OUTCOMES-BASED ASSESSMENT IN PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY OF SIX EDUCATORS AT A SECONDARY SCHOOL IN KWAZULU- NATAL

J. RAMSAROOP

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Education
University of Natal
Pietermaritzburg

2003

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work, and that all sources consulted and quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

_____   _____
Jeevaloshni Ramsaroop   Date

I

ABSTRACT

Since it assumed power in 1994, the democratic government in South Africa had to meet the challenge of changing a fragmented, inequitable and culturally oppressive system of education into one that would promote the principles of equity, redress and social empowerment. A mechanism to meet the aims of the new South African education system, Curriculum 2005 and its outcomes-based education approach, was introduced from the beginning of 1998. The new education system was subjected to changes that were designed to address the legacy of apartheid, and to meet the challenges presented by twenty first century global imperatives. Curriculum 2005, as a learner-centred educational framework, embraces a continuous assessment process that requires that educators be skilled to employ integrated assessment and teaching strategies to facilitate the holistic development of learners. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and practices of grade nine language educators with regard to translating outcomes-based assessment into practice. A qualitative approach, using a case study method, was employed for the investigation and interviewing was the major data collection instrument. The interview data was supplemented by document analysis. The data were coded and analyzed. The main findings suggest that the grade nine language educators have a sound understanding of the outcomes-based system of assessment but the policy language and large class sizes were found to have limited educators' abilities to meaningfully use ongoing classroom assessment for formative purpose with individual learners. Finally, recommendations made concerning assessment practices, could lead to a more effective learner-centred learning environment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to place on record my heartfelt thanks to the people who have been my source of help and inspiration.

Professor Anbanithi Muthukrishna, my supervisor, for her patience, guidance and belief in me. Her encouragement, and the positive manner in which she went about supporting me academically, places her as an excellent role model for any student. Thank you Nithi.

Special thanks to my dear friends, Saaj and Mohomed, who have been my pillar of strength through the dark days when I was unable to see the light at the end of the tunnel. None of this would have been possible without their constant support and motivation. God bless them both for always being there for me. Thank you Saaj and Mohomed for your unconditional love and support.

A special thank you to the teachers who participated in this study – I hope this study may be of some benefit to you.

To my sons, Vivek and Kiran, thank you for your love, tolerance and moral support. Your fine achievements are my motivation to go on.

Finally, I must thank Ricki, my guiding spirit, who is always with me.

It is to you, Ricks, that I dedicate this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

THE STUDY IN CONTEXT

1.1. Introduction

This chapter serves to introduce the focus of this research. It provides a brief historical perspective of the post-apartheid South African education system. A historical perspective is used to throw some light on current policy and practice. This discussion is necessary in order to locate current developments within a historical context.

The new national curriculum, Curriculum 2005 (C2005) and its Outcomes-Based approach to teaching and learning (OBE) are briefly reviewed. The chapter moves on to discuss assessment within the national curriculum, and then more specifically to assessment in the language, literacy and communication learning area. This chapter then focuses on the formulation of the problem, the rationale for the study, and finally the research methodology.

1.2. Curriculum Reform in South Africa

Since it assumed power in 1994, the democratic government in South Africa had to meet the challenge of changing a fragmented, inequitable and

culturally oppressive system of education into one that would promote the principles of equity, redress, and social empowerment (Baxen & Soudien, cited in Jansen and Christie, 1999). A major initiative to meet this challenge has been the development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), a coordinating structure and mechanism intended to respond to the fragmented, inequitable system of education and training. The objective of the NQF is to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements, and to enhance access to, and mobility and quality within education and training (Department of National Education, 1997b). A mechanism to operationalise the NQF is the new national curriculum, Curriculum 2005 and its outcomes-based education (OBE) approach.

Curriculum 2005 takes as its starting point a clear political agenda and the need to transcend the curriculum of the past, which "perpetuated race, class' gender and ethnic divisions, and … emphasized separateness, rather than common citizenhood and nationhood" (Department of National Education, 1997a: 1). C2005 is based on the principles of co-operation, critical thinking and social responsibility, and requires that educators become curriculum developers, classroom managers and learning mediators (Department of National Education, 1997a).

