range of skills and understanding. Portfolios support instructional goals and reflect change and growth over a period of time. Portfolios encourage students, teachers and parents to reflect and provide continuity in education from one year to the next. They provide a way for students to value themselves as learners by offering opportunities for peer-supported growth.

2.12 The development of portfolio assessment

Portfolio assessment grew in popularity in the U.S. during the 1990s as part of a widespread interest in alternative assessment (Hogan 2007). It developed as a result of increased criticism about norm-referenced tests in the 1980s. Hogan (2007) argues that norm-referenced, multiple choice tests only assess a very limited range of knowledge.

The development of portfolio assessment would also enable teachers and researchers to examine the wide array of complex thinking and problem solving skills required for subject matter accomplishments. Portfolio assessment had to be multi-dimensional, and would assist to reveal various aspects of the learning process, including the development of cognitive skills and strategies, and decision making processes.

2.13 Characteristics of portfolio assessment

According to Barton and Collins (1997) certain characteristics are essential to the development of any type of portfolio used in assessment.

Barton and Collins (1997) says "portfolios are multi-sourced". This implies that they must allow for the opportunity to evaluate a variety of specific evidence. The portfolio should be used to judge more than a single performance. According to George (1995) the "multi-dimensional nature of portfolios assists in the reflection of a wide variety of artefacts and processes which reflect various aspects of student learning processes".

Barton and Collins (1997) also say "portfolios exhibit authentic assessment of learners' work". Here the authors imply that the context and evidence must be directly linked. If the portfolio is assessing the effect of a programme on learners, then the evidence should reflect the success of the activities of the programme on learners and the skills that were gained. Integration as an important characteristic of portfolio assessment allows the learner to translate the contents of learning into real-life situations. This correspondence to real-life situations is highlighted by NCS as the learner develops multi skills to deal with real-life situations.

The context of portfolio assessment facilitates the dual nature of instruction and assessment. The contents of the portfolio are thus determined by the context within which learning takes place. Portfolio assessment is also dynamic, which assists in the capturing of growth and change. The data can be added at many points in time for a rich understanding of the process of change. The purpose and goals are explicitly defined in advance which allows the learners to know what is expected of them. As the portfolios are based on ownership, it allows the learners to be highly involved in the determination of the goals to be met.

According to George (1995) portfolio assessment is characterised by the following recurrent qualities:

- It is continuous and ongoing, providing both formative and summative opportunities for monitoring students' progress

towards achieving essential outcomes. Portfolios clearly reflect stated learner outcomes identified in the core or essential curriculum that students are expected to study.

- Portfolios are multi-dimensional, i.e. they reflect a wide variety of artefacts and processes which represent various aspects of learners' learning processes. Portfolios contain samples of work that stretch over an entire marking period, rather than single points in time. These samples of work represent a variety of different assessment tools.
- Portfolios provide for collaborative reflection, including ways for learners to reflect about their own thinking processes and metacognitive introspection as they monitor their own comprehension, reflect upon their approaches to problem solving and decision making, and observe their emerging understanding of subject skills. Portfolios focus upon learners' performance-based learning experiences as well as their acquisition of key knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The utilisation of portfolios to assess learners is underpinned by the theory of outcomes-based education which is linked to the NCS which in turn is informed by policies that are a guide to education matters in the country.

The next section focuses on the advantages as well as the disadvantages of using portfolios on the assessment of learners.

2.14 Advantages of using portfolios in assessment

2.14.1 Introduction

Portfolio assessment comes with new challenges to most educators and learners at school. Most schools have not been exposed to this form of assessment. It has become part of the new policy in the NCS and its advent comes with certain advantages. The researcher has consulted various authors' points of view pertaining to the usefulness of portfolios in assessment.

2.14.2 The development of learners

Le Grange and Reddy (1998) mention that the learner is able to be developed as a whole as a result of portfolio assessment. Their argument is based on the premise that this type of assessment is formative in nature and the learner continuously learns about his/her strengths and weaknesses during the teaching and learning process.

A whole range of learner development is affected as a result of portfolio assessment. This is because this form of assessment allows for a variety of assessment methods which culminates in a wide range of abilities, skills, and attitudes being assessed. The teacher has the opportunity of not only focusing on the formal part of assessing the learners, but the informal aspects as well, observing the learner in terms of behaviour and attitudes.

The learner's development of a range of abilities assists him or her to be creative in the creation of the portfolio, and teaches the learner to compile portfolios for a number of subjects and learning areas while acquiring the skills of self-and-peer assessment. The learner also feels gratified as a sense of participation and ownership in the portfolio is fulfilled. This means that the assessment of various skills, abilities and attitudes in portfolio assessment can help with the intergration of the traditionally disparate education and training system as promoted by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). In education one gains knowledge and in training one gains skills.

Koshy et al. (1993), extend the argument that in formative assessment, being part of portfolio assessment, it is not only the learner who grows educationally, but the teacher also develops both skills and systematic procedures for making and recording teacher assessments. He also focuses on reflection by the learners and teachers.

Gallagher (1998) highlights critical self-reflection and decision-making skills as some of the important outcomes that learners acquire. They are able to reflect on their portfolios in order to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. This enhances the development of cognitive and critical thinking skills.

2.14.3 Cooperative learning

Venn (2000) confirms that one of the advantages of portfolio assessment is the facilitation of cooperative learning activities, which includes peer evaluation and tutoring, cooperative learning groups and peer conferencing. The learner is able to share the work with his/her peers in class, teachers, as well as parents. The learners become aware of their levels of performance. Portfolio assessment assists teachers and the parents in monitoring and passing judgements on the progress of the learner. They all have an input on the performance of the learner. Portfolio assessment enables teachers and students to share the responsibility for setting learning goals and for evaluating progress towards meeting those goals.

