TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING AND USE OF ASSESSMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION:

A CASE STUDY OF A HAMMERSDALE FARM SCHOOL

BY

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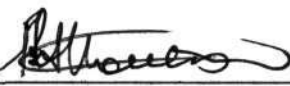
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DECLARATION

I, **Rosemary Rosebud Rosa Fikile Langa**, declare that this is my own work, submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Education at the University of Natal. I further declare that this dissertation has never been submitted at any other university or institution for any purpose, academic or otherwise.

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

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the nature and extent of teacher's understanding of assessment in the context of an outcomes-based education system at a Hammersdale Farm School. The study also investigates the nature of assessment techniques used by educators at the school and whether these techniques were implemented in a manner that enhances learner performance. The educator level of assessment literacy or illiteracy was also examined. Learner's experience of assessment was also investigated. The subjects in this study were eleven educators and twenty-two learners. The research methodology was in the form of a qualitative case study. Individual interviews of educators, learners questionnaire as well as document analysis were used to investigate educator's assessment, literacy or illiteracy, learner's experience of assessment and whether assessment (there) techniques are implemented in a manner that embraces principles of outcomes-based education.

The results revealed that educators show an understanding of assessment in an outcomes-based education system. There has been a shift from the traditional way of conducting assessment, which was by means of tests and examination only. Educators conduct assessment continuously and employ a variety of strategies, which help educators collect data about learner's performance. The data collected enables educators to give constant feedback to learners and also report to parents about their children's performance. However, findings also revealed that there is some illiteracy with regards to assessment planning and implementation. (Educators attempts are dwarfed by the tradition of summative type of assessment that educators have been exposed to all their lives. The study has also revealed that though educators engage in continuous assessment and

employ various assessment strategies; examinations are still considered as the strategy to be used for making decisions and public judgments due to lack of clearly formulated school assessment policy.

There is minimal participation of parents in their children's learning, which is due to illiteracy with regards to transformational policies and curriculum issues. Some parents, because of work commitments, financial constraints and not living with their children, makes participation almost impossible.

The implication of this study is that the school needs to have a clearly formulated assessment policy, which reflects OBE principles. The policy should state clearly how assessment is to be planned and implemented in an outcomes-based education system. The school also needs to have a staff development programme which is an ideal platform for sharing meanings and interpretations with regards to assessment implementation in an outcomes-based education system. The development programme will also help educators revisit and review their assessment policy to ensure that assessment implementation is on track. Parent participation in their children's learning could be made a reality through workshops. Parent's workshops would help develop parents on transformational policy and curriculum issues. This will ensure maximum parent participation in their children's learning and also ensure that parents provide necessary support to sustain effective learning.

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CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this research project was to investigate the nature and extent of teachers' understanding of assessment in the context of an outcomes-based education system at a Hammersdale farm school. The study also examined the nature of assessment techniques used by educators at the school and whether these techniques are implemented in a manner that embraces principles of outcomes-based education. The research study assessed the educator's level of assessment literacy or illiteracy in the context of new curriculum policies in South African education.

Traditionally educational assessment has been used to sort children for occupations of different status and remuneration in a historically ordered society. (Satterly, 1981; Little et al, 1996). Peliwe Lolwana (1996) confirms the above when she states that selection for particular occupational roles has been the most familiar function of assessment. This practice has manifested itself here in South Africa and internationally. In South Africa, learners were sorted out racially, (i.e. whites in white schools and Blacks in black schools). Under the apartheid regime, blacks had been the most disadvantaged in the sense that there were very few spaces for them in the labour market. In Britain and France, for example, selection operated through educational institutions and children from the elite class would be ensured of jobs and high positions in the labour market and this enabled its members to reproduce in successive generations. (Butterfield,1995).

The above is contrary to Satterly's (1981) definition of educational assessment. Satterly defines educational assessment as a process that describes the nature and extent of children's learning, its degree of correspondence with the aims and objectives of teaching and its relationship with the

environments, which are designed to facilitate learning. Little, (1996) also sees assessment as the facilitation of the learning process of the child, while Cullingford, (1995:11) defines it as an essential act and part of the creative process, and Brady, (1995:11) defines assessment as measuring pupil's performance during a programme of study. Looking at the above definitions of assessment, one can conclude that assessment is at the heart of the process of promoting children's learning and not to be used as a tool for sorting learners at the end of the process.

Traditionally, assessment has been perceived as a process in which we determine what learners have learnt. It has also been perceived as an afterthought activity, and was not integrated into the teaching-learning process. This means that assessment is an activity that takes place at the end of the teaching-learning process in the form of tests and examinations. The use of tests and examinations is not only confined to South Africa. Noah, (1994:106) reports on comparative research on assessment that was conducted in eight countries namely China, France, Germany, England, Japan, Sweden, Russia and the United States of America. One of his findings was that examinations are the most used as modes of assessment in schools.

The traditional way of assessing learners is informed by the behaviourist theory whereby teachers and pupils know what behaviour is required of them, i.e. what objectives are to be achieved (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). According to this theory knowledge can be broken down and hierarchies of learning established. Learners encounter and master simple facts and concepts before moving on to the more complicated material (Satterly, 1981, Torrance and Pryor, 1998).

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This results in assessment being conducted in an atomistic manner (Swezey, 1981, Gultig, 1997). According to Swezey, (1981) and Gultig, (1997), atomistic refers to outcomes being broken down to single performance elements that can be observed. In other words knowledge and skills are not tested simultaneously.

For the simple reason that they have been exposed to it all their lives, educators have used the traditional assessment mode. Unfortunately for the learners, they have been in a situation where they have to compete against each other. Because most learners are unable to compete, they are often labeled failures. Failure reduces self-esteem (Mitchell & Koshy, 1993). This is contrary to the role of assessment as a tool to measure learner performance with an aim of promoting and enhancing children's learning.

With the introduction of OBE, there has been a shift from the traditional way of assessing learners. The emphasis is now on an outcomes-based approach in which learners are evaluated or knowledge and what they can do with it (Gultig, 1997). For educators to be able to assess learners meaningfully, they (educators) should let them (learners) know what criteria they need to meet to be regarded as competent, or which criteria they are going to be assessed against. This leads to outcomes also being regarded as criterion-referenced. Swezey, (1981:4) sees criterion-referenced assessment as a measurement whereby the score achieved by an individual on a test are interpreted against an external standard. The above is supported by Stoll and Fink's assertion that "if pupils know what is to be learned, the performance standards which define the outcome; then they have a much better opportunity to learn" (1993:125). In this context, assessment is now conducted on a continuous basis, hence the reference to continuous assessment. Cullingford (1995:150) states that sustained teaching relies on the ability to analyse how pupils are learning

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and to diagnose what they need throughout the process. Therefore, engaging in continuous assessment will help maximize learning.

Outcomes-based assessment is informed by the social constructivist theory, where learning is regarded as a much more interactive process between teacher and learner (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). Constructivists concur with the outcomes -based education system when they state that pupils do not simply encounter and learn material, moving from simple to complex, but they actively engage with and attempt to make sense of what they encounter and incorporate it into their developing schematic understanding (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). To this effect, Wood (1987) regards assessment as a process, which envisages teacher-pupil interaction as part of the assessment process where the teacher and pupil collaborate actively to produce best performance.

1.2. Focus of the Study

In light of the above, this study investigated the nature and extent of teachers' understanding of assessment in the context of an outcomes-based education system at a Hammersdale farm school. The study also examined the nature of assessment techniques used by educators at the school and whether these techniques are implemented in a manner that embraces principles of outcomes-based education. The research study assessed the educator's level of assessment literacy or illiteracy in the context of new curriculum policies in South African education.

In the present transitional period, changes are taking place. Fullan, (1997:92) states that "real change requires individuals to alter their ways of thinking and doing". If an education system changes, one has to start with teachers because they play a cardinal role in the implementation of the change. New assessment approaches need to be accompanied by educators engaging in

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assessment practice changing, change of attitudes and behaviours. Looking at the above, this study aimed to investigate the educator's understandings of assessment in the context of outcomes-based education system in one Durban school. The study is based on the premise that if assessment is done correctly, the learner's performance could be enhanced. In particular the following research questions formed the focus of the study;

1. What is the school's assessment policy and how does it reflect principles of OBE?

2. What is the educators' understanding of outcomes-based assessment and its purpose?

3. What is the educators' understanding of outcomes-based assessment and its role in the teaching and learning situation?

4. What strategies do educators use to collect, record and report assessment data and how they facilitate or inhibit learning?

5. How is assessment conducted to enhance student learning?

1.3.   Organisation of the Report

Chapter 1 has focused on the aim of the research study and the research questions that were addressed. It also focused on what assessment is about, particularly outcomes-based assessment Chapter 2 will review literature on assessment, particularly outcomes-based assessment. Chapter 3 will focus on the research design and the methodology that were used in the study. Chapter 4 will present research findings and also provide analysis of those findings. The fifth chapter of the research project will formulate conclusions and recommendations on how assessment practice is to be changed in order to enhance learner performance in an outcomes-based context.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter has argued that traditionally assessment was regarded as an afterthought and was not integrated into the teaching- learning process. Assessment was done in the form of tests and examinations, which promoted competition amongst learners and contributed little to student learning. Teachers have opted for this kind of assessment because they have been exposed to it all their lives. This has led to teachers becoming assessment illiterate. This study aimed to investigate the nature and extent of teachers' understanding of assessment in the context of an outcomes based education system. The study has also assessed the educator's level of assessment literacy or illiteracy in the context of new curriculum policies in South African education. In this chapter literature related to the above aspects of assessment will be reviewed and the theoretical conceptual frameworks that informed the study identified.

2.2. Conceptions Of Assessment

Assessment is perceived as a process in which we determine what learners have learned. It has also been perceived as a process that has to take place at the end of the teaching-learning process. Traditionally learning would take place; thereafter planning for assessment would take place. This would be in a form of a test or an examination. This kind of assessment has promoted competition amongst learners and has disadvantaged many learners because they are unable to compete, thus subjecting learners to failure. Failure reduces self-esteem. Mitchell and Koshy, (1993) and Cullingford, (1995) refer to the above type of assessment as norm-referenced assessment, and all

agree that this kind of assessment has been used to compare children with one another.