C2005 not only marked a dramatic departure from the apartheid curriculum but also represented a paradigm shift from content-based teaching and learning to an outcomes-based one (This shift is illustrated in Table 1.1).

Table 1.1. Curriculum 2005 – The Paradigm Shift
(Adapted from Dept. of Education, 2000a)

OLD PARADIGM	NEW PARADIGM
1. Educators... - possess knowledge - transmit this knowledge to empty vessels (learners)	1. Educators ... - are facilitators - facilitate the learning process
2. Learners ... - are empty vessels - are ready to be filled with content (facilitator-centered)	2. Learners ... - possess knowledge and ability to learn - play an active, constructive role in their own education (learner-centered)
3. Teaching ... - refers to the act and methodology of conveying knowledge to a child (transmission mode)	3. Teaching ... - means providing learner experiences and guiding, supporting, mediating, and facilitating the learner
4. Learning ... - means memorization of content presented by the facilitator (rote learning)	4. Learning ... - means the development of the learner's knowledge, understanding, skills, abilities, and values - is based on interaction between the facilitator and and the learner context and content
5. Syllabi ... - are content-based and focus on facilitator input	5. Learning Programmes ... - are outcomes-based and focus on what learners should do, know and understand
6. Assessment ... - is based on formal testing of content knowledge - is used to grade pupils for formal testing and promotion	6. Assessment ... - is continuous, based on a variety of techniques - is used to see what the learner can do - helps facilitators plan learning programmes

This paradigm shift in the South African education curriculum is characterized as a "move from the judgemental to the developmental role of assessment "(Department of Education, 1998a: 3). The tool through which this 'paradigm shift' will be achieved is said to be Continuous Assessment (abbreviated in the document as CASS).

This system of Continuous Assessment in the outcomes-based approach means that learners are assessed in an ongoing way. In essence this means that all the work that the learner does is credited, that is, it is given the status and value that in the past system of education was reserved for formal written tests (Pahad, 1999). Assessment has now shifted from a system that is dominated by public examinations whose main function has always been to rank, grade, select and certificate learners to a new system that informs and improves the curriculum and assessment practices of education and the leadership, governance and management of learning sites. Assessment is viewed as a structured process for gathering evidence and making judgments about the individual's performance in relation to registered national standards and qualifications (Department of Education, 1998a). This continuous assessment of the learner's performance is aimed at helping to shape or form the learner through the learning process.

Outcomes-based assessment appears to offer a number of advantages to the key stakeholders (educator and learners) in educational programmes,

including transparency of reporting, alignment of teaching and curriculum goals, and sensitivity to individual needs. However, the introduction of outcomes-based approaches has on occasion proven problematic for a variety of reasons (Brindley, 1998). Jansen's (1999) expressed concern about OBE is that the management of assessment practices will multiply the administrative burdens placed on educators. I, as the researcher, thought it was important to investigate the ways in which these problems are being manifested and addressed in the real world of teaching and learning, in particular in the Language, Literacy and Communication learning area, and to establish the extent to which they appear to be amenable to resolution.

1.3. Formulation of the Problem

With this background information in mind, it seems the challenges facing educators in general, and language educators in particular, in this period of educational transformation, are rather daunting. Policy makers assume that the new curriculum and assessment policy would build on the current use of educators' formative assessment to promote students' learning. This assumption might be partly due to the lack of a strong research base to inform an understanding of the extent to which educators are able to translate new assessment policy into practice and thereby promote student learning. Some have argued that if the vision detailed in the new assessment policy is to be realized, such a research-based understanding would be needed.

5

The National Department of Education acknowledges that the strength and success of an outcomes-based assessment model rests on the "professionalism and ability of a highly skilled teaching core who understand and are able to apply the sound educational assessment principles and draw on a variety of assessment techniques" as advocated in assessment policy documents (Department of Education, 1997a: 26). The question on my mind, and perhaps on the mind of all stakeholders in education (policy makers, parents, educators and learners), is: Are educators able to give 'life' to the outcomes-based approach to assessment of learning progress, in other words, are educators able to align their assessment of learners' progress with curriculum reform and practices?