Portfolio assessment gives the teacher the advantage of being able to provide formative feedback to the learner because the work completed by the learner is easily accessible. According to Ornstein and Behar (1999), the portfolio is "a locally implemented assessment system which provides multiple forms of evidence about learning in order to make sound judgements on instruction". This implies that the portfolios provide information to both learners and teachers about the process of learning and teaching. Opportunities are provided for learners and teachers to discuss learning goals and progress towards these goals.

A number of skills are assessed by means of portfolios by setting up various tasks to be performed by the learner. This leads to the provision of multiple forms of evidence about his/her learning. Multiple dimensions of learner progress are enabled. This includes

the different types of learning materials which are collected by the learner during the process of learning. Portfolio assessment provides informative feedback to the teacher and assists the teacher to assess the method of instruction.

Wiggins (1998), highlights this point when he argues that portfolios serve as an illuminating focal point for teacher-parent conferences and teacher-learner conferences alike. These various audiences of the learner portfolio assist in different ways, like on the moderation of portfolio contents for standardisation.

Scramm (2002), in his argument on portfolio assessment, says that learners become shareholders in their own learning. Portfolio assessment promotes learner self-evaluation, reflection, and critical thinking. He argues that learners are capable of assessing themselves and their peers. This even increases love for the subject since learners are able to compete against each other in the design and arrangement of the contents of their portfolios. Involvement in the creation and design induces feelings of ownership of the portfolio among the learners since they are afforded the opportunity to have extensive input into the learning process.

The contents of each of the learner's portfolios is measured based on genuine samples of work done by the learner. This allows both the educator and learner to be aware of shortcomings. Portfolio assessment thus provides flexibility in terms of measuring how the learner should accomplish his or her learning goals. The teacher, peers and parents are also able to highlight to the learner areas that need attention thus assisting the learner.

Aker (1995) argues that the educators will be able to get more of an understanding of learners as a result of continually assessing them. Portfolio assessment provides a process for structuring learning in stages by allowing an opportunity for both learners and educators to

reflect on and diagnose work done. Whereas summative assessment increases the workload for learners, continuous assessment assists in the maintenance of progression. The acquisition of information from portfolios by the learners assists the learners and also enhances their self-confidence.

According to Koshy and Mitchell (1993), "Learners are able to share work with their parents as well as their peers". This assists the parents to become aware of the school's ethos and philosophy. Portfolios allow the learners to demonstrate knowledge, understanding, skills and strategies because the learner is able to use prior and emerging experience to improve their own capacity to adapt to a variety of contexts.

Koshy and Mitchell (1993), highlight the benefits to learners having their own portfolios, saying that they, "allow learners to be able to assess their own work, and teachers add comments". Portfolio activities done by the learner are recorded and this represents the learners' performance over the course of instruction. This assists in student growth, as the learner and the teacher are able to identify the areas that need attention, thus assisting the learner to develop.

2.15 Disadvantages of using portfolios

Novack, Herman and Gearhart (1996) highlight the difficulty of reliability requirements on the implementation of portfolio assessment and they say "Without high inter-rater agreement figures, the usefulness of the scores as an accountability tool diminishes, because the results cannot be used to compare scores reliably between or over time". The outcome of performance-based tests in words rather than numbers makes some stakeholders feel that the school system is less accountable for individual students.

Ellington (1997) says that when drawing up a short list for a job, it is much easier to base the selection on paper qualifications and grades

rather than on portfolio work, even though the latter will almost certainly tell the prospective employer much more about the candidate.

According to Gearhart, Baker and Whittaker (1993), the amount of support teachers provide to students, the amount of time the students are allowed to spend on portfolio samples, and the extent to which students' work is augmented by support from external sources, have raised questions about students competence based on portfolio work.

Portfolios are costly in terms of the time it takes to look at them (Ellington, 1997). This author says, "It can take a very long time to assess a set of student portfolios and do full justice to the work and effort that has gone into them". It takes a longer time to design, implement and score the portfolio contents. The process is labour-intensive and costly.

Ellington (1997), further states that, "Portfolios are much harder to mark objectively than most other outcomes of student work. It is extremely difficult to decide on a set of assessment criteria which will be equally valid across a diverse set of portfolios". Venn (2000), concurs with this notion when he says "Scoring portfolios involves the extensive use of subjective evaluation procedures such as rating scales and professional judgement, and this limits reliability". Scoring student work using predetermined criteria is more time-consuming than scoring a single occasion, norm-referenced test. Proper training is necessary for people involved with portfolios so that they know how to carry out their roles.

2.16 Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

2.16.1 Research as qualitative study

This research is located in the interpretivist paradigm as a result of the participatory nature of the interviewer (subject as the researcher)

and the participants, (in this case the Grade 9 educators). This research will not only focus on the collection of data, but also on the interpretation of such data in order to understand and illuminate the significance of the data collected.

During research, there is maintenance of dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. The main purpose of the interview process is for the researcher to gather data from the teachers. Such data will assist the researcher in his investigation on the implementation of portfolio assessment. Usher (1996), refers to hermeneutic understanding as a learning experience involving 'dialogue' between ourselves and that which we are trying to understand.

This research is located in the same paradigm because it serves to highlight the argument of the interpretivists in social research, namely that knowledge is concerned with interpretation, meaning and illumination. The data collected during the course of the interview will be analysed by the researcher. This will assist the researcher to arrive at interpretation on the purpose of the research.

2.16.2 Theory on authentic assessment

The new NCS documents, to which authentic assessment conforms, lean towards a more authentic approach (theory) to assessment practice as the focus has shifted to the development of the learner who is multi-skilled and according to Pratt (1994), asks learners to "display the actual qualities they are intended to learn under the 'real world' conditions for which the curriculum is intended to prepare them".