Recently, with the introduction of outcomes-based education there has been a shift from the traditional way of assessing learners. Assessment is now planned in conjunction with learning outcomes which pupils are expected to achieve. This requires teachers to determine standards of performance at the beginning of the teaching -learning process. This means assessing learners performance (i.e. what it is that they can do in relation to what they are being taught). Stoll and Fink, (1993:125) state that if pupils know what is to be learned, the performance standards, which define the outcome, then they have a much better opportunity to learn.

An outcomes-based assessment is an ongoing process, referred to as continuous assessment Pennycuick, (1990) agrees with Stoll and Fink, (1993) when he states that assessment forms an integral part of teaching and learning and is not a separate activity. This kind of assessment is used to improve teaching and learning in schools. It is formative because it forms an integral part of teaching and learning (Mitchell and Koshy, 1993). Little, (1996) adds that it facilitates learning Fullan, (2000:582) states that pedagogy and assessment feed on each other through the interaction of teachers to improve student learning. The following section examines assessment and its purpose in the teaching-learning situation.

2.3. Purpose Of Assessment

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that in an OBE curriculum, assessment is used to evaluate the effectiveness of classroom activities and the curriculum as a whole. From the information gathered, channels of meaningful communication between children, parents and teachers can be developed. Assessment also helps to inform choices and plans one makes

concerning the way forward for individual children (Nuttall, 1986:114).

Little, (1996) states that assessment provides the teacher and student with feedback o performance. Pennycuick, (1990) sees assessment as helping to identify strengths and weaknesse of the teaching-learning process, which can help the teacher to make development plans fo further teaching and learning. Stoll and Fink, (1993) see the purpose of assessment as th enhancement of good quality learning and are supported by Mitchell and Koshy, (1993) who stat that assessment evaluates the effectiveness of the classroom activities and the curriculum as whole.

For assessment to be carried out, planning directed towards pupil outcome should be develope (Stoll and Fink, 1996:124). This therefore requires teachers to determine standards c performance at the beginning of the teaching-learning process. This means that assessment shoul be criterion-referenced (Mitchell and Koshy, 1993:12). By criterion referenced, Mitchell an Koshy, (1993:12) mean that the criteria for assessment should be developed so that the result should give direct information about pupils' achievement in relation to objectives.

Standardized means of conducting assessment can be formative, summative and evaluative Cullingford, (1995:152) defines formative assessment as concerned with recognizing an delineating the achievement of a pupil so that the teacher knows what the learner should lean next. It is the starting point for further planning. Using diagnostic tasks, a teacher can identif strengths and weaknesses of learners and also identify areas for further development (Pole, 1993) In contrast, summative and evaluative assessment provides a summary of achievement up to particular moment in time, at the end of a learning task. This kind of assessment is concerned

with testing what kind of help and support the child is getting (Gultig, 1997).

Looking at the above, one can conclude that formative and diagnostic forms of assessment ar essential to help the child's development. As Pennycuick, (1990:113) states formative function are internal to the school and they fit more closely with the concept of assessment as an integra part of the teaching and learning process.

In the next paragraph the ways in which data can be gathered and recorded so that teachers ar able to give formative feedback, are explored.

2.4. Methods of Assessment

Mitchell and Koshy, (1993) state that teachers use different techniques when gathering an recording assessment data. These include projects, oral and written work, tests and performance during the teaching learning process. The teacher records the individual learners' performance an areas for further development to be communicated to the learners and the parents. Educators us a mark book to record marks and at times use ticks. One of the principles of assessment is that w should establish the purpose of assessment, which will eventually help us achieve an educationall useful purpose (Gultig and Stielau, 2002). We need to ask ourselves the question, as educators what do the marks mean? Do they help us as educators to see why learners do not understan certain concepts and also why and how they go wrong? Do the marks help educators identif areas for further development? The use of a mark book seems to put the emphasis on achieving certain mark to be regarded as competent whereas with outcomes-based assessment system learners achieve competency when outcomes against set criteria have been achieved. This metho is not relevant to outcomes-based assessment because it does not show what knowledge; skills

and values are being assessed. It also does not show whether outcomes against set criteria, if there are any, will be achieved.

A second method of assessment is the teacher-set tests or tests set by the district or subject committees outside the school. Some tests may be oral (e.g., reading test where the teacher scores the child as he reads). Tests may also be in the form of multiple-choice questions, which test knowledge or recall of facts. Tests are marked and a score is given for each child. Tests only provide the teacher with the child's understanding of concepts, skills and knowledge (Gultig, 1997). The score given does not give an idea why the child went wrong and does not make the learner understand why he or she went wrong. We also need to establish whether the test given was linked to the desired learning outcomes (Gultig and Stielau, 2002). We as educators also need to ask ourselves whether the assessment feedback provides information about the quality of learning and teaching and will help improve our teaching. We also need to ask ourselves whether we will be able to make valid and reliable judgements on the information received (Gultig and Stielau, 2002). However, tests are useful in that they indicate what the learners know and what they do not know thereby helping the teacher to plan for developmental tasks. Tests set by the district or subject committees are useful in that they help the educator to adhere to the standards stipulated by the Department of Education.

Observation is a third way of collecting information about children's learning. This kind of method has been used previously as a research strategy in assessing children's performance (Little, 1996). Children are observed when they are engaged in learning activities in the classroom (e.g. problem solving in maths). The teacher has to record observations made for each and every child. The teacher's assessment may be disturbed because the teacher has to observe and write comments

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about the child's performance. The teacher may thus only assesses the cognitive skill (e.g. skill in problem solving) and does not take into account the affective and the psychomotor domains. This may be because she or he does not know the criteria that she or he can use to measure the affective and psychomotor. Goodwin, (1997:120) also posed that question when he asked: If teachers are expected to assess attitudes of learners towards the subject, how does one go about doing it?

Little, (1996) identifies the checklist as a fourth method that may be used in the classroom. Checklists are used when assessing discussion on a topic given by the teacher. The topic is discussed with the learner before it is taught. Here the teacher assesses the understanding of concepts. The teacher bases this on the premise that the children learn outside the school, they read about things in books and also learn through television programmes. The discussion on the topic helps the learners to activate their existing knowledge and makes it easier to relate new knowledge on the existing knowledge. According to Little, checklists would include items to be assessed like, using existing knowledge, handling of new knowledge and relating it to their everyday life.

A fifth method is the portfolio. According to Little, (1996), this is a file where samples of children work are kept. In these portfolios work samples of children include projects, essays, poems, drawings etcetera. Teachers who use this method acknowledge the positive influence portfolios have on children's learning. The teacher together with the learners would assess the work samples. The question that comes into mind is what criteria do learners use in assessing each other's work (Mitchell and Koshy, 1993:25). In order to do this meaningfully, educators need to set criteria against which the work samples will be assessed. This would help learners to also assess

themselves whilst still doing their portfolio.

A combination of portfolios, checklists, observation, tests and examinations would be, in my opinion, the strategies recommended in an OBE context. The reason is that learners are given an opportunity to access information on their own and work independently. When these methods are integrated, they would allow the educator to assess not only knowledge, skills and values but they would also help learners in knowing what they can do with the knowledge attained.

From the literature reviewed in this study, it is evident that teachers work as individuals in their classrooms when assessing learners. This leads to teachers giving their own meanings to the assessment process, which might differ from each other. Mitchell and Koshy, (1993) suggest that when they have assigned meaning in the assessment process, teachers need to compare their interpretations until they come to a uniform agreement about the meanings they assign to the assessment process. This can only be realized through on going and long-term staff development. This could help alleviate the level of assessment illiteracy among teachers.

2.5. Outcomes-based Assessment

In the past, teaching and learning were content based whereas outcomes-based education focuses on knowledge and how to use the knowledge they have learned (i.e. skills, values and attitudes). The assessment strategies that have been discussed above are in line with the outcomes-based approach to assessment because teachers are not only giving tests and examinations, but also engage in continuous assessment. Continuous assessment is one of the assessment strategies for assessing stipulated by the Department of Education, which is outcomes-based. Continuous assessment is a formative, developmental and summative form of assessment, which also

operates diagnostically. Continuous assessment is integrated into day-to-day teaching so that the teacher is constantly aware of the learners' progress towards the outcomes (Gultig and Stielau 2002). This form of assessment also helps the teacher to understand why and how learners go wrong, thus helping teachers to alter their methods in order to help learners achieve mastery in their learning and enhance their performance. This also means that teachers are also able to learn about their teaching, thus helping them to improve their teaching. Cullingford, (1995) agrees with Gultig and Stielau, (2002) when he states that assessment teaches and assesses. With continuous assessment, according to an outcomes-based approach, we do not only test knowledge but also test skills, values and attitudes. Before deciding on the techniques to be used, teachers need to decide what knowledge, skills and values they want to assess.

It should be noted that teachers have confused continuous assessment with continuous testing, for the simple reason that they have been exposed to testing for the greater part of their lives, making it a norm of assessment. This has led to Jansen, (1998:329) stating that traditional testing and examinations will continue to play a powerful role in shaping the nature of OBE-directed teaching.

Tests and examinations are still regarded as assessment strategies but there has been a shift in the emphasis as the "only" assessment strategies. Teachers need to integrate old and new assessment strategies so as to be able to assess skills, values and attitudes and not only assess knowledge through tests and examinations (Gultig, 1997). It is important that teachers try and establish what the purpose of assessment is. That way teachers may begin to change old assessment strategies and use those that fit the purpose of assessment. If we can start implementing assessment strategies that fit the purpose of assessment, we will be able to judge whether learners have

learnt and that we have taught competently (Gultig, 1997). In other words, the assessment approach that we should engage in should be the one that teaches and assesses (i.e. formative).

Through an outcomes-based approach, teachers are able to judge what has been learned and how they teach. This also gives learners the responsibility to be in charge of their progress; hence the concept of self-assessment. Self-assessment helps learners to keep track of their learning (Gultig 1997). This makes assessment not only to be the teacher's business but also the learners' as well. Self-assessment does not guarantee that all have to pass because criteria to be regarded as competent are set clearly before students begin learning. This is supported by Stoll and Fink's, (1993:125) assertion that "if learners know what is to be learned (i.e. the performance standards which define the outcome) then they have a much better opportunity to learn". If performance criteria are made available to learners, it gives them an opportunity to continuously assess their own progress towards the achievement of those outcomes.

Looking at the above strategies for gathering and recording assessment, it is inescapable that when assessing, teachers bring their emotions; their own preconceptions and experience to the assessment situation (Little, 1996). This is evident when teachers end up with data that is not informative. Some teachers claim that gathering and recording data is time consuming and adds pressure to the overload of work that the teacher has. This may lead to assessment data not being valid and not reliable. Some teachers end up not writing necessary comments about learner's presentations and performance. This may be as a result of poor planning of assessment tasks and not regarding assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning (Stoll and Fink, 1996 and Pennycuick,1990).