In order to answer this question the following questions are investigated in this study:

1. What are the educators' perspectives on and experiences of outcomes-based assessment in the Language, Literacy and Communication learning area?

2. What tensions, dilemmas, successes, and problems are language educators experiencing in translating assessment policy into practice?

3. What, if any, strategies are language educators employing to overcome the problems they are experiencing in translating assessment policy into practice?

1.3.1. Rationale for the study

Curriculum 2005 policy advocates an approach that sees assessment as being integrated with teaching and learning (Dept. of Education, 1997b). The aim of this study is to contribute to the building of an understanding of how grade nine language educators experience classroom assessment, with the introduction of major changes in the education system, in particular in the Language, Literacy and Communication learning area.

It was envisaged that the results of the study would provide policy makers with more insight into language educators' perceptions and experiences in translating outcomes-based assessment policy into practice. They (policy makers) could consider these insights in their reflections on the workings of policy implementation and in designing or rethinking policy. The potential of research to inform policy can, however, not be overstated. It was also hoped that the results would provide some language educators with data that could inform their reflections on their own perceptions and experiences of assessment. For the educators who participated in the study, it is hoped that the process would provide opportunities for continued reflection when they respond to questions about how they perceived and experienced outcomes-based assessment in their classrooms. This element could also not be overstated.

1.4.   Clarification of concepts

The outcomes-based education jargon often prevents a clear understanding of what this educational approach entails. Clarification of the major concepts that are used in the study follows.

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria indicate in broad terms the observable processes and products of learning which serve as evidence of the learner's achievement. It refers to statements of evidence that educators need to look for in order to decide whether a specific outcome or aspect thereof has been achieved. In an OBE system the assessment criteria are derived directly from the specific outcome and form a logical set of statements of what learner achievements should look like (Department of Education, 2000a).

Curriculum 2005

The new South African curriculum revolves around outcomes-based education (OBE) and the goal of the educational system is lifelong learning. Curriculum 2005 (C2005) is the name given to the project and OBE is the instrument by which this goal will be achieved (Department of Education, 1997a).

Expected Levels of Performance (ELP's)

The expected levels of performance refer to the minimum standard the learner is expected to achieve at the end of a grade or a phase. The ELP's serve as a guide to enrich the assessment process. They are fundamentally a breakdown of the performance indicator that incorporates different levels of performance. ELP's provide information about a learner in terms of learning difficulties and remedial action required to support learners who may experience problems in the learning process (RSA, 1998).

Fairness

A fair assessment is one that provides all students an equal opportunity to demonstrate achievement and yields scores that are comparably valid from one person to another. Fair assessments are unbiased and nondiscriminatory, uninfluenced by irrelevant or subjective factors. Effective and informative assessment strategies are designed to ensure equal opportunity for success, regardless of learner's age, gender, physical or other disability, culture, background language, socio-economic status or geographic location (Department of Education, 1997a; Pretorius, 1998).

Learning Area

Learning areas are the domains through which learners experience a balanced

9

curriculum. There are 8 learning areas: Language, Literacy and Communication (LLC); Human and Social Sciences (HSS); Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences (MLMMS); Technology (TECH); Natural Sciences (NS); Economics and Management Sciences (EMS); Life Orientation (LO); and Arts and Culture (A&C).

Learner- Centredness

Effective and informative assessment practice is learner-centred. Ideally, there is a co-operative interaction between educator and learners, and among learners themselves. The learning programme outcomes and the assessment processes should be made explicit to the learners. Learners should participate in the negotiation of learning tasks and actively monitor and reflect on their achievements and progress.

Outcomes

The word 'outcome' has two meanings. Firstly, it is the statement of a desired task, skill or set of behaviours that a learner should be able to demonstrate at the end of a learning experience. Secondly, it is the ability to demonstrate, at the end of a learning experience, a pre-determined task, skill or set of behaviours in a manner that involves understanding and truthfulness.