This allows this research to be influenced by the theory on authentic assessment because as by definition, the emphasis on authentic assessment is on the display of the actual qualities that are intended to be learned under 'real world' conditions for which the curriculum is intended to prepare the learners (Malcolm, 1997).

According to Mann and Fraser (2004), authentic assessment is not just a measurement of a learner's performance, but also gives guidance, multiple chances to improve competence and performance and a variety of techniques that provide learners with a range of opportunities to develop and demonstrate what they know and are able to do. According to George (1995), one of the characteristics of portfolio assessment is that it focuses on learners' performance-based learning experiences as well as their acquisition of key knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Hogan (2007) refers to authentic assessment as performance assessment because of the emphasis on realistic tasks. He says performance assessment refers to assessment that requires a learner to 'perform' i.e. to produce or do something. The emphasis is on some holistic or realistic task. The emphasis for the response is on what is called a constructed response or free response format.

Portfolio assessment is performance-based because the NCS emphasises the acknowledgement of outcomes which serve as a guide to performances exhibited by the learners in the process of their learning. The performances exhibited by the learner are an indication of the outcomes of learning emphasised in the NCS. With portfolio assessment the teacher continuously observes a learner's performance as he/she is engaged in long-term projects or tasks.

2.17 Conclusion

Portfolio assessment, as part of the new curriculum, compels teachers to change. The teachers' role is transformed from being the central figure in the classroom to that of a facilitator. The teacher has to plan the process with the learners, give direction, help them select items, discuss items and their meaning with the learner. The teacher has to identify progress and assist the learner to do so through self-evaluation as well. While learners are working on their

portfolios during the lesson, it is an ideal opportunity for the teacher to interact individually with learners to discuss their progress and identify how the learners have dealt with feedback from the teacher.

Transformation in the country has compelled teachers to adjust accordingly. The new curriculum i.e. the NCS, has revolutionised the education system because of the shift from apartheid education to a form of education which is based on democratic principles. The teachers, as policy implementers, must be in a position to adapt to the changes in their profession.

The next chapter focuses on the research methodology.

CHAPTER 3

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This section reviews the methodology used during research. In order to ensure the smooth running of the interviews, the researcher selected relevant interviewees. All the stakeholders that contribute to the success of the research were consulted.

During the research, the researcher indicated his/her leanings in terms of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underlie the research process.

The purpose of having a well-defined methodological structure enabled the researcher to manage the challenges that crop up. The researcher designed semi-structured questions for the interview. The research used a qualitative paradigm because “there is an emphasis on gathering data (in the form of words), on naturally occurring phenomena” (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). This qualitative design is interactive because of face-to-face techniques used to collect data from the interviewees. The researcher used open-ended questions in an interview to collect the data.

3.2 Focus of the study

The study focuses on the teachers’ knowledge and skills on the implementation of portfolio assessment in Grade 9. The proper implementation of the NCS in the classroom necessitates the development of the teacher on policy matters. The researcher has observed negative perceptions amongst teachers towards implementation of portfolio assessment and the researcher investigates the causes.

This study is necessary because the use of portfolios in assessment is a shift away from ‘traditional assessment’ which is summative in nature. Traditional assessment does not give as many expanded

opportunities to the learner as does portfolio assessment. Traditional assessment provides little or no opportunities for the teacher to diagnose on learner performance.

3.3 Purpose of the research

The purpose of the research is for the researcher to investigate the adequacy of knowledge and skills amongst the teachers as they implement portfolio assessment in Grade 9. This form of assessment, which is continuous, is propagated by the new policy (NCS). Most teachers have experienced challenges on the implementation of portfolio assessment. The conclusions of the research investigation will indicate the proficiency or lack thereof of the teachers' understanding of portfolio assessment implementation.

3.4 Research design

McMillan and Schumacher (2006), defines research design as the description of how the research will be conducted. This involves an understanding of how the research will be set up, what happens to the subjects, and what methods of data collection will be used. They further state that the purpose of the research design is to specify a plan for generating empirical evidence that will be used to answer the research questions. Research design is a very important part of an investigation, since certain limitations and conditions in interpreting the results are linked to each design. The research design determines how the data should be analysed (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006).

The data that is collected by means of interviews and observation processes is analysed. This is done using an interpretive paradigm. The use of open-ended questions does not limit the respondent because there is sufficient time to respond.

3.4.1 Sampling

The criteria used by the researcher on selecting the population sample is purposive. It is purposive (Williams 2006) because the researcher has a purpose for gathering the information on portfolio assessment from educators who are engaged in the process. In this case, the teachers were a perfect target for sampling because they provided the relevant data required for the research. The researcher can easily get in contact with the teachers at school.

The sample chosen by the researcher comprised all the teachers who are engaged with teaching of IsiZulu in Grade 9 classes in the three schools listed in Table A. This ensures the validity of the research. Purposive sampling has ensured that the participants meet the criteria for the research. The researcher has purposely identified this learning area because it is also his specialisation.

The criteria used were based on the varying performances amongst three schools in the Port Shepstone district. The criteria were:

- i) A school which has been consistent in achieving a 100% pass rate. This is a former model-C school. The school is well equipped in terms of resources, both human and physical.
- ii) A second school which achieves on average, between 60%-69%. The school is located in the township and has inadequate resources. The school is also crippled by overcrowding in most of the classrooms.
- iii) The performance in the last school fluctuates between 29% and 40%. This school is located in the rural area. Most of the educators are not qualified and are former pupils from the same school. There is a problem with physical resources as the principal of the school shares his office with the rest of the staff.

The table below indicates the performance of these schools for the years 2004-2006:

TABLE A:

| SCHOOLS | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|---------|------|------|------|
| A | 100 | 99 | 100 |
| B | 61 | 69 | 64 |
| C | 29 | 35 | 40 |

The researcher, while conducting the study, needs to ascertain whether the targeted groups are able to utilise the policy documents in planning and implementation of portfolio assessment.