After the assessment data has been gathered and recorded the next stage is the reporting stage where it has to be shared with parents. As Mitchell and Koshy, (1993) state that parents have a right to know about their children's progress. The next section examines the various ways of sharing assessment data with learners and parents.

2.6. Reporting Assessment Data

Historically parents have been excluded from the decision-making and governance process in schools. Research also shows that parents have been on the opposition side due to lack of information. Now there is a wide spread effort to involve parents in meaningful collaboration with teachers and administrators around issues of governance, hence we have governing bodies as one of the governing structures in our schools. However, parents still lack knowledge on curriculum issues. Robinsons, (1995:298) cited in Goodwin, (1997) state that parents admit to having limited knowledge on how to assess learning. In spite of the fact parents have limited knowledge about assessment, parents have a right to know about their children's progress and may contribute to effective learning. Thus, teachers have to find creative and accessible ways of communicating assessment results with parents.

Giving meaningful feedback is part of the learning process and shares the responsibility between teachers and learners (Mitchell and Koshy, 1993). Cullingford, (1995:49) states that records of achievement engender more effective communication with parents because formative reporting has the capacity to enhance pupil performance through discussing learner's performance with the learners and parents. Parents will be expected to give input, which may help the educator in planning for the next developmental task.

Assessment results usually come in the form of a progress report. To communicate such results, parents are invited to schools where they discuss learner's progress with teachers. However, many parents, especially those whose children learn in township schools never get to discuss assessment results with teachers. They accept what comes and never question anything. In this kind of situation, it is evident that parents rarely or never give support that will enhance their children's performance. Mitchell and Koshy, (1993:89) state that reports to parents should be informative. Reports need to pinpoint both achievements and areas for future development.

Sharing does not start with assessment results but it begins when teachers initiate contact with parents when there is a change in policy and practice. Teachers should invite parents and engage in meaningful conversation concerning the curriculum, assessment procedures, criteria and standards. In this way, parents will be able to play a meaningful role in assisting teachers with assessment (Goodwin, 1997).

Since the National Education Policy (1984) did not consider parents as part of the assessment process in the teaching-learning situation, Goodwin, (1997:112) refers to the involvement of parents in the assessment process as alternative assessment. According to him, an alternative assessment strategy that invites parents' participation fosters discussion between teachers and parents about the nature of learning and the purpose of assessment. Torrance, (1995:72) states that parents who learn the why's and how of alternative assessment prior to and during implementations can provide the support necessary to sustain and institutionalize the innovation of alternative assessment.

2.7. Conclusions

The literature reviewed in this chapter revealed that assessment is a continuous process and has to be conducted in a manner that learners' performance is enhanced. It is clear that assessment should establish what children know, understand and can do in order that teachers and parents can identify children's strengths and weaknesses and plan the next steps in their education. The literature also revealed that outcomes-based assessment is inclusive of but is not limited to tests and examinations. To be able to assess knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, alternative assessment strategies need to be used.

Unfortunately alternative assessment does not seem possible due to parents and educators' assessment illiteracy. Parents are only invited when they have to be given feedback about the financial situation of the school or when they have to collect their children's' reports. Many parents do not honour the invitation because of their work situation. Many cannot afford to lose a days wage or for the hours they did not work. The governing body, which is a parent representative structure often, knows little or nothing about the input that parents need to make in their children's' learning. This is due to the fact that most governing body members in our township schools are not literate and not well acquainted with transformational policies that are in operation.

Thus this study investigated the level of literacy and illiteracy of educators in assessment with regards to OBE principles:

1. Are performance criteria set before learning takes place?

2. What strategies are used when assessing learners?

3. Is assessment regarded as part and parcel of the structured learning environment?

The next chapter describes the research study and methodology used to gather and analyse data in this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature and extent of the teacher's understandin

of assessment in the context of an outcomes-based education system at Emabomvini Combine

School a School. The study also aimed to examine the nature of assessment techniques used b

educators at the school and whether these techniques were implemented in a manner that enhance

learner performance, The educator's level of assessment literacy or illiteracy was also examined.

3.2 Research Design and Methodology

3.2.1 Design

The study is located within the qualitative research paradigm. It takes the form of a case study a

Emabomvini Combined School: According to Cohen and Manion, (1990) a case study is

technique the researcher uses to observe the characteristics of an individual unit, for example,

child, school or community. Best and Kahn, (1989) define the case study as a way of organisin;

social data for the purpose of viewing social reality, while Yin, (1983; 22) defines a case study a

an inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in which multiple sources are used. Thus

the study examined assessment practices at one high school.

The case study approach best suited the study because it enabled the researcher to probe deepe

and analyse the assessment phenomenon in the school. Cohen and Manion, (1990) give advantage:

of using a case study as: Their peculiar strength lies in their attention to the subtlety and

complexity of the case in its own right. Second, they recognise the complexity and embeddedness

of social truths. By carefully attending to social situations, case studies can represent something ⸀
the discrepancies or conflicts between the viewpoints held by participants. Thirdly they are a ste
to action. They begin in a world of action and contribute to it. Their insights may be directl
interpreted and put to use for staff or individual self-development: for intra-institutional feedbac
for formative evaluation and in educational policy making.

3.2.2. Methodology

The proposed study is located within the qualitative research paradigm, and with takes the form ⸀
a case study of Emabomvini Combined School. Several data collecting methods were used. Firs
individual interviews with selected teachers were conducted to investigate their understanding ⸀
assessment, its role and purpose in the teaching and learning situation. Second, learne
questionnaires were administered. Thirdly, educator documents (i.e. educators' lesson plan:
planning of tests, projects etcetera) were analysed. It must be iterated that educators wer
unwilling to avail documents for analysis, however, those that were available would be used t⸱
draw common themes in the contradictory data generated from interviews and questionnaires.

For the purpose of the study, Emabomvini Combined School was used as a unit of analysis. Thi
case study was meant to provide the researcher with an opportunity to investigate how the schoc
teachers understood the concept and procedures of assessment in an outcomes-based educatioı
system and how they planned and implemented assessment strategies in order to enhance learne
performance.

3.2.3 The Research Site: Emabomvini Combined School

Emabomvini Combined School is a site that I chose to conduct my study. This is a farm schoc situated on a sugar cane fields at Eston, near Harmmersdale. There is no visible community in th area. The school is situated on a farm, which was initially known as Redlands and was owned b the farmer, Frank Knowles. Frank Knowles had people working for him in the sugar-cane fields Their (farm workers) children received education at Emabomvini Combined School. The farme asked his farm workers what the farm Redlands would be in Zulu. Emanating from Red, the farr workers coined the name Emabomvini. Therefore the school was a private school because it wa located on private property.

In 1993 when the Hunter Commission was instituted to have a look at all types of schools, (i.e private, public and schools on private properties), the commission was given a directive that in th end there have to be only two types of schools (i.e. private and public schools). Frank Knowle had declared that he would not be able to meet the needs of the school if it remains a privat school. After negotiations with the education officials, he handed over the school to the educatioi department. This made Emabomvini Combined School a public school on private property.

The school starts from Grade 1 to Grade 12. Learners come from different communities and trave long distances to school, for example, as long as 40kms to and from school. Learners come from as far as Richmond, Camperdown, Hammersdale and Eston. The school has an enrolment of 97· learners; 422 boys and 552 girls. Learners and teachers are Africans and are all Zulu languagi speakers. Learner's ages range from 7-23 years. Most of the learners come from middle to lov socio-economic background. Some of the learners' parents work on the sugar-cane fields. Most o the learner's parents work in factories such as Baconery in Richmond, Rainbow Chickens ii Hammersdale and Camperdown. Smaller percentages are teachers and nurses. Some educators

reside in cottages at school and some travel from Hammersdale and Camperdown.

3.3 Sampling

The focus of the study was to investigate the educators' level of literacy or illiteracy o assessment, and also to investigate how they (educators) plan and implement assessment usin outcomes-based principles. The strategies used when assessing were also investigated. For th purpose of the study, learners and educators were sampled from the school. Eight learners from grade eight to grade ten were selected to participate in the interviews. A class list was used. Fou girls and four boys were selected in each grade. From the girls and boys lists, every fourth learne i.e. starting from one to four and moving from five to nine etcetera, would be selected. However the initial set of questionnaires went missing and in the end only learners from grades eight an nine participated. The reason why I chose grades eight, nine and ten is because they have bee engaging in Outcomes-based education as from grades six and seven during their primary schoo years of learning and are still engaging in it in their secondary school learning and the concept o outcomes-based education is not new to them. Questionnaires were given to learners to respon to. I explained questions or concepts that learners may not understand since English is their secon language, which they only use at school, thus making the command of the language not to be ver good.

Table 1 shows the sample of grades eight and nine learners that participated in the study and are differentiated according to their sex, i.e. boys and girls in grades eight and nine respectively.

LEARNERS

GRADES	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
8	4	6	10
9	6	6	12
TOTAL	10	12	22

Educators were selected according to their learning areas. Two Language, Literacy and Communication educators, two Natural Science educators, two Arts, Culture and Technology educators and five Economic Management Science educators. This was done in Grade eight nine and ten and involved twelve educators. Educators were interviewed individually. Interviewing educators aimed at investigating their understanding of assessment in an outcomes-based education system and how it is implemented.

Table 2 shows the various departments to which the educators belong at school and their respective post levels and the proportion with respect to gender.

DEPARTMENTS	POST LEVEL 1	POST LEVEL 2	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
LLC	1	1	1	1	2
NATURAL SCIENCE	1	1	2	-	2
ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT SYSTEM	4	1	4	1	5
ARTS,CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY	2	-	1	1	2
TOTAL	8	3			11

Data analysis was continuous throughout the study. Initial interview data was used to inform subsequent research. Once data collection was completed, data analysis became more focused.

3.4 Data Collection Methods.

Several data collection techniques were employed in this case study. These included interviews questionnaires, classroom observation, documentation, (i.e. a sample of learners books an papers).