Outcomes-based education (OBE)

As the term 'Outcomes-Based' suggests, everything that happens in an OBE system is based on what its outcomes are. OBE is an approach to education that clearly defines what is to be learned by a learner. An outcome refers to a learner's demonstration of learning at the end of a learning experience. In this case, 'based' means 'defined according to', 'organized around' and 'focused on' (Spady and Schlebusch, 1999). Therefore, if we go into any OBE school, we would expect the educators to describe how their curriculum (planning, teaching, testing and their record keeping and reporting) are directly defined according to, organized around and focused on their Outcomes. Therefore, OBE is about "organizing everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences" (Spady, 1994: 1).

Performance Indicators

Performance indicators are statements, which provide details of the content and processes, which a learner should master, as well as the training context. It should assist the educator in judging what evidence is required. Performance indicators can be used to measure content and knowledge, skills, attitudes and even values and beliefs.

Range Statements

A range statement is a description of the difficulty level of the learning content that should be learned and the skills learners are expected to display with respect to a specific outcome in a specific phase. "Range statements help educators to understand in which ways the work should be made easier in the Foundation Phase, more difficult in the Intermediate Phase and even more difficult in the Senior Phase" (Jacobs, Gawe and Vakalisa, 2001: 119). The range statements provide information about the intended scope and context of the learning. Therefore, range statements are needed to inform educators of the degree of complexity of the learning outcome. These outcomes could be used at different levels of education. It would therefore be necessary that a description be provided of how assessment would take place at the different levels.

Reliability

Reliability is concerned with the consistency, stability, and dependability of the results. In other words, a reliable result is one that shows similar performance at different times or under different conditions, (McMillan, 2001: 65). The term reliability has a technical meaning, referring to the quality of the assessment procedure itself. A reliable assessment is one that gives consistent results by eliminating errors arising from different sources. Reliability is closely linked to the principle of fairness. If a strategy does not

accurately assess what it is designed to assess, then its use is misleading and unfair to the learner.

Specific outcomes

Specific outcomes refer to the demonstrations of what learners must be able to do at the end of a learning experience and is directly derived from the learning areas. The specific outcome reflects the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which inform the demonstration of the achievement of an outcome.

Teacher Judgement

Good assessment practice involves educators making judgments, on the weight of assessment evidence, about learner progress towards the achievement of outcomes. When the learner successfully demonstrates the outcome a number of times, and in varying contexts, the teacher is confident that a learner has achieved an outcome.

Validity

Classroom assessment is a process that includes gathering, interpreting, and using information. This conceptualization has important implications for how we define a familiar concept that is at the heart of any type of high quality

assessment, i.e. validity, (McMillan, 2001: 59). Valid assessment strategies are those that reflect the actual intention of teaching and learning activities, based on learning programme outcomes, (Pretorius, 1998). Validity is concerned with the soundness, trustworthiness, or legitimacy of the claims or inferences that are made on the basis of obtained scores. Thus, in broad terms, validity is taken to mean the extent to which what is assessed is what the assessor set out to assess.

1.5.   Overview of the study

Chapter 1:   The Study in Context

This chapter gives an introduction to factors that led to curriculum change in the South African education system. This is followed by the formulation of the problem and the aims and purposes of the study. The major concepts that are used in the study are clarified. An overview of the study and a demarcation of the study is elucidated. Finally, the value of the study is described.

Chapter 2:   Literature Review: Policy and Changing Perspectives on Curriculum Assessment in South Africa

In this chapter the researcher provides a theoretical framework within which the study was conducted. Books, journal, media reports and the internet were consulted. The research paradigm of the study is clarified. This chapter

focuses on OBE assessment strategies and OBE teaching methods that are consistent with a learner-centred approach to education. The role of continuous assessment in the learning process is described. The issue of reliability and validity of the assessment process as well as strategies to ensure that the assessment is reliable, valid and fair are discussed. Finally, the assessment process is clarified.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter contains the research methodology and includes the data collection and data analysis procedure used in the study.

Chapter 4: Findings and Reflections

The findings of the investigation are presented in this chapter. The major themes and categories that emerged from the data analysis are discussed. Related literature is cited as a control mechanism to mirror or refute the perceptions that the participants have of an OBE assessment approach.

Chapter 5: Overview of the Study, Synthesis and Recommendations

This chapter contains a synthesis of the findings. This is followed by conclusions that are drawn from the findings and recommendations that are made based on the actual findings. The limitations of the study are put into

perspective and finally further research is suggested.