The research was informed by the researcher's interaction with the stakeholders involved in education. The teachers, as the people who are doing hands-on implementation, were the researcher's primary target. The researcher also wrote letters to the circuit managers requesting permission to interview educators in the schools which were selected.

3.4.2 Pilot study

As a means of ensuring the validity of the data collected, the researcher initially piloted the interview schedule with another group of respondents. This assisted the researcher to assess whether the language is comprehensible enough. But more than the language, it also assisted the researcher to assess if the context of the research was understood by the respondents.

3.4.3 Research instruments

An interview is one of the instruments that was be used during the research. The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in order to provide the researcher with more information during the data collection process.

As a strategy to probe deeper, the researcher used non-verbal cues. The researcher, at times, led the respondent by extending the same question with the intention of probing deeper.

The use of semi-structured questions assisted in terms of not limiting responses. The interviewee was also at ease because he/she has familiarised him/her with the questions beforehand. The manner of questioning was the same for all the respondents.

To alleviate any suspicions from the respondent, the researcher informed him/her about the use of a tape recorder during the interview. The respondents were informed about the purposes of the taperecording, namely that it would assist the researcher during the analysis of the data. The use of note-taking should also not distract the respondent, and he/she should be aware that such an activity was to take place.

3.4.4 Data generation

The research focus is on the implementation of portfolio assessment in the Grade 9 classroom. I intend to gain an understanding of this by the use of semi-structured interviews and observation. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) refer to this method of data collection as triangulation. Cohen et al. (2003), define triangulation as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour.

According to Cohen et al. (2003), the more the methods contrast with each other, the greater the researcher's confidence that it will be trustworthy. The triangulation strategy in this research assisted to validate the data collected, in the sense that the methods used, namely interviews and observations contrasted with each other. Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research. The collected data was

interpreted in terms of observed reality as portfolio assessment is implemented in the classroom by the teachers.

The interaction process between the interviewer and the interviewee, culminating in observation of the data collected, enabled this research process to assume a qualitative paradigm.

The schools where the educators are located were used as venues for the interviews. The researcher needed to request a quiet room from the school authorities to prevent disturbances during the interview.

3.4.5 Semi-structured interviews

Kvale (1996) defines the semi-structured interview as one done with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee, with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena. With this type of interview process, the researcher is also at liberty to probe for responses.

The interview needed to be carefully planned and piloted so that the interviewer was able to gather sufficient data for the study. Knight (2003) in his study, also pointed out that semi-structured interviews are conceived as data collection devices which attempt to capture responses of people to questions that are carefully standardised and intended to be minimally interceptive.

3.4.6 Observations

The relevancy of observations in this research was that the researcher had to gather appropriate data on the physical settings as well as the management of the whole process of portfolio assessment. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003), refer to observational data as being more attractive because they afford the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from live situations. In this research, the researcher observed the teacher in the Grade 9

class, displaying his/her knowledge and skills on the implementation of portfolio assessment.

The researcher prepared an observation schedule as a tool to assist him during the data collection process. The focus was on participant observation, and such observation was recorded. As the learners were allowed to work in groups, the focus of the researcher was to observe how the educator relates to the learners as they work either individually or in groups. The intention was to check the ability of the educator in the management of learner portfolios in the classroom as the interaction proceeds.

The researcher also observed how the portfolios were stored in the classroom. The researcher had no problems during observation because the observation schedule was used as a guide.

3.5 Measures to ensure validity

The interview process calls for sharing and negotiation of ideas. In order to ensure validity of the research process, the researcher remained detached from the viewpoints of the interviewees. The researcher assumed an objective stance which allowed the interviewees to be in a position to 'come out' and be able to express their points of view without the researcher's interference. The respondents were at liberty to give their own interpretation of events.

3.5.1 Concurrent validity.

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2003), refer to concurrent validity as being demonstrated when the data gathered from using one instrument correlates strongly with data gathered from using another instrument. In this research, the researcher was able to correlate the data collected through interviews and observations and hence make conclusions pertaining to the knowledge and skills of the teachers on implementation of portfolio assessment.

3.5.2 Formulation of an interview schedule

As a result of the information gathered during the literature review, which entails the relevance of the utilisation of portfolios on assessment as per NCS policy, the researcher was able to formulate an interview schedule. The interview schedule was also formulated having considered challenges that educators face in the implementation of portfolio assessment as part of CASS.

The use of portfolios is relevant for CASS because documentation of growth is one of the purposes of portfolio assessment. This is made possible as the learner is able to gauge his/her level of performance in terms of the tasks that have been completed as the learner is being continuously assessed.

The questions required responses from the teachers pertaining to the implementation of portfolio assessment. These responses assisted the researcher in an understanding the teachers' perceptions pertaining to portfolio assessment. Some of the questions in the interview schedule required the educator to highlight the learners' attitudes towards this new form of assessment.

3.6 Interview setting

The idea of choosing the schools where the educators were based assisted the interviewer to limit disturbances. It was important for the setting to be a quiet place/room. The room needed to have enough space to allow for the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee.

It was ethical for the researcher to observe the school time table so as not to interfere with teaching and learning. The researcher also observed the teacher during the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. This observation was focused on classroom setting, the learning process, and how well the educator is versed on the

implementation of portfolio assessment. The data collected in these settings was documented for analysis.

3.6.1 Ethical considerations

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) say "The issues of informed consent and confidentiality need to be prioritised with interviewees by way of letters, as well as talking to the interviewees". There was a need to meet the interviewees before the actual interview to highlight to each interviewee the purposes of the interview. Interviewees needed to know that their participation was voluntary and that they were able to withdraw at any time.