First, individual interviews with selected teachers were conducted (Appendix A), to investigat educators' understanding of assessment; its role and purpose in the teaching-learning situation Individual and focus groups interviews were also conducted (see Appendix B). Kyale, (1996:11 defines interviews as an exchange of views between two or more people of mutual interest, see the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production and emphasizes social interaction When conducting interviews, open-ended questions were used. Open-ended items are defined b. Kerlinger, (1970) as those items that supply a frame of reference for respondents answers, but pu a minimum restrain on the answer and the expression. The decision to use open-ended item wa motivated by Kerlinger, (1970) in that: they are flexible; they allow the interviewer to probe so tha she may go into more depth in order to clear any misunderstandings. They enable the interview to test the limits of the respondents' knowledge. They encourage co-operation and help establish rapport. They help allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondents really believe, and can also result in unexpected or unanticipated answers, which may suggest hitherto unthought of relationship.

Second, to verify data collected through interviews; a sample of learners' books from selected grades was collected and analysed to examine the nature of assessment strategies used in the classrooms. In addition, classroom observation was conducted to examine the extent to which assessment is integrated into and used in the learning process.

Third, questionnaires were used with learners to investigate the learner's experience of assessment how and when it is done and whether it does enhance their performance. 22 learners voluntaril participated in the study (i.e.10 learners from Grade eight and 12 learners from Grade nine) Before questionnaires could be delivered, they were first piloted with learners who would not b part of the sample. Piloting was done in order to find out which questions were difficult t understand or ambiguous, for example, which strategies are used when they are assessed? Whicl ones are often used?

All these techniques were used for data collection with an aim of maintaining reliability an validity, through the process of triangulation. Cohen and Manion, (1990:269) define triangulatio as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of huma behaviour. The use of triangulation was meant to help give a broader picture and scope of data an explain more fully about the study, whereas the use of one method may lead to bias and distort th researcher picture of the study conducted (Cohen and Manion, 1990).

3.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

3.5.1 Limitations of the case study design

First, case study accounts are described as subjective biased and lack precise quantifiable measures Second, because of the small sample, results may not be generalisable except where othe researchers see the application. However, lessons can still be learned from experiences at th school for other similar contexts.

3.5.2 Limitations of the Study

Research was conducted in June, two weeks before the schools closed for winter vacation. Learners were busy finalising their projects and also writing tests. Educators were finalising

their recording of marks and making schedules and reports. This resulted in educators not to be willing to participate in the study. Educators were also unwilling to share their documents with the researcher for analysis. This resulted in insufficient data to be collected.

Questionnaires went missing and a second set of questionnaires was administered. This posed as a limitation because learners could not get sufficient time to reflect and respond on their experience of assessment resulting in some of the questions to be poorly responded to and some not responded to. This deprived the researcher to gather data as desired because of time constrains.

The next chapter will focus on the presentation and analysis of the research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1   Introduction

The purpose of the study was to investigate the nature and extent of the teachers' understanding of assessment in the context of an outcomes-based education system at Emabomvini Combined School. The study also aimed to examine the nature of assessment techniques used by educators at the school and whether these techniques were implemented in a manner that enhances learner performance. The educators' level of literacy or illiteracy was also examined. This chapter constitutes the analysis of data through the procedures described in the previous chapter. In this chapter the analysis of the data gathered during the research process will be presented. The analysis will be in the form of descriptions and interpretations of educators' responses from interviews as well as learners responses from questionnaires. Brief summaries and personal interpretations drawn from the literature reviewed on assessment will be given.

4.2   Educator's understanding and Practice of Assessment

This section examines educators' responses when they were interviewed with regards to their understanding of assessment and its purpose.

4.2.1 The Nature and Purpose of Assessment

Assessment is perceived as a process in which we determine what learners have learned (Satterly, 1981, Little, 1996). In an outcomes-based system, assessment is perceived as a process whereby learners' performance is assessed; i.e. what it is that they can do in relation to what they are being taught (Gultig, 1997). Responses from educators show an understanding of what assessment is supposed to be in an outcomes-based system. In the question asked to educators about their

understanding of assessment, these are some of their responses:

"From an educational point of view, it is formative and summative".

" It is a collection of data about the performance of a pupil."

"It is to see how much learners have understood what has been taught".

"It is to evaluate using standards of assessment."

"Assessment assesses learner performance."

"It is to evaluate knowledge that the learner have and what the learner can do with the knowledge that he or she has."

"It is a way of checking progress and helps improve their performance."

The above responses show that educators understand that the focus is not only on content but is on what learners know and what they can do with the knowledge. Responses also indicate that educators understand that, in an outcomes-based education system, assessment should be formative, i.e. it should inform teaching and learning and should provide valid and reliable information with which we can use to make public judgements (summative). To collect data about the learners' performance is to evaluate the knowledge that learners have, check whether learners understood what has been taught. Where they show weaknesses, we need to have developmental tasks in place.

When educators were asked about the purpose of assessment, they responded by saying that:

"It is to check whether kids understand, to indicate whether there is a problem"

"To enhance the learning of a pupil so that what he does is more understandable."

"To see how capable is the learner for the next grade."

"To check where the learner lacks."

"To determine whether a set of objectives have been met."

"To perform as expected."

"To identify the strengths and weaknesses."

Pennycuick, (1990) sees the purpose of assessment as helping to identify strengths and weaknesses of the teaching-learning process, which can help the teacher to make development plans for further teaching and learning. Stoll and Fink, (1993) see the purpose of assessment as the enhancement of good quality learning.

Looking at the above responses, the pattern of educators trying to establish the purpose of assessment before engaging in assessment comes to the fore. For example, to identify strengths and weaknesses, enhancing learner performance, etceteras. However, one may not ignore the fact that for some educators the aspect of a diagnostic kind of assessment is not well conceptualised since it does not come forward in the educator's definition of what assessment is and its purpose. For some educators, the summative type is seen as the purpose, but according to the literature reviewed, we need to decide as Gultig and Stielau, (2002) states, which assessment tasks are going to be used formatively and those to be used for summative purpose. We cannot engage in a summative type of assessment all the time. According to Gultig, (1997) summative assessment provides a summary of achievement up to a particular moment in time, at the end of a learning task. To see how capable the learner is for the next grade does not seem a useful educational purpose of assessment. Gultig, (1997) states that it is imperative that educators try and establish what the purpose of assessment is. This will help especially in the implementation process where educators will decide on implementing assessment strategies that will fit the purpose of assessment.

The researcher also wished to know how educators planned their assessment and when do they

assess learners. Some of the educators responded as follows;

"Assessment planning takes place beforehand, I plan having the level of the learner in mind."

"I plan my assessment beforehand as we do continuous assessment. It directs my teaching. What I will ask leads to what I will teach."

"Assessment is planned before teaching- it is integrated with the lesson as we do continuous assessment."

"One must know what to test before teaching starts."

"Planning of assessment depends on the learning area. Sometimes I plan what to assess after teaching. I also plan assessment against the outcome."

"I assess my learners at the end of the chapter. In Home Economics we do practicals in some cases."

"Learners should know before teaching takes place what they will be assessed on but we don't de it most of the time."

From the above responses, one can conclude that some educators acknowledge that assessment is conducted on a continuous basis, hence the reference to continuous assessment. Most educators state that in their planning of assessment, they need to know what and how they are going to assess before even teaching and learning takes place. In other words, assessment drives teaching and learning.

Other responses show inappropriate planning of assessment that takes place. One educator responded by saying that planning of assessment depends on the learning area and sometimes plans assessment after teaching. For assessment to be continuous, it needs to be integrated into the day-to-day teaching and learning, irrespective of whatever learning area. Stoll and Fink

(1993) state that assessment forms an integral part of teaching and learning and is not a separate activity. Some responses show that assessment still does take place as an afterthought activity as some educators admit not to be integrating it into their day-to-day teaching and learning.

For assessment to be able to correctly drive teaching and learning, it has to be planned against the outcomes to be achieved. In my interview with educators, I asked them whether they do set criteria before assessment takes place so that learners know what is expected of them. Positive responses from most educators came forth with respect to the setting of criteria and its importance in the learning of children. Responses such as the following were given;

"I set criteria because they serve as guidelines as to what level learners must achieve."

"The criteria is set beforehand though I don't usually write it on the board; I tell them what I expect from them."

"Criteria are set with them so that they know what is expected and nothing comes as a surprise."

"No, we don't set criteria in class."

"Criteria are set but depends on the subject matter."

"Criteria are set but I do not always do it with learners."

Some responses show that the setting of performance criteria does take place in the teaching-learning situation but are set unilaterally, learners not being involved. In some instances these are

not even discussed with learners. Some educators tend not to take the setting of criteria seriously, and to them; the setting of criteria seems not to have an educationally useful purpose. Responses such as, "I don't write the criteria on the board, but I tell them verbally what is expected of them," deprive learners of taking charge of their learning and monitoring their progress, (i.e. engage in self-assessment) (Gultig,1997). Stoll and Fink, (1993:125) support Gultig, (1997) when he stated that "if learners know what is to be learned (i.e. the performance standards which define the outcome) then they have a much better opportunity to learn. This therefore requires educators to exercise more transparency with regards to the setting of criteria, involve learners and discuss criteria with them, so that they know what is expected of them and that they are going to be assessed against set criteria. This will give learners insight into how to go about learning and also take responsibility of their progress (i.e. self-assessment), and will also serve as an educationally useful purpose of assessment.

One educator stated that the setting of criteria is done according to learning areas. Stoll and Fink, (1993:125) state that, " If learners know what is to be learned (i.e. the performance standards which determine the outcome) then they have a much better opportunity to learn. This assertion is supported by Gultig, (1997) when he states that criteria should be clearly set before students begin to learn. The above assertion embraces all learning areas as it refers to the learning of the child in general and not particular learning areas.

For assessment to be carried out, planning directed towards pupil outcome should be developed (Stoll and Fink, 1996:124). This therefore requires teachers to determine standards of performance (i.e. criteria) at the beginning of the teaching-learning process. It is therefore imperative that criteria be set with the learners; discuss them with the learners so that learners

engage with them (criteria) during the assessment process (self-assessment). This will help learners achieve competency when outcomes against set criteria have been achieved.

4.2.2 Assessment Strategies

The study also investigated the assessment strategies employed by educators when gathering data through assessment and to investigate whether they are in line with OBE principles. Responses from educator interviews show that there has been a shift from the traditional way of assessing learners (i.e. using tests and examinations as the "only" assessment strategies and testing knowledge only). Respondents stated that they assess learners continuously using a variety of strategies because they are not testing only knowledge but also assess skills, values and attitudes. Strategies such as assignments, projects, oral presentations, group work, homework, tests, exams, research, creating models etcetera, were among those that came from responses.