1.6. Conclusion

In this chapter the background that led to the present investigation is given. The research problem is formulated and put into perspective. This was followed by a clarification of concepts and an overview of the study. The study is demarcated and the value of the study is clarified.

In Chapter Two, I will present a literature review in which the theoretical foundations of the investigation are explained.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: ASSESSMENT IN AN OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION APPROACH

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relating to the transformation of the education curriculum in South Africa, with specific reference to the new system of assessment. The chapter provides a conceptual framework of the study by presenting an overview of literature related to an outcomes-based approach to assessment. It begins with a brief look at the theoretical paradigm, the National Qualifications Framework, and then moves on to review the literature, local and international, on the policy and practice of assessment within an outcomes-based education system.

2.2. Theoretical Paradigm

This study is placed within the field of cognitive education and is informed by the principles of critical theory. Cognitive education is an approach to education that is learner-centred and is focused on alternative assessment and learning strategies by employing cognitive processes to engage learners in problem-solving and thinking processes (Samuels 1994, cited in Vereen, 2001). Within the critical theory paradigm, society, schooling and education cannot be separated because schools exist to reproduce the social economic

and political order of society, therefore critical theory is focused towards social change (Jansen 1997).

Furthermore, Nel (1995) argues that critical theory aims to transform society by paving the way for change in society. The role of critical theory in terms of education is to encourage learners and educators to reflect on knowledge, thus empowering them to be liberated from the restrictions imposed on them by the dominance of mass culture and to transform the school curriculum. Thus, following the principles of critical theory, learners and teachers are able to do more than simply adapt to 'the new order', but rather to be 'freed and their circumstances changed in order to be able to change the community'(Carl 1995, cited in Vereen 2001). This concurs with the vision of the new education system in South Africa that is focused on the whole development of the learner in a learner-centred approach that will result in self-fulfilled and creative citizens (Department of National Education 1997c).

2.3. The Transformation of the South African Education Curriculum

One of the major problems with the school curriculum of the 1980s and 1990s was that it did not systemize and link school education sufficiently to the world of training and work. To overcome this problem, a new framework had to be created in which adults who study or train outside of schools and other institutions (for instance through night schools, in-service courses and short courses) could be given recognition in the form of certificates. That

would act as an incentive for people to do training courses and further

studies, and at the same time ensure them equal opportunities to compete in

the job market. Consequently, the NQF was produced as a national structure

to underpin outcomes-based education. The NQF and OBE go hand-in-hand.

The NQF ensures that skills acquired outside the formal education system are

recognized by employers nationally and internationally; while OBE forces

formal institutions (like schools) to make their programmes more practical

and career-oriented.

Table 2.1. illustrates the structure of the NQF. The South African education

and training system is divided into three bands reflecting the three main

education and training sectors: General Education, Further Education and

Higher Education (see the second column of Table 2.1.) The lowest band

indicates the first nine grades of schooling which fall into four school phases:

Pre-school, Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phase (see the bottom

section of Table 2.1.) on completion of Grade 9, learners receive a General

Education and Training Certificate which allows them to leave school and

look for work, or continue studying for Further Education and Training

Certificates. If they decide to study further, they can do it at school (Grades

10, 11, and 12) or at a training college or non-governmental organization.

Once learners have completed matriculation or an equivalent training

certificate, they can continue studying at a University or Technikon for

diplomas, certificates or degrees. If they obtain a Master's or Doctor's degree

or an equivalent qualification, they reach NQF level 8 – the highest level of

Education and Training recognized by the SAQA.