The other objective of the meeting was to initiate a relationship of trust between the researcher as an interviewer and the teacher as an interviewee. The researcher needed to ensure the interviewee that the interview details would remain confidential. This assurance was intended to put the interviewees in a comfortable position so that and they would not have any suspicions during the course of the interview. The interviewee was ensured that no details or particulars of the interview would be disclosed.

Durrheim and Wassenaar (1999) maintain that the research design should always reflect careful attention to the ethical issues embodied in research projects. They further emphasise that the essential purpose of ethical research planning is to protect the welfare and rights of the research participants. As a strategy, the researcher familiarised the interviewee with the contents of the interview by issuing him/her with a list of semi-structured questions before-hand. The researcher met the principal of the school hand over the details of the research project.

3.7 Limitations

The interview process was conducted during teaching and learning periods. The challenge to this was the time factor. The teachers had

limited time as a result of time table constraints. The researcher needed to use the free time available to the teacher of normally an hour per day.

Sometimes the researcher had to adjourn the interview and classroom observation because of limited time. Some of the teachers were not able to participate after school hours because they were engaged in personal matters.

In one of the schools it was difficult to organise a quiet room where the interview could be conducted without any interruptions. The researcher was compelled to conduct the interview session in the staffroom as a result of non-availability of rooms. During the research process the researcher had to bear with disturbances by teachers coming in and out of the room. In the other two schools, they were able to offer an office in the administration building, which was good, but learners and teachers could come in to collect their stuff.

During the observation process in class, the observed teacher intended to create an artificial situation. The learners felt uneasy with the presence of the researcher in class during tuition. This led to an uneasy relationship between the teacher and the learners.

In two of the schools the classes were very large. This created difficulties for the teacher to facilitate and give individual attention to members in the groups. This limited the researcher's observation of most of the learners' interactions with the teacher.

3.8 Conclusion

The research methodology has highlighted the steps and formalities that the researcher followed. The research methodology used in this research study helped the researcher to come to an understanding of

how the research was designed in order to achieve results which were valid.

The method used is also an indication that the data collection process is not done in a vacuum. There has been an interaction between the researcher and the interviewees during research. Having collected the data by means of an interview process, the next step was an analysis of the data collected.

The next chapter focuses on the analysis of the data. The data collected is also interpreted.

CHAPTER 4

4. Analysis of data

4.1 Introduction

The data collection process not only involved interviews with the teachers, but also observations in classroom settings, while the teacher was involved with the implementation of portfolio assessment. The data collected during the research focused on evidence based on the teachers' understanding of the policy on assessment and specifically portfolio assessment. The intentions of the researcher were to find out whether the teachers are knowledgeable and skilled enough to implement portfolio assessment in the classroom. The data gathered was analysed. The results of the research indicated a correlation of data gathered from using both instruments.

4.2 Data generation and analysis

The research questions were formulated to link with the data collection. The research was undertaken because of a need to highlight the teachers' knowledge and skills on the implementation of portfolio assessment. The researcher prepared the same set of questions for each of the three teachers that were interviewed. The data gathered in these responses assisted the researcher to investigate the implementation of portfolio assessment by the teachers.

The initial question was aimed at gathering data about the teachers' understanding and description of portfolio assessment. Two of the participants indicated that "Portfolios are files. The learner has to keep the entire tasks that are done in this file". Shaklee et al. (1997), elaborates on this by saying that this form of assessment is authentic because the data is collected from various sources, through multiple methods, and used over multiple points in time.

The next question was “What is your opinion concerning the implementation of portfolio assessment in the learning area that you teach?” One participant indicated that “both the learner and teacher are able to monitor the progress of the work that has been done”. The other response indicated was “The learner is able to be assessed continuously”. In the review of the literature, Paulson et al. (1991), reiterate that the use of portfolio assessment is related to the monitoring of student mastery of the core curriculum.

One of the participants indicated that “Portfolio assessment contributes to the progress of the learner because it combines a range of formative and summative methods. Portfolio assessment is essential because every piece of work is assessed to determine the final mark. The learners develop a sense of responsibility and accountability because they are made aware of the programme of assessment”.

The next question asked was “Do you think portfolios are relevant tools to be used in continuous assessment?” Two of the participants indicated that “With portfolio assessment, every task that is done counts towards the summative assessment. All aspects are covered and tested accordingly. Reporting on the progress of the learners is done quarterly by means of recorded marks from the assessment book and schedules. These marks are then recorded on a CASS form to give summative results at the end of the year”. George (1995) emphasises that the characteristic nature of portfolio assessment, being continuous, provides formative opportunities for monitoring students’ progress towards achieving essential outcomes.

The other participant indicated that “Portfolios encourage continuous active participation of both the teacher and the learner. Portfolio assessment allows the teacher to continuously monitor learner progress. Portfolio assessment assists in tracking progress and the teacher can immediately identify areas that need specific attention.

This allows the teacher to give expanded opportunities to learners who are struggling. Portfolios serve as evidence to protect the teacher against any challenges that may arise from parents and other stakeholders pertaining to the learners' performance".

The next question was "What has been your biggest challenge/s on the implementation of portfolio assessment at school?" One participant indicated that "There is a problem with learners who show a lack of interest and are unable to work independently hence they fail to meet the stated deadlines for submission. If the learners have a negative attitude about the use of portfolios it becomes difficult to improve their learning. This calls for an extra effort on the part of the teacher to monitor task completion. The teacher may also use the same tasks over and over again." The other participant indicated that; "There are concerns about portfolio storage as a result of limited space as well as time constraints. Keeping the portfolios in class is not recommended, as some of the learners cannot be trusted. Learners have a tendency to misplace their completed tasks which is an added disadvantage. There is also a problem for teachers with large numbers of learners".