Homework, as an assessment strategy, is used in an effective and formative way. There is no homework policy in the school. Nevertheless, educators want learners to assign meaning to homework instead of taking it as one of the activities given to them by educators. A mathematics educator has made it his policy that learners remain after school and do homework under his supervision. When asked why he decided on supervising homework, his response was;
"I want every learner to do his/her fair share of work and no copying from each other occurs, and I believe they will benefit from it."

The educator wants learners to see homework as a meaningful learning activity which in essence is set to benefit them because that is how they will be able to assess themselves as they do their work whether they understood a particular unit of work or not. It will also help educators in

assessing whether the strategies used were effective and also to see whether the instruments used were relevant to the work that was assessed.

It should be noted that confusion amongst educators came up with regards to the concept of portfolio as an assessment strategy, which is recommended in an OBE context. The concept is more in use in the Literacy, Language and Communication department and is understood as an activity that engages learners in essay writing, letter writing, dialogues etcetera. Little, (1996) defines a portfolio as a file where samples of children's work are kept. The work samples include projects, essays, drawings, and etcetera. It should be noted that work samples are drawn from different learning areas and do not comprise only of language and communication activities. These work samples are kept at the teacher's cupboard for display when parents have been invited by educators to discuss their children's work or when department officials visit the school. In this school learner's work samples are there but are not filed in educators' cupboards because most cupboards, if not all, have destroyed shelves and are not lockable. Learners keep these work samples on their own and only submit them at the request of the educator for display when parents have been invited.

It should be noted that educators have shown an understanding that the use of a variety of strategies helps in assessing a variety of activities effectively. Various strategies cater for all children. The following response from an educator supports the above;

"I use a wide range of strategies because of different levels of children. Some kids may not be good in quizzes but will be good in debates." (LLC educator)

Stoll and Fink, (1996) makes an assertion to the above when they state that no learners should be precluded from achieving mastery and that all pupils can learn if given sufficient time and support. Thus, learners should be given an opportunity to present themselves in the most positive manner possible.

Though educators have shifted from using tests and exams as the only assessment strategies, responses from interviews show that testing is still mostly used and exams are still considered as the strategy to be used for making decisions and public judgements. As mentioned above, educators have attempted to implement formative and continuous assessment, but their attempts are dwarfed by the tradition of summative type of assessment that they have been exposed to all their lives. This has led to Jansen, (1998,329) claiming that "traditional testing and examinations will continue to play a powerful role in shaping the nature of OBE-directed teaching.

4.2.3   The Role of Feedback

Giving meaningful feedback is part of the learning process and shares the responsibility between teachers and learners (Mitchell and Koshy, 1993). Assessment is done continuously in a formative way. Because of the manner in which assessment is conducted according to educator's responses, feedback to learners occurs constantly. Some of the responses are testimony to the above.

"Feedback to pupils is now and then as we engage in continuous assessment."

"Feedback is done on daily basis and developmental tasks are available."

"Feedback comes in the form of remedial work because of the lack of pre-knowledge and where they show problems with concepts."

"General feedback takes place through discussion in class. There is no time for individual attention because of class sizes."

Giving feedback to learners constantly, allows educators to plan developmental tasks in areas where learners show weaknesses, so that misunderstandings against set criteria are addressed. Feedback also helps learners understand where and how they went wrong.

4.2.4 Reporting and Feedback

The teachers who participated in the study reported using different strategies to gather information. They record marks that indicate the quality of a learner at the end of the learning process. When assessment information has been gathered and recorded, the teacher has to analyse the information. The teacher has to look at trends that might guide his or her teaching (e.g. when learners demonstrate a similar pattern of misunderstanding) Data from this study indicates that educators do not engage in the analysis of learner's responses, which show a similar pattern of misunderstanding. Instead, they blame learners for not studying properly and for cheating. This may result in developmental tasks not being planned properly thus not addressing learners' weaknesses.

After giving feedback to learners, we also need to give feedback to parents. Cullingford, (1995) stated that records of achievement engender more effective communication with parents because formative reporting has the capacity to enhance pupil performance. Assessment results come in the form of a progress report, which is informative. Mitchell and Koshy, (1993;89) stated that

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reports should pinpoint both achievements and areas for future development.

Parents are invited to school to discuss their children's performance so that they engage in a discussion with educators concerning their children's learning with a view to planning developmental tasks where weaknesses are evident and also provide assistance to educators concerning their children's learning.

Assessment results come in the form of a progress report, which is informative. The report provides for the column where the learners scores are recorded and next to the column is the level equivalent to the score. The report has a key to overall performance as shown in Table.3 on page 42. With this information provided on the report, parents would be able to see and understand the child's strengths and weaknesses.

In spite of the fact that educators have initiated contact with parents, some parents do not honor these invitations because of their busy schedules and when not busy, parents do not even take initiative to contact teachers thereby showing interest in their children's learning. Those who attend meetings do not give effective input with respect to their children's learning. This is due to illiteracy and is therefore unable to have effective input with regards to their children's learning.

In spite of the fact that parents have limited knowledge about assessment, parents have a right to know about their children's progress and also to be involved in their children's learning.

Some parents also do not respond because of the economic factor. Some parents are jobless and live far from the school. Whatever amount they get, they save for taking children to and from

school and also for food at home. That is as far as their effort goes.

Few cases of learners living all by themselves come forward resulting in parents not honoring invitation from educators. Parents are away most of the time, selling clothes trying to earn a living. This leads to parents knowing little about what is happening at school concerning their children's learning. Some educators have visited such children to actually see what goes on at home. On their parents return, and hearing about the educators visit at home, one or two parents came to school but there was no commitment from the parents side to have effective assistance in the child's learning

4.3 Document Analysis.

To investigate the extent to which assessment is integrated into and used in the learning process, several documents were analysed. The analysis focused on the following areas; school assessment policy, teachers' lesson preparations, assessment instruments and the school report.

4.3.1 School Assessment Policy.

Emabomvini Combined School does not have its own assessment policy but uses the standards set in the Department of Education assessment policy for Grade R-9 of 1998, Curriculum 2005 and the General Education and Training Certificate Policy of 2001. According to these policies, assessment should be conducted formatively and summatively. Policies further emphasize that assessment should be conducted on a continuous basis, hence the reference to continuous assessment.

Different departments at the school have their operational policies where assessment standards

adopted by educators in their respective departments are reflected. These assessment standards are drawn from the Education Department's policies. In summary the schools' departmental policies state that assessment should be conducted continuously in all grades. For Grade eight, 75% of CASS (continuous assessment) is taken and 25% from the summative type is used. 75% and 25% produces the final mark, which is used to make decisions and public judgements. For Grade nine, 75% of CASS is used and 25% is derived from Common Tasks Assessment which is divided into Section A and B. Section A is supplied by the Department of education and is administered at school by educators and it totals 60. Section B comes in the form of an examination paper and it totals 40 and learners are not in any way assisted. 75% derived from Cass and 25% derived from the summative type of assessment will be added to produce the final score that will be used by educators to make decisions and public judgements about the child's learning

The absence of the school assessment policy affects the manner in which assessment is implemented. Though theoretically, educators understand that assessment should be formative and summative and that it should operate diagnostically, it does not happen in practice. Planning of assessment is still a separate activity and not an integral part of teaching and learning. It is evident where educators do not plan which assessment types would be used for formative and summative purposes. The following responses are testimony to the above;

" we still don't do it as stipulated- spontaneous and afterthought assessing still does take place. "

" we are from the old school, tests and exams have always been our means of assessing. "

It is in this context that Jansen, (1998:329) claimed that traditional testing and examinations will

continue to play a powerful role in shaping the nature of OBE- directed teaching.

It is imperative that the school should have an assessment policy so that educators can plan and implement assessment properly. In this way educators will be able to gather valid and reliable information, which will be used to make sound public judgements on quality learning.

4.3.2   Lesson Preparation

Educators in the school use a preparation form that was designed and agreed upon by all educators engaging in OBE and is OBE oriented. It must be stated that educators were very reluctant to have their documents analysed because they were not confident enough about their work and that what was observed would not be used against them at a later stage by the department. However, what I observed with one of the LL2 (English) educators was that assessment in some instances is not integrated into the daily activities. This is contrary to Stoll and Fink's (1993) assertion that assessment forms an integral part of daily activities. In some instances, the educator would have "Question and Answer" for a strategy and end up having nothing for a technique. The educator would not state clearly what is to be assessed and the instruments to be used. This shows poor planning of the whole assessment process. This is exacerbated by the clause in the school policy that states that an educator may plan and do his or her preparation in a manner that fits the content and also suitable to him or her. No matter how we do our preparation, assessment should form an integral part of our daily activities.

From my observation, it is evident that each and every educator gives his or her own meaning to the assessment process, which might differ from each other. Mitchell and Koshy, (1993) suggested that when educators have assigned meaning in the assessment process, they need to

compare their interpretations until they come to a uniform agreement about the meanings they assign to the assessment process. Educators at Emabomvini have never engaged in sharing meanings and have admitted not doing it, also acknowledging that it would be an ideal situation to engage in sharing meanings.

Sharing of meanings in the Emabomvini situation will help educators clarify misconceptions they have about the assessment process, revisit the policy with regards to planning and implementation of assessment and reach a uniform agreement on how to correctly plan and implement assessment.

4.3.3 Report Card

Mitchell and Koshy, (1993:89) stated that reports to parents should pinpoint both achievements and areas for future development. Assessment results come in the form of a progress report, which is informative.

Looking at Emabomvini report form, one can say that it provides informative feedback. The report provides for the column of learning areas and next to it is the column where the learners' score is recorded and next to the column is the level equivalent to the score, which shows the learner's strengths or weaknesses. The report form has a key to overall performance. The key consists of three columns i.e. column for levels which starts from 1-4, the next column is for the percentage and the last column is for an explanation.

Table;3

KEY TO OVERALL PERFORMANCE		
LEVEL	**%**	**EXPLANATION**
1	0-34%	Not achieved; achieved between 0 and 34% per learning area
2	35-39%	Partially achieved; achieved from 35-39% per learning area
3	40-69%	Achieved; achieved from 40-69% per learning area
4	70-100%	Outstanding/excellent; achieved from 70-100% per learning area

With this information provided on the report, parents would be able to see and understand the child's' strengths and weaknesses. Educators invite parents to school to discuss their children's performance so that they engage in a discussion concerning children's' learning with a view to planning developmental tasks where weaknesses are evident and also provide assistance to educators concerning their children's learning.