LEVEL	BAND	TYPE OF QUALIFICATION
8 7 6 5	Higher Education & Training Band.	Ph D, Further Research Degrees Higher Degrees; Professional Qualif. First Degrees; Higher Diplomas; Occupational Certificates
FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING		
4 3 2	Further Education & Training Band	Grade 12 Grade 11 Grade 10
GENERAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING		
1	General Education & Training Band	Senior Phase (Grade 7 to 9) Intermediate Phase (Grade 4 to 6) Foundation Phase (Grade 1 to 3) Reception (Pre-School)

Table 2.1. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)
            (Adapted from Kramer, 1999: 130)

2.3.1. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The advent of the NQF and the adoption of the principles of OBE have made the transformation of the curriculum of teaching and learning in South Africa a central issue. The development of human resources and potential is the main goal of the curriculum framework. The emphasis is on what the learner should know and would be able to do at the end of a course of learning and teaching (Department of Education, 1997a). South Africa's NQF is an attempt to bind all education and training into an integrated system in which there are minimal barriers to diversity, flexibility, portability, progression, and to the breath and depth of learning, according to Harley and Parker (cited in Jansen and Christie, 1999). Kramer (1999: 129) agrees with these sentiments: "The NQF was created to bring together education and training so that we close the gap between the two. " However, in order to achieve either an integration or articulation of education and training, there has to be agreement on some core unit underlying a qualification that makes explicit what a 'qualified' learner is able to do. A qualification is a planned combination of learning outcomes that has a defined purpose (or purposes). It is intended to provide qualifying learners with competence in a specific area and a basis for further learning. It is possible to construct rules of access from one qualification to another on the basis of what learners are able to do. The SAQA document (1995) spells out to educators exactly what this 'qualification' should entail.

21

2.3.2. Objectives of the National Qualifications Framework

The objectives of the NQF according to the SAQA (1995: 9) are to:

- Create an integral national framework of learning achievements;

- Facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;

- Enhance the quality of education and training;

- Accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities, and thereby

- Contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

2.4. Perspectives on Curriculum Assessment

When we think about 'assessment', we generally conjure images of tests and examinations, grades and scores. However, research into classroom contexts of assessment broadens our understandings of practices to include day-to-day, often moment-to-moment judgments made by educators. We can include in this the vast range of informal, formative and diagnostic judgements that teachers make of students' work, attitudes and responses and of their social and emotional behaviour generally (Filer, 2000).

In this section, issues in defining assessment are explored, the purpose of assessment is discussed, and the important features of assessment within an outcomes-based approach is discussed.

2.4.1. Defining assessment

The Latin root of assessment, *assidere*, means to sit beside (Dreyer, 2000). In an educational context assessment refers to the process of observing learning, describing, collecting, recording, scoring and interpreting information about a learner's learning. At it's most useful, assessment is an episode in the learning process, part of reflection and an autobiographical understanding of progress (Pahad, 1997; Pretorius, 1997). Accurate and appropriate student assessment provides the information to help educators make better decisions about what and how much students have learned. In the classroom context, then, assessment is the gathering, interpretation, and use of information to aid the teacher in making decisions about students' performance, (McMillan, 2001). Van der Horst and McDonald (2000: 170), agree that assessment is a data-gathering strategy. It is the strategy for measuring student knowledge, behavior or performance, values or attitudes.

Thus, it can be said that assessment in outcomes-based education is the process used to decide if the learner is competent or not. A learner must show he, or she, knows, understands and can do whatever is required to demonstrate competence. These requirements, in the context of the NQF, are called specific outcomes, which simply means that the learner has to demonstrate learning and capabilities that derive from and underpin that learning experience.

23

2.4.2. Why do we assess?

The NQF permits us a closer look at assessment of learning. We now have the opportunity to match our assessment practice to our educational goals. The proposed changes in assessment rests on the premise that what we assess and how we assess it, reflects both what is taught and the way it is taught, (RSA, 1998). The goal of assessment should be to have students who can create, reflect, collect and use information, and solve problems, (Department of Education, 1998a). Thus, Dreyer (2000) argues that our assessment must measure the extent to which students have mastered these types of knowledge and skills. The ultimate purpose of assessment is to validate learning outcomes. Assessment results provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the learner and can therefore suggest ways that the educator may help the learner.

Assessment in one form or another has always gone on in schools; what has varied is the role and style of such assessments. In this section I will give some examples of how assessment schemes have been developed in response to particular needs and circumstances.