The other participant said, "Portfolio assessment seems to be on the right track because it provides continuity. It indicates to the next grade educator what skills, attitudes and values (SKAV's) have been attained by the learner. In this way, portfolio assessment provides the groundwork for baseline assessment. The SKAV's that are lacking are highlighted, and are attended to by the next educator".

The participants were then required to give their suggestions as to how the challenges mentioned above could be alleviated. One of the participants said "Portfolio assessment should be encouraged and monitored strongly from the early grades so that both the learners and educators could become accustomed to it. There should be interventions from the department of education officials to assist on

the implementation of portfolio assessment". The other participant felt that "It is important to involve parents to assist teachers in monitoring the progress of learners on portfolio assessment. Parents encourage learners and they also stay informed about their children's academic performance". The other participant mentioned that "Working as a collective promotes cooperation and an ability to identify areas that need development. The support by all stakeholders results in a positive reinforcement and the will to work harder".

The participants were also asked "Do you think that it is helpful to involve learners in the creation of their portfolios?" One participant said; "Portfolio assessment ensures active participation amongst the learners as they continually engage on its compilation in terms of tasks that have been completed. This involvement of learners' gives them a feeling of being recognised and trusted, thus reinforcing the potential of working independently". The other participant indicated that "The learners develop a feeling of accountability because the product of the work kept in the portfolio i.e. the completed tasks, is a reflection of their own effort. A sense of pride is developed as they compete for the best portfolio contents".

One of the participants indicated that "The involvement of learners on the creation of their portfolios is not recommended because the learners will select tasks that are easy for them to accomplish, thus not achieving the stated outcomes".

The next question was "What have you observed as the biggest advantage in the implementation of portfolio assessment?" One participant indicated that "The marks obtained by learners on continuous assessment (CASS) can be traced back to the tasks accomplished by the learner and filed in the portfolio. This makes it easier for the management of the school to monitor the teachers' and learners work. Each learner will be involved in completing the set

tasks as reflected on the P.O.A. because they are aware that those tasks will ultimately count towards their year mark. The tasks for assessment are always kept together. This serves as a good reservoir in preparing for summative assessment". Gallagher (1998) says that the portfolios enhance the growth of the learners, and critical self-reflection and decision-making skills are some of the important outcomes that the student acquires. The other participant indicated that "The biggest advantage of portfolio assessment is that it has exposed personal qualities on the part of the learners as well the teachers because they are encouraged to think strategically and flexibly".

The next question was "How do you think the advantage stated above has assisted in the development of the learner?" One of the participants said "Portfolio assessment helps in the sense that the learner is able to demonstrate the skills of thinking independently and thus promotes self-esteem". The other participant indicated that, "The learner becomes better prepared for the final examination. Portfolio assessment encourages learners to improve their learning and promotes a better understanding of concepts. Independent thinking and working is reinforced. A sense of ownership is promoted amongst the learners and co-operation from the parents is stimulated". The other two participant mentioned remedial work, stating that "Remedial work can be done when needed. The teacher becomes aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the learner at an early stage".

The next question was "Do you think that the involvement of other stakeholders like parents, peers and educators contribute positively to the development of learners in portfolio assessment?" One of the participants indicated that "Parents encourage learners and also stay informed about the learners' academic performance. The learners who are poor organisers are assisted". The other participant indicated that "The parental input encourages learners to do more".

The third participant indicated that “Working as a collective promotes cooperation and an ability to identify areas that need development. Learners get motivated when they realize that they are being watched”.

The next question asked “Is there any correlation between what is assessed at school and the national policy on assessment?” One of the participants could not respond to this question. The other two participants indicated that “The department of education determines the assessment policy and guidelines so the teachers assess what they are supposed to”. This indicates that most of the educators lack understanding of the assessment policy guidelines in the NCS. One of the participants indicated that “The national policy on assessment emphasises continuous assessment”.

The next question asked of the participants to indicate, “How does the assessment policy assist you in the implementation of portfolio assessment?” Only one of the participants indicated clarity by indicating that, “The policy is only designed to outline what and how much is to be assessed. Portfolios must contain a certain amount of work (tasks) as per the national policy on assessment”. The other two participants could not provide a response, indicating lack of awareness of the policy.

The next question enquired “How does the school assessment policy assist you in the implementation of portfolio assessment?” All the participants indicated that the year plan assists them to plan for tasks to be completed on time.

The next question was “Do you have any strategies that you employ in the classroom to facilitate peer group assessment on portfolios? Two of the participants indicated that “The learners are able to assess one another by means of portfolio interchange. They are able to work as peers and in groups and compare their work with each

other's". One participant said "They are able to help each other to perform remedial work. Active learners get a chance to work with those who are slow".

The next question was "What products do you include in the content of learner portfolios?" One of the participants said "The portfolios contain samples of good work including all the tests, assignments, and projects which have been completed by the learner". The other two participants indicated that contents must also "Include all the question papers as well as their memoranda".

4.3 Observations

The observation of portfolio utilisation in the classroom was done in three schools with the intention to assess the success of portfolio assessment implementation in the classroom. The researcher had to request permission from the participants to do observations in the classroom. The observations were to be done during the second quarter so as to observe the tasks that were completed during the first quarter.

In the three schools, the researcher observed that the learners were seated in groups. The teacher introduced the lesson, and then facilitated the engagement of learners in various activities. The activities were to be completed and then filed in the learner portfolios.

In two of the three schools where the observations were done, more than a minimum number of tasks were done during the first quarter, which was not in accordance with the National Policy on Assessment. In one of these two schools the learners had only formal tests filed on their portfolios. This was to the disadvantage of the learners since it was an indication that most of the skills were not assessed as specified in the new NCS curriculum.