In spite of the fact that parents have limited knowledge about assessment, parents have a right to know about their children's progress and also to be involved in their children's learning.

To validate the above data the next section looks at learners reported experiences of assessment.

4.4 Learner's Responses

The study aimed to investigate the learners' experience of assessment, how and when it is done and whether it does enhance their performance. It was also to illuminate the fact that they (learners) too, have a vital role to play regarding their assessment. Gultig, (1997) states that learners have a responsibility to be in charge of their progress, i.e. self-assessment.

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It is important to re-iterate that initially learners from grades eight to grade 10 were selected randomly to participate in the study. The reason for their selection was that they have been engaging in outcomes-based education as from grades six and seven during their primary school years of learning and are still engaging in it in their secondary school learning. Because of the fact that the first set of questionnaires went missing at school where they had to be administered, and the second set of questionnaires was administered in the presence of the researcher, and the atmosphere under which the research was conducted, the sample no longer consisted of grade 10 learners but now consisted of 12 grade nine learners and 10 grade eight learners.

These are the responses of the 22 questionnaires returned. The sample consisted of 10 boys and 12 girls and their ages range respectively between 13 and 16 years of age, as indicated in Table 1.

First, when asked how often they were assessed at school, 14 percent of the learners reported monthly assessments, 60 percent reported weekly, and six percent reported daily and 20 percent reported quarterly assessments.

Second, in response to the question "which assessment strategies (methods) are used when being assessed" all 22 of them (100%) mentioned the following; Oral Presentation, Group work, Assignments, Tests and Homework. Third, learners responses to the question of the assessment strategies mentioned above, which ones are mostly used, directed the following responses.

STRATEGY	NO. OF RESPONSES	%
Tests	11	50%
Assignments	2	9%
Group Work	6	27%
Homework	2	9%
Oral Presentation	1	5%
TOTAL	**22**	**100%**

Fourth, when asked whether their teachers set criteria before assessment, 77 percent answered Yes and 23 percent answered No. Fifth, when asked where her teachers ever explained how the setting of criteria will help you in their learning 55 percent answered Yes and 45 percent answered No. Sixth, when asked whether after feedback (assessment results), do they engage in a discussion concerning your performance, 86 percent answered Yes and 14 percent answered No. 84 percent of these said they discuss and do corrections and 16 percent indicated that they work in groups and discuss. Seventh, when asked whether the discussions helped them in their learning, 86 percent answered Yes and stated that they (learners) understand the work better while 14 percent did not respond. Eighth, when asked whether teachers do invite parent (s) to discuss their learning and performance. 100 percent responded in the affirmative. When asked whether their parents attend these meetings regularly? 72 percent answered Yes, 14 percent answered No and 14 percent responded by saying "sometimes". Ninth, when asked whether the discussions between parents and teachers helped improve their learning and performance, 72 percent answered Yes, 14 percent did not respond 14 percent responded by saying "sometimes". Tenth, when asked whether they do receive help from their parents with respect to learning and assessment, 72 percent answered Yes, 14 percent did not respond and 14 percent responded by saying "sometimes".

Eleventh, when asked whether the help they received from their parents has helped improve their learning and performance, 72 percent answered Yes, 14 percent did not respond and 14 percent responded by saying "sometimes"

Some that answered, "yes" state that parents come with other tactics that make them understand better. Others stated that parents explain better using Zulu, their first language. The three that answered sometimes stated that if their parents were not very busy and put time aside to help them in their learning, their performance would improve.

The results from the responses suggest that learners show an understanding of assessment in an outcomes – based education system, which is conducted in a continuous basis. Learners acknowledge that criteria need to be set before learning and assessing takes place, though they do not understand what purpose the setting of criteria serves.

Responses from educators as well as learner's reveal that some educators do set criteria unilaterally, without engaging learners so that learners understand what is expected of them and the fact that they also engage in self-assessment and take charge of their learning as is stated by Gultig, (1997). The following responses from learners bear testimony to the above;

> *"the criteria is set by the teacher, we just listen and do as she says".*
> *"we don't set criteria, teachers set it, they don't discuss with us".*

In this regard, the criteria is there but if it is not discussed with the learners, how are they going

to know when they go wrong. Gultig, (1997) states that criteria should be clearly set before students begin to learn. This practice inhibits the learners the opportunity to engage in self-assessment during and after assessment and during their learning.

Some educators do set the criteria and engage learners in the setting of criteria. Responses from learners show that being involved in the setting of criteria and the discussion thereof, has a positive effect on their learning. A response from the grade learner proves the above;

> *"yes we do even though I am in a lower class, but I have seen that my learning has improved"*.

Some of the responses are as follows;

> *"yes we do, so that we know what is expected and get a clear understanding of what to do*
> *"yes we do (the whole class)"*.

Few responses from learners reveal that no criteria is set before learning takes place.

Learners are also more concerned about the marks they get from a test or a project. To some learners marks seemed to be more important than the knowledge gained and what they can do with the knowledge. There is evidence that educators also put emphasis on marks resulting in learners having a conception that learning is about getting high marks and not so much on gaining knowledge and also what to do with the knowledge gained. The following responses prove the above;

> *"discussions help boost my marks if I did bad in my test"*.

> "the teacher tells us to participate fully and we get marks for that".

> "If my mark was lower I discuss it with my teacher".

It should also be noted that learners would not see the need to have discussions after assessment concerning their performance if their marks were low, whereas there is a possibility that discussions may help them move from where they are in terms of their performance to where they should be. This means that even when learners show a certain degree of understanding of the work, we as educators need to ask ourselves whether how do we want them to understand better what has been taught. This means that we as educators need to plan our developmental tasks in a manner that learning is enhanced, in the same breadth improving our teaching as well.

The manner in which we articulate assessment feedback comes to the fore. When discussions are held after a test or a project, do we explain in a manner that is engaging and helps improve the performance of learners, or that will lend learners not knowing where and how they went wrong. Some learners remain confused and never get to understand better because of the manner in which we explain or address their weaknesses. Learners point out that they are being shouted at by educators, which leaves them confused and not knowing how they went wrong. Like educators plan their assessment and choose appropriate techniques, they (educators) also need to prepare their explanations. Gultig and Stielau, (2002;165) stated that when educators prepare explanations, they need to know the purpose of explaining, the structure of explanations and how the explanation is to be delivered. By being able to establish the purpose of explanation, will help bring clarity on the misunderstanding and also help educators adjust their techniques so that an educationally useful purpose is eventually achieved i.e. moving learners from where they are to where we want them to be.

There are also cases whereby educators give feedback that is not informative. The use of a

signature in some tasks given to learners still occurs. The use of a signature is not in line with outcomes-based principles because it is not formative. It does not point on the learner's strengths and weaknesses. This shows poor planning on the side of the educator because educators would not be able to give formative feedback and also plan the next developmental tasks.

The use of the a variety of strategies helped learners not only to concentrate on acquiring knowledge but also on acquiring different skills to use during their schooling years and later in life. Learners acknowledge that the involvement of parents in their learning has a positive impact in their performance.

4.5 Summary Of Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature and extent of the teacher's understanding of assessment in the context of an outcomes-based education system at Emabomvini Combined School. The study also aimed to examine the nature of assessment techniques used by educators at the school and whether these techniques are implemented in a manner that embraces principles of outcomes-based education. The study also aimed to assess the educator's level of assessment literacy or illiteracy in the context of new curriculum policies in South African education. The data derives from interviews, document analysis and responses from learner questionnaires. The following issues came to the fore:

4.5.1 Educator's understanding and Practice of Assessment

Educators showed an understanding of assessment in an outcomes-based education system. Educators also showed an understanding that assessment is and should be conducted formatively, diagnostically and summatively. Assessment is also conducted on a continuous basis and needs

to be integrated into the day-to-day teaching and learning. Educators have stated that assessment drives their teaching and learning, thus integrate it in their daily teaching. For assessment to be able to correctly drive teaching and learning, it has to be planned against the outcomes to be achieved. In order to be able to achieve the outcomes, performance standards that define the outcome should be set before even teaching and learning takes place.

4.5.2 Assessment Strategies

The study also intended investigating the assessment strategies by educators when assessing learners and also to investigate whether they are in line with OBE principles. In the past teaching and learning were content based and the strategies for assessing content that were used were only tests and examinations. With outcomes-based education, the focus is on knowledge and how learners use the knowledge they have (i.e. skills, values and attitudes) in assessing skills, values and attitudes, we need to employ a variety of strategies. Educators employ a variety of strategies for formative as well as summative purposes. Educators have shown an understanding that the use of a variety of strategies helps in assessing a variety of activities effectively. Various strategies cater for all learners. This is supported by Stoll and Fink, (1990) when he states that no learners should be precluded from achieving mastery and that all pupils can learn if given sufficient time and support and should be given an opportunity to present themselves in the most positive manner possible. However one cannot ignore that, from the interviews and questionnaire responses, testing is still predominantly used. This is due to the fact that educators have been exposed to it all their lives. This has led to Jansen, (1998; 329) claiming that "traditional testing and examinations will continue to play a powerful role in shaping the nature of OBE-directed teaching.

4.5.3 Assessment Literacy among Educators

There is confusion amongst educators and learners with respect to the concept portfolio as an assessment strategy. The concept portfolio is used mostly in the Literacy, Language and Communication department. It is perceived as an activity engaging learners in essay writing, letter writing, poems, dialogues, and etcetera. These work samples are kept for display when parents are invited to the school to see and discuss their children's work and when department officials visit the school. It is imperative that educators understand the concept portfolio to its correct meaning so that it is also correctly explained to learners.

Giving meaningful feedback is part of the learning process and shares the responsibility between teachers and learners (Mitchell and Koshy, 1993). Assessment is done continuously in a formative and summative way. Different strategies are used to gather information. Educators record marks that will indicate the quality of a learner at the end of the learning process. When assessment information has been gathered and recorded, educators have to analyse the information before they make judgements and decisions. The decisions made should be communicated to learners, parents, principal and the department.

As assessment is done on a continuous basis, feedback is supposed to be done constantly so that development is planned for in areas where they show weaknesses. Responses from educators and learners show that constant feedback occurs in the classroom whereby teachers' address misunderstandings against set criteria. Discussions are held whereby educators pinpoint learners' weaknesses and also explain where and how learners went wrong. Discussions are helpful to learners because they help learners to work on their weaknesses and improve their learning.