2.5. Assessment in an OBE approach

It is necessary for teachers to be close to the learners in order to determine what the learners know. OBE assessment, at the very simplest level, refers to the ability of the teacher to perceive and see what learners can do. From this

24

perspective assessment in an OBE approach is the process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about a learner's achievement, as measured against "nationally agreed outcomes for a particular phase of learning" (Republic of South Africa, 1998: 9). In essence, continuous assessment is a data gathering strategy for measuring knowledge, values and attitudes of learners. Continuous assessment employs alternative methods of assessment on an ongoing basis and therefore revolves around the essential principles of OBE (Van der Horst and McDonald, 2001).

Continuous assessment is focused on student development and growth to enable educators to make decisions about the best way to facilitate student learning. Consequently, there is the notion that this process of assessment is aimed at improving the lives of learners in terms of their development and learning. The process of continuous assessment is closely linked to teaching and learning and aims to ensure that all learners will accomplish success in the learning process in terms of clearly stated outcomes appropriate to their stage of development.

This education approach is learner-centred, result-oriented and builds on the notion that all learners need to and can achieve their full potential, but this may not "happen in the same way or within the same period" (RSA, 1998: 9). In order to meet the goal of a learner-centred approach to education, criterion-referenced assessment is applied because in this type of assessment the learner's achievement is compared to an external criterion.

2.5.1. OBE assessment and learning

Assessment lies at the heart of the process of promoting children's learning (Weeden, Winter, and Broadfoot, 2002). According to Weeden et al assessment can provide a framework in which educational objectives may be set and learners' progress charted and expressed. It can form the basis for planning the next step in response to children's needs. It should be an integral part of the educational process, continually providing both 'feedback and feed forward' (Weeden, Winter and Broadfoot, 2002). Therefore, assessment needs to be incorporated systemically into teaching strategies and practices.

Assessment in an OBE approach is multidimensional as it focuses on the curriculum, the learner and the educator. An integral purpose of assessment is to determine whether individual learners have achieved specific outcomes, but it is also meant to assess the effectiveness of learning programmes to inform and improve the curriculum as well as the governing of learning sites (Republic of South Africa, 1998). Furthermore, assessment is a process that can enrich the lives as well as enhance the learning and the development of learners. Thus, assessment allows the educator to appreciate and understand what the learners learn, while simultaneously enabling learners to recognize their strengths and weaknesses.

Assessment can also be used in teacher development because it aims to assist, enrich and develop educators in their own teaching. The process of assessment empowers educators to assess their own strengths and weaknesses

26

and this results in educator development. It is thus necessary for educators to keep abreast of advancement in teaching practices and development, especially as teaching, learning and assessment are viewed as inseparable processes.

Assessment has a reporting function with regard to learner achievement. In an OBE approach it is expected that parents be informed of their children's shortcomings and strengths in terms of their academic achievement. This reporting function also includes informing learners of their achievement in terms of feedback during the assessment process.

Weeden et. al (2002), RSA (1994: 4) and Race (2000: 1- 2) cited in Dreyer (2000), offer the following reasons for assessing learners' performance:

- learners need feedback to help them to find our about their learning progress.

- educators need feedback on the progress of students' learning, so that they can adjust and develop their teaching (i.e. are specific outcomes achieved).

- assessment is often the major driving force that motivates students to study.

- assessment maximizes learners' access to the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values defined in the national curriculum policy.

Thus, OBE is based on the achievement of outcomes, and assessment is the way that we gather information to gauge or decide whether the outcomes

have been achieved properly. Educators need to ensure that their assessment of learning is accurate and effective. Poor assessment strategies will mean that the entire OBE approach to education is undermined. Many educators argue that any education system is only as good as its assessment strategy (Kramer, 1999). Consequently, much research and debate has gone into the issue of assessing learning and in the past decade some important trends in assessment have emerged internationally. This section of the research study will engage with the literature regarding all facets of outcomes-based assessment: principles, features and practices.

2.5.2. Aim of Outcomes-Based Assessment

The general aim of assessing learners in outcomes-based education, (Department of Education, 2000b), is for growth, development and support. The purpose of assessment is to monitor a learner's progress through an area of learning so that decisions can be made about the best way to facilitate further learning in terms of expected knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Assessment provides information about learning difficulties and remedial action necessary to support learners who may be experiencing learning difficulties. The purpose of assessment is not about promotion (Pass/ Fail/ Conditional Transfer), but about progression (Department of Education, 2000b: 12).