The storage of portfolios varied. In the first school the portfolios were kept in the classroom cupboard. During the start of the lesson the portfolios were issued to the individual members of the group. This was time-consuming particularly with very large groups and the educators had to work hard to maintain order in the classrooms. In the second school, the portfolios were kept by the teacher in the staffroom. The researcher observed that in these two schools, incomplete tasks were taken by the learners for homework and the portfolios remained at school.

In the third school, the portfolios were kept by the learners. This posed a challenge for the teacher during teaching period. Other learners indicated that they had forgotten their portfolios at home. This method proves to be chaotic according to the researcher's observations because of the added factor that some learners also complained of the loss of completed tasks.

In the first school the teacher indicated that they were able to procure the folders for the learners. In one of the schools that were observed, the learner portfolios were just simple folders which were not an added financial burden to the parents. In one of the schools the learners had carefully designed folders which looked unique. The researcher's observation was that learners with nicely decorated portfolios wanted to draw his attention which indicated that they held them dearly.

Another observation was that in the second and third schools, the table of contents was not available in the learner portfolios. This hampered the excitement of the learners because they were not made aware of other tasks to follow. It also limits the learner's awareness of the outcomes of given tasks. In the third school there was no indication of moderation of the work done by management of the school.

4.4 Conclusion

This data collected through the interaction of the researcher with the teachers assisted on the investigation on the implementation of portfolio assessment. It has also assisted to inform the researcher about the teachers' shortcomings in the implementation of portfolio assessment.

The next section highlights the researchers' recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

5. Findings, recommendations and conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to determine whether the teachers at school are knowledgeable and skilled in the implementation of portfolio assessment. The researcher identified a need to determine whether educators understand the new National policy on assessment.

5.2 The findings

With the completion of the research, the researcher analysed the data and provided findings which were important because they assisted in the determination of the challenges that are faced by teachers at schools with regard to the implementation of portfolio assessment. When these challenges were highlighted, they then assisted the researcher to propose solutions.

5.2.1 An indication of the educators' level of understanding of portfolio assessment at school

- The interviewed teachers indicated that they were aware of the prevalence of the policy on assessment, but varied responses were detected pertaining to the readiness of educators to implement the new policy at classroom level.
- Basically the teachers at schools indicated an understanding of files when one refers to the creation of portfolios. There were however, different views in terms utilising the files during implementation. This shows lack of knowledge of the policy.
- The interviewed educators responded positively on the significance of portfolio assessment, but there was evidently a lack of understanding regarding the policy which guides implementation.
- The responses also varied pertaining to the contents of learner portfolios. This again was an indication that the teachers were

aware of the changes and the new policy in education, but there is definitely a lack of understanding the policy which is a guide.

- All the participants interviewed were not able to give a definite answer in terms of the achieved learning outcomes in their subjects. This indicates lack of understanding of the learning outcomes and assessment standards. Evidently the learning outcomes are taken from the textbooks without the teachers' understanding of the accompanying assessment standards.

5.3 Some challenges and suggestions on portfolio assessment

- The teachers highlighted a common problem concerning storage space for portfolios at schools. In one school the teacher allowed the learners to take the portfolios home, and the learners ended up losing parts of the contents or the whole portfolio or it ended up in a bad condition.
- The other challenge was the lack of skills amongst educators to manage the portfolios as a result of lack of proper training.
- Large classes also posed a challenge in terms of time constraints and an inability to attend to individual learners.
- Some participants identified the challenge to the teachers of adapting to the new curriculum, whilst at the same time needing to attend to learners in the classroom.
- Lack of understanding of the assessment policy led to some of the teachers giving learners too many tasks. The teachers themselves again do not have enough time for marking these tasks which actually demotivates learners.

5.4 Recommendations

During the data collection process, it became evident that most of the teachers were aware of the importance of portfolios as part of the latest form of assessment, i.e. continuous assessment. The teachers confirmed that the implementation of portfolio assessment at school

was not monitored properly. There is a lack of focus from the department at GETC level. There is no effective monitoring of portfolios in the lower grades.

It would be proper for the department to change its focus and lay a solid foundation at GETC level to achieve quality results at FET. This could be done in the following ways:

- Curriculum and education specialists should be employed at GET level to monitor and assist teachers at school on the proper implementation of portfolio assessment as part of the NCS policy. If portfolio assessment is to be successful, the department needs to train teachers on the utilisation of portfolios. If teachers are properly trained, they will be motivated to implement the task successfully. The lack of training results in teachers having to revert to the old methods of teaching which may be disastrous because it is not in line with current curriculum guidelines.
- Education specialists should assist with the formation of clusters amongst the teachers at GET level so that they can all participate in planning for the year. Proper implementation would require the department to communicate directly with the educators who are involved with implementation rather than sending circulars to the school principals. This will ensure validity of the work covered by the various grades in different schools. Within these clusters the educators can plan and moderate the work they have covered. The formation of cluster groups will also assist with standardisation.
- District officials should intervene in setting the deadlines for quarterly assessments. This can assist the teachers to plan for assessments being guided by the assessment policies. It can also enlighten the teachers about the relevancy of the assessment standards and learning outcomes.

- There is also a need to involve other stakeholders on the assessment of learners, eg. parents. The parents must be made aware of the number of recorded tasks that are filed for reporting at the end of the quarter, and they have to acknowledge this by signing the work done by the learners. The involvement of the parents will assist the teachers in the management of the work done by the learners at school.
- Provinces need to develop a common programme of assessment for all the learning areas and subjects which is guided by the national policy on assessment. This will assist in the coordination of tasks that are to be performed by learners at school. These assessment tasks are to be kept in a learner's portfolio.