The next chapter will focus on the conclusions drawn from the study and also recommendations and possible further research on this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study examined the nature and extent of the teacher's understanding of assessment in the extent of an outcomes-based education system at Emabomvini Combined School. The study also examined the nature of assessment techniques used by educators at the school and whether these techniques were implemented in a manner that enhances learner performance. The educator's level of assessment literacy or illiteracy was also examined. The previous chapters presented data pertaining to educators understanding, planning, implementation and assessment of OBE and learner experience of assessment in an outcome-based education system.

5.2 Analysis of Findings

This chapter aims to analyse the responses from educator's interviews, learner questionnaires and documents analysis, and from the findings the researcher would be able to develop tentative conclusions regarding the research investigations of assessments of assessment this school.

5.2.1 Assessment Policy

In summary the response to the research question regarding the school's assessment policy and how it reflects OBE principle, was that the school does not have its own assessment policy but uses the standards set in the Department of Education assessment policy for Grade R-9 of 1998. Curriculum 2005 and the General Education and Training Certificate Policy 2001. The absence of the school assessment policy affects the manner in which assessment is implemented especially where educators do not integrate it into, their day-to-day teaching and also where educators do not plan which assessment types would be used for formative and summative purposes.

5.2.2 Assessment Literacy among Educators

Regarding the educator's understanding of outcomes-based assessment and its role in the teaching and learning situation, responses from educators show an understanding of assessment in an outcomes-based system. There has been a shift from the traditional way of conducting assessment, which was by means of tests and examinations only. Educators also understand that assessment is and should be conducted formatively and summatively; though one detects from their responses that when planning; there is no decision-making process that takes place as to which strategies would be used formatively and summatively. While educators understand that assessment should inform teaching and learning and should provide valid and reliable information with which can use to make public judgements, there is no clear cut decision made as to which strategies will be used to collect data that will be used to make public judgements. In an outcomes-based context, assessment operates formatively, summatively and diagnostically, (i.e. diagnose problems in teaching and learning so that educators can plan the next developmental lessons). Educator's responses show that the diagnostic aspect is not well conceptualized.

Educators acknowledge that assessment is conducted on a continuous basis, hence the reference to continuous assessment. For assessment to be continuous, it needs to be integrated into the day-day teaching and learning. This statement about continuous assessment however, holds true only if the principle of integrating assessment into the day-to-day teaching is adhered to. When I glanced through some educators daily preparation, I found that assessment was not planned for in certain days thus opposing Stoll and Fink, (1993) when they states that assessment forms an integral part of teaching and learning and is not a separate activity. This shows poor planning on the part of the teachers regarding assessment. Most educators, however, stated that assessment drives their teaching and learning thus they integrate it in their daily teaching. The above is also supported

by learner's responses from questionnaires where some of them stated that they are assessed daily, while others stated that they are assessed weekly. This may suggest that assessment is integrated into the day-to-day teaching and that in some instances it is still being treated as a separate activity.

Regarding the purpose of assessment, some educators stated that it is to identify strengths and weaknesses and to enhance learner performance. For some educators, the summative type of assessment is seen as the purpose, but according to the literature reviewed, we need to decide as Gultig and Stielau, (2002) states, which assessment tasks are going to be used formatively and those to be used for summative purpose. We cannot engage in a summative type of assessment all the time. According to Gultig, (1997) summative assessment provides a summary of achievement up to a particular moment in time, at the end of a learning task. To see how capable the learner is for the next grade does not seem a useful educational purpose of assessment. Gultig, (1997) states that it is imperative that educators try and establish what the purpose of assessment is. This will help especially in the implementation process where educators will decide on implementing assessment strategies that will fit the purpose of assessment.

Regarding the setting of criteria with learners in class before assessment is conducted, educators' responses show that in some instances these are set but not discussed with learners. Gultig, (1997) states that criteria should be clearly set before students begin to learn. Few cases show that no criteria are set before learning takes place. This practice deprives the learners the opportunity to engage in self-assessment during and after assessment and during their learning. For assessment to be able to correctly drive teaching and learning, it has to be planned against the outcomes to be achieved. In order to be able to achieve the outcomes, performance standards that define the

outcome should be set before even teaching and learning takes place.

In the research question where educators were asked whether they do share meanings with respect to interpretations that they assign to outcomes-based assessment and its implementation, educators responses reveal that sharing of meanings never takes place, even in instances where they encounter problems or contradictions come forth. Mitchell and Koshy, (1993) stated that when educators assigned meaning in the assessment process, they (educators) need to compare their interpretations until they come to a uniform agreement about the meanings they assign to the assessment process. Educators acknowledged that sharing meanings is an ideal situation and would help them put assessment issues into perspective. This can only be realized through on-going and long-term staff development.

Regarding the question whether assessment teaches and assesses, educators responded by saying that assessment teaches and assesses because it helps them reflect on their practice in the sense that educators are able to monitor learner's progress, at the same time learning about their teaching thus helping them to improve their teaching. Cullingford, (1995) and Gultig and Stielau, (2002) agree on the statement that assessment teaches and assesses.

5.2.3 Assessment Strategies

With regard to the assessment strategies that educators used to collect data, responses from both learner questionnaires and interviews with educators show that there has been a shift from the traditional way of assessing learners (i.e. using tests and exams as the "only" assessment strategies). Respondents stated that they engaged in continuous assessment through assignments, projects, oral presentations, group work, peer assessment, etcetera. In other words, educators employ strategies that are formative and summative. Educators acknowledge that strategies used

to collect data about learner performance are in line with OBE principle because they have shifted from using only tests and examinations but engage in continuous assessment through projects, assignments, oral presentation, tests and examinations.

5.2.4 Assessment Feedback

With regard to the reporting of assessment data to learners and parents, responses from educators and learners show that constant feedback occurs in the classroom in the form of discussions whereby educators pinpoint learner's weaknesses and explain where and how learners went wrong. It should be pointed out that discussions held in class, in some instances, do not help improve learner's performance because of the manner that educators articulate assessment feedback. Learners pointed out that they are being shouted at by educators, which left them confused. In addition to planning their assessment and choosing appropriate techniques, educators also need to prepare their feedback explanations. Gultig and Stielau, (2002;165) stated that when educators prepare explanations, they need to know the purpose of explaining, the structure of explanations and how the explanation is to be delivered. By being able to establish the purpose of explanation, educators will be able to clarify misunderstandings and adjust their techniques so that an educationally useful assessment is eventually achieved (i.e. moving learners from where they are to where we want them to be).

Parents are invited to school to discuss their children's performance so that they engage in discussion with educators concerning their children's learning with a view to planning developmental tasks where weaknesses are evident and also provide assistance to educators concerning their children's learning. Assessment results come in the form of a progress report that would enable parents to see and understand the child's strengths and weaknesses. It should be

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pointed out that some parents do not honour invitations because of busy work schedules, not understanding their role in the learning of their children and due to illiteracy.

Pertaining to parents giving input about their children's learning; responses from educators show that parents do not give input as expected because of the reasons mentioned above and also because of the fact that they are not well versed with transformational policies in place as Mitchell and Koshy, (1993;89) state that sharing does not start with assessment results but it begins when teachers initiate contact with parents when there is a change in policy and practice. Teachers should invite parents and engage in meaningful conversation concerning the curriculum, assessment procedures, criteria and standards. In this way parents will be able to play a meaningful role in assisting teachers with assessments.

It is evident from the data that educators have made an effort in engaging with the assessment policy, assigned meaning and also put it into implementation. Educators show understanding of assessment in an outcomes-based education system; that it should be conducted formatively diagnostically and summatively and continuously. As much as OBE has its terminology which educators show not to understand and also the fact that educators assign their own meanings; became evident when educators translate their meanings into practice.

Looking at the implementation process, educators conduct assessment on a continuous basis, employ different strategies to assess a variety of activities as they acknowledge that it is not only knowledge that is assessed in an outcomes-based education system, but also skills, values and attitudes are assessed. It is also evident that whilst educators are showing an understanding of the assessment process, the implementation is still a cause for concern.

5.2 OBE Assessment Implementation

Findings from this case study indicate that the planning of the whole assessment process is not up to the mark. Although educators acknowledge that assessment is conducted on a continuous basis, and that it drives their teaching, one cannot help but conclude that there is fragmentation in the process. Some educators still plan their daily activities and thereafter plan assessment. Stoll and Fink, (1996) state that assessment forms an integral part of teaching and learning and is not a separate activity. This means that, for assessment to correctly drive teaching and learning, it has to be incorporated into the day-to-day teaching and learning.

Assessment should be conducted formatively, diagnostically and summatively. Educators need to decide which tasks are to be used for formative and summative purposes and those that are to be used for formative purposes to be vigorously assessed (Gultig and Stielau, 2002). Educators responses in this study have shown that this aspect is not well conceptualised. The diagnostic aspect is also lacking. As diagnostic testing rarely occurs; it therefore means that educators are not always on track as to what it is that learners know and understand, and what it is that they do not know and do not understand.

For assessment to effectively drive teaching and learning, it has to be planned against the outcomes to be achieved (Stoll and Fink, 1996, Gultig, 1997). If learners, know what is to be learned (i.e. the performance standards which define the outcome) then they have a much better opportunity to learn. As the setting of criteria occurs in class, according to responses, learners know what is to be learned though it became evident in the study that the purpose of setting criteria is not known to learners. Learners unconsciously engage with criteria, not knowing what

educational purpose it serves, thus inhibiting the learners the opportunity to engage in self-assessment during and after assessment during their learning. Gultig, (1997) states that the setting of criteria gives learners the responsibility to monitor their progress; (i.e. engage in self-assessment.). This will help learners achieve competency when outcomes against set criteria have been achieved.

Data obtained in this study suggest that there has been a shift from the traditional way of assessing learners. This is due to the fact that educators have realised that assessment is more than just testing knowledge as stated in the outcomes-based education assessment policy. Educators acknowledge using a variety of strategies because they also need to assess skills, values and attitudes and employ a variety of strategies that cater for all children. Though educators see assessment as a purposeful activity, rather than as afterthought activity and have made an effort to shift from the traditional way of assessing, tests and exams still remain the main feature in the assessment process.

As educators admitted not to be implementing assessment the way they should, it is worth noting that while they identified their shortcomings in the implementation process they came short of putting mechanisms for development. Perfecting educators practice will not be an event but will be a process that would need engaging in constant development.

5.4 The Role Of Feedback

Giving meaningful feedback is part of the learning process and involves responsibility and accountability between teachers, learners and parents (Mitchell and Kosky, 1993). Learners need feedback constantly, as assessment is done continuously, and identifies learner's strengths and

weaknesses. Learner's weaknesses need to be addressed so that they understand how and why they went wrong. This will enable learners to move from where they are to where they should be, only when they understand how and where they went wrong. This requires well-planned developmental tasks.

Not only should feedback be communicated to learners, but to their parents as well. Mitchell and Koshy, (1993) state that parents have a right to know about their children's progress. Educators initiate contact with parents so as to discuss their children's progress. Educators expect effective input from parents after the discussion concerning their children's performance. Parents respond to the invitation, which is a sign that they are willing to participate in their children's learning. This study reveals that educators were unhappy about parents not giving input concerning their children's learning. Despite the fact that educators acknowledge the parents' low level of literacy, there appears to be high expectations from the educator's side to have parents giving input. Parents have limited knowledge with respect to transformational policies, curriculum and the assessment process and this was validated by the response that parents say they do not understand the work that is done. Although educators seemed very dissatisfied with the lack of input from parents concerning their children's performance, none of the educators ever indicated what mechanisms or programmes they have in place so as to guide the parents as to what input is expected from them.

Davidoff and Lazarus, (1995:5) state that teachers are policy implementers and if teachers cannot do what the policy state, that policy needs to be reviewed or the implementation process needs to be re-examined. The school under investigation does not have its own assessment policy. It is evident from the study that educators implement assessment according to their own

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interpretations and meanings they assign to the national assessment policy.

Because of the absence of a school assessment policy, educators in this study do not reflect on their practice, do not revisit or re-examine assessment implementation process. Re-examining the implementation process would open room for sharing meanings with colleagues that individuals assign to the assessment process. This corresponds with Mitchell and Koshy's (1993) assertion that when educators have assigned meaning to the assessment process, they need to compare their interpretations and negotiate meaning with each other until they come to an agreement about meanings assigned to the assessment process. Educators at Emabomvini acknowledged that sharing meanings would be an ideal situation though they could not say how they would go about doing it.

5.5 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, recommendations will be made in this section that might contribute to assessment being implemented in the manner that it should. From the study, therefore, these are the implications; staff development, parental development workshops and policy formulation.

5.5.1 Policy Formulation

In the absence of the assessment policy at the school, educators cannot be certain whether the implementation of the assessment process is on track. Davidoff and Lazarus, (1995:5) state that teachers are policy implementers and if teachers cannot do what the policy states, that policy needs to be reviewed or the implementation process needs to be re-examined. The authors' assertion calls for every school to have its own assessment policy, which will be drawn to suit the context of that particular school. The school policy should be in line with the Department of

Education assessment policy and should reflect OBE principles. It should state clearly how assessment is to be planned and implemented in an outcomes-based education system.

5.5.2 Staff Development

The school under study does not have a clearly defined staff development programme, therefore the school needs to have a programme for development in place. Educators' responses were suggestive of a staff development programme especially when they made mention of the fact that sharing of meaning would be an ideal situation though they did not state how they plan doing this. Staff development programme would be an ideal platform for sharing meanings and interpretations on their practice, in this instance, on the issue of implementing assessment in an outcomes-based education system.

In the study, educators showed some theoretical understanding of how assessment is to be conducted, but implementation is a cause for concern. Educators seem to implement assessment bringing their own interpretation and meanings they assign to the process. This could be addressed through staff developmental programmes.

It should be noted that educators are still in the process of engaging with Curriculum 2005 and the assessment policy and are giving their own interpretations. This may result in educators not having confidence to initiate a staff development programme where they would be expected to lead discussions on assessment because the information they have does not give them confidence to act as resources for colleagues. In spite of the above, educators have a responsibility to have programmes for development in place. To kick-start the developmental programmes, educators may need to network with institutions of higher education where they would be able to interact

with experts on the subject in question. Educators would have to invite experts to their school to address them on assessment. Whilst external experts could shed light on assessment and its implementation, educators and the school should not depend entirely on them for development because in their absence, the programme will become stagnant. Networking should also take the form of documents, publication, journals and books on OBE and assessment, which will be made available to the school. The availability of such material will help educators to be resourceful and to scaffold the development programme.

Educators also need to engage in life-long learning. Besides the material that will be available at school, educators need to find literature on OBE so that they validate the information they have and clarify misconceptions they have about OBE. The Policy Unit in the Department of Education has done a review on Curriculum 2005 and is currently engaging in revising the curriculum. We as educators need to obtain the reviewed documents and engage with them. From this exercise, educators at school level also need to use their developmental programmes to revisit and review their assessment policy to ensure that assessment is implemented in the manner that it should be implemented.

5.5.3 Parents' Workshops

Parents as stakeholders in school are expected to play a meaningful role in their children's learning. Robinson (1995: 298) cited in Goodwin, (1997) state that parents admit to having limited knowledge on curriculum issues and on how to assess learning. In this study, parents admit to having no knowledge of the work that is being done in schools. Educators are also aware of the parents' illiteracy and yet appeared to have high expectations of the parents to give meaningful and effective feedback. However, the school does not have any programme to

develop parent's skills and knowledge in this regard.

The school can play a major role in alleviating parent illiteracy through workshops. In these workshops educators need to workshop parents on the South African Schools Act of 1996 so that they become well versed in issues of governance, professionalism, curriculum and assessment and the role that parents need to play at school. Wood, (1988) holds that a sound working relationship is necessary to promote parent-professional communication.

The school also needs to workshop parents and the governing body structure on transformational policies, curriculum issues and assessment in order to ensure maximum participation by parents in their children's learning. In the study, learners in their responses indicated that their parents help them to understand better, which means that parents can be used as resources for their children. With these workshops in place, parents will have information on how to participate in their children's learning and also enable parents to give effective feedback to educators. Torrance (1995: 72) states that parents who learn the why's and how's of assessment prior to and during implementation can provide the support necessary to sustain effective learning.

5.6 Conclusion

From this study, one can conclude that educators have different interpretations of the assessment policy. This results in assessment being implemented by educators differently. To curb this, the school needs to have its assessment policy in place which should be discussed and adopted by all educators and should suit the context of the school. To ensure that process, educators need to revisit the policy and re-examine the implementation process.

Staff development for educators should not be a rare and futile exercise but should be a regular

exercise because without staff development there would be no school development. Staff development provides opportunities for reflection where educators are able to see areas for development in their practice. Reflection on assessment implementation would provide educators with an opportunity to share and negotiate meanings and eventually come to a common understanding, which would bring about effective implementation of assessment in an outcomes-based education system.

Parent involvement would ensure communication between educators and parents and would help to develop parents in curriculum issues. It would also make parents their children's resource and in this manner the children's performance would be enhanced.

5.7 Implications for Further Research

Since OBE came into implementation it has been met with controversies such as not being accepted by educators because it was regarded as something that was forced upon them and no consultation was engaged into. Most educators have always stated that they have never received any training. Workshops on OBE have not shed any light on educators because OBE facilitators have been unable to address educators concerns. The terminology used in OBE has been found not to be easily understable and ambiguous. Educators claimed that OBE was forced to be implemented prematurely. These claims were based on the fact that South Africa was not yet ready to finance OBE in its entirety and the school system was not structured in a manner that would make OBE implementation possible and effective

In spite of all difficulties, there has been a positive move from the educators in that they are engaging with OBE and are putting effort into understanding what OBE is about, but their efforts

show shortcomings. Educators lack in-service training and support from the Department of Education. Support in terms of teaching and learning material, informative workshops that would help educators reflect on their implementation of OBE is lacking.

Further research needs to be done to examine whether the language used in the revised OBE policy is understandable to educators and whether workshops are conducted in a manner that would help educators in implementing the policy appropriately. Research would also have to be conducted to examine whether in-service training would help educators improve OBE implementation.

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APPENDIX A

EDUCATOR INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What is the school's assessment policy and how does it reflect principles of OBE?
   ....
   ....

2. What is your understanding of outcomes-based assessment and its ole in the teaching and learning
   situation?..
   ....

3. What do you understand the purpose of assessment to be?
   ....
   ....

4. Is assessment planned in conjunction with your lesson to be taught or do you plan it separately?..
   ....

5. Do you set criteria with your learners in class before assessment is conducted?
   ....
   ....

6. Which assessment strategies do you use to collect data?
   ....
   ....

7. Would you say that the strategies used are in line with OBE principles?
   ....
   ....

8. How do you report assessment to (a) Learners
                                 (b) Parents...
   ....
   ....

9. How do you address learners' weaknesses after giving feedback?

....

....

10. After reporting to parents, do you get input from parents, which will help enhance their children's'

learning?..

....

11. Do you, as a staff share meanings with respect to interpretations that you as educators assign to outcomes-based assessment and its implementation?

....

....

12. In your view, would you say that assessment teaches and assesses?.....................................

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APPENDIX B

LEARNER QUESTIONNAIRE

The aim of the questionnaire is to assess the understanding of the purpose of assessment by learners and the implementation of the assessment strategies in teaching-learning situations. It would be helpful and appreciated if you fill out this questionnaire sincerely.

NB: Please do not write your name. All details are confidential.

1 Age: - under 15 years.

    -15 years

    -16 years

    - older than 16years.

2. Grade: - 8

    - 9

    -10

3. Gender - Male

    - Female

4. Do you live with?

        both parents

        father only

        mother only

        other (specify)

5. What do your parents do for a living?

        (i)   unemployed

        (ii)   self-employed

        (iii)   employed (specify

6. How often are you assessed at school?

        (i)   quarterly

        (ii)   monthly

        (iii)   regularly (specify)

7. Which assessment strategies (methods/forms of assessment) are used when you are being assessed?

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8. Of the assessment strategies mentioned above, which ones are mostly used?

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9. Before being assessed do you, together with your teacher set criteria, so as to know what is expected of you when being assessed?

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10. Has your teacher ever explained to you how the setting of criteria will help you in your learning? Answer Yes or No and explain.

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11. After your feedback (assessment results), do you engage in a discussion concerning your work with your teachers? Answer Yes or No and explain?

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12. Does the discussion help your in your learning?

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13 Do teachers invite your parent (s) to discuss your learning and your performance Answer Yes or No and explain?

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14.Do you receive help from your parents with respect to assessment and your learning in general?

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15. Would you say that the discussions you have had with your teachers helped with your learning and your performance? Answer Yes or No and explain.

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16. Would you say the help you received from your parents has helped improved your learning and your performance? Answer Yes or No and explain.

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