5.5 Conclusion

It is evident from this study that the implementation of portfolio assessment is not done properly at Grade 9 level. The department of education needs to pay particular attention to the GET level. Through proper training and guidance at GET level by the department of education, a proper foundation on policy implementation can be laid. This is so because as teachers become familiar with the assessment policy, they will be able to implement portfolio assessment. Teachers are not motivated because they are confused by the changes and there is not enough support coming from department for GET level teachers.

Portfolio assessment in Grade 9 cannot be properly implemented in isolation because of the huge gaps in terms of departmental interventions at foundation, intermediate, and senior phases in schools. The research indicates that Grade 9 teachers are aware of the new assessment policy and they all approve of portfolio assessment. But the proper implementation in Grade 9 will necessitate that the department goes back to the drawing board and effects more interventions at foundational learning levels.

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APPENDIX A

1. Formulation of the research questions

1.1 In your understanding, can you describe what is meant by portfolio assessment?

.....
.....

1.2 What is your opinion concerning the implementation of portfolio assessment in the learning area that you teach?

.....
.....

1.3 a) Do you think portfolios are relevant tools to be used in continuous assessment?

.....

b) Give reason/s for your response above.

.....
.....

1.4 How can portfolio assessment be used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your learners at school?

.....
.....

1.5 a) Do you think that it is helpful to involve learners in the creation of their portfolios?

.....

b) Give reason/s

.....
.....

1.6 What has been your biggest challenge/s in the implementation of portfolio assessment at school?

.....
.....

1.7 Give your own suggestions as to how you think such challenges can be met.

.....
.....

1.8 a) What have you observed as the biggest advantage in the implementation of portfolio assessment?

.....
.....

b) How do you think the advantage stated above has assisted in the development of the learner?

.....
.....

1.9 State any disadvantages you might have experienced in the implementation of portfolio assessment?

.....
.....

1.10 a) Do you think the involvement of other stakeholders like parents, peers and educators contribute positively to the development of learners in portfolio assessment?

.....

b) Give reason/s.

.....
.....

1.11 a) Is there any correlation between what is assessed at school and the national policy on assessment?

.....

b) What correlation exists?

.....
.....

1.12 How does the school assessment policy assist you in the implementation of portfolio assessment?

.....
.....

1.13 How do you think portfolio assessment has assisted you to achieve the learning outcomes in your subject?

.....
.....

1.14 a) Has portfolio assessment posed any challenges to you to acquaint yourself with the new curriculum?

.....
.....

b) How?

.....
.....

1.15 a) Do you have any strategies that you employ in the classroom to facilitate peer group assessment on portfolios?

.....

b) How do you facilitate this process?

.....
.....

1.16 What products do you include in the content of learner portfolios?

.....
.....

1.17 a) Do learners have separate folders for each learning area or its just one file for all learning areas?

.....
.....

b) What is your comment on the response above.

.....
.....

APPENDIX B

Observation Schedule

Coding: 1. NEVER

2. YES

3. SOMETIMES

1. Were the learner portfolios kept in the classroom?

2. Were there any observable disruptions in class when portfolios were used by the learners?

3. Did the learners require any assistance from the educator?

4. Was the educator able to maintain discipline in the classroom?

5. Were the learners able to interact in class when portfolios were used?

6. Were the learners made aware of the expected learning outcomes?

7. Was the portfolio design indicative of individual skills?

8. Were there any scoring rubrics on the contents of the portfolios?

9. Was the table of contents reflective of the subject policy?

10. Was there any observable order on the selection of portfolio contents?

Comments:

11. Comment on observed learner attitudes towards portfolios.

.....
.....
.....

12. Comment on observed educator attitudes towards portfolios.

.....
.....
.....

APPENDIX C

Letter to the circuit manager.

Box 40332
Shelly Beach
4265
28 August 2006

The Circuit Manager
Gamalakhe Circuit
Gamalakhe
4249

Dear Sir

Request to interview grade 9 isiZulu educators in your circuit.

I hereby wish to be granted permission to interview Grade 9 isiZulu educators in three of the schools in your circuit. I am currently enrolled for a Masters degree with the University of KwaZulu Natal. I am doing research on the implementation of portfolio assessment as part of continuous assessment at school level. This project is headed by Dr. Combrinck who can be contacted at the number 031 2603688. I believe that the department will benefit from my research as it focuses on proper implementation of the National Curriculum Statement.

Thank you.

Yours Sincerely
Ngcobo B.M.

Signed:.....
Cell no.: 0822982434

APPENDIX D

Letter to the school principal

Box 40332
Shelly Beach
4265
28 August 2006

The School Principal
Port Shepstone High School
Port Shepstone
4240

Dear Sir

Request to interview grade 9 isiZulu educators in your school.

I hereby wish to be granted permission to interview Grade 9 isiZulu educators in your school. I am currently enrolled for a Masters degree with the University of KwaZulu Natal. I am doing research on the implementation of portfolio assessment as part of continuous assessment at school level. This project is headed by Dr. Combrinck who can be contacted at the number 031 2603688. I believe that the department will benefit from my research as it focuses on proper implementation of the National Curriculum Statement.

Thank you.

Yours Sincerely
Ngcobo B.M.

Signed:.....
Cell no.: 0822982434

APPENDIX E
Letter to the school teacher

Box 40332
Shelly Beach
4265
28 August 2006

The School Teacher
Port Shepstone High School
Port Shepstone
4240

Dear Sir/Madam

Request for observation and interview.

I hereby request to interview and do observation on you during research. I am currently enrolled for a Masters degree with the University of KwaZulu Natal. I am doing research on the implementation of portfolio assessment as part of continuous assessment at school level. This project is headed by Dr. Combrinck who can be contacted at the number 031 2603688. I believe that the department will benefit from my research as it focuses on proper implementation of the National Curriculum Statement.

Thank you.

Yours Sincerely
Ngcobo B.M.

Signed:.....
Cell no.: 0822982434