The role of assessment in OBE is part and parcel of the aims of assessment in

all its root models. OBE aims to assess the competences of learners in their totality. It takes a holistic approach in describing the competence of a learner in terms of knowledge, skills and values, and assessing competence by using a variety of assessment approaches. This calls for performance-based and authentic assessment strategies against the background of criterion-referenced assessment (Malan , 1997).

Criterion-referenced assessment in outcomes-based education focuses on the achievement of clearly defined outcomes, making it possible to credit learners' achievement at every level. It is a process of getting valid and reliable information about the learners' performance on an ongoing basis. The educator is able to make these assessments using clearly defined criteria, a variety of methods, tools, techniques and contexts, recording the findings, reflecting and reporting by giving positive, supportive and motivational feedback to learners, other educators, parents and other stakeholders (Department of Education, 1997, 2000). The ability to assess learners in accurate, objective, valid and interactive ways (or lack thereof) will influence the value of our education practices and qualifications (Deacon and Parker; cited in Jansen and Christie, 1999).

Education practices and qualifications can improve if educators work towards tests that are fair to all learners by paying attention to what they know about factors in assessment, their administration and scoring. One reason why the educators cannot look for 'fair' tests is that they cannot

assume identical experiences for all learners (Gipps, 1996). This is also why

educators cannot look for equal outcomes – for this they would need

assessment tailored for different learners.

2.5.3. Assessment fits into teaching and learning

In keeping with the above discussion on OBE assessment, it is possible to

show how assessment fits into teaching and planning by means of a diagram

(Sieborger, 1998). In this diagram assessment includes three stages: gathering

information (or evidence), recording the results, and feedback to the learners.
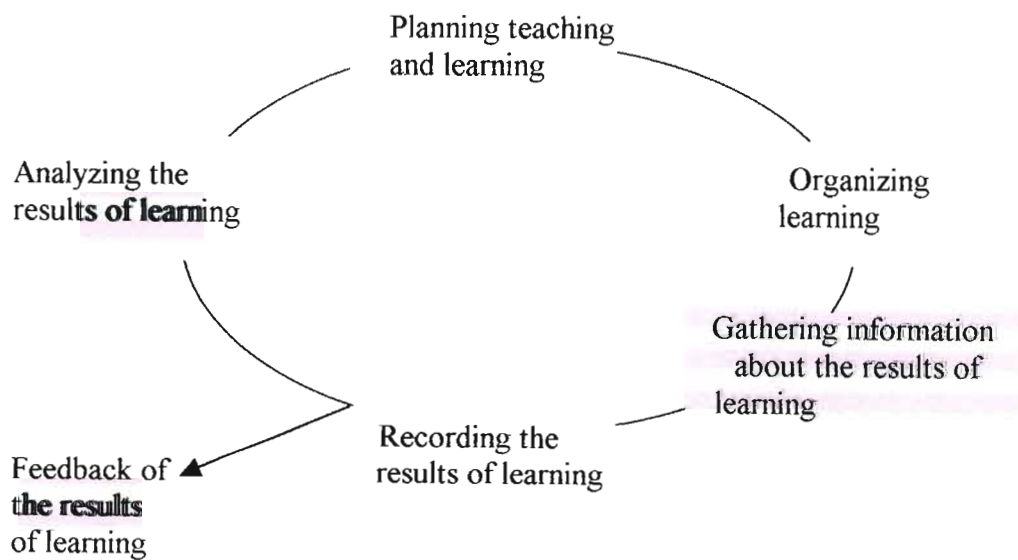
Figure 2.2. Transforming Assessment
(Adapted from Sieborger, 1998)

I believe this figure, the 'cycle' of assessment, teaching and learning, indicates that ongoing assessment of learners' performance is of paramount importance in any education curriculum. This figure shows that assessment is not the final point of teaching and learning, but something that is used to guide and direct future teaching and learning, through analysis of the results of learning. The remainder of this chapter will focus on outcomes-based assessment and how it fits into this cycle of teaching and learning.

2.5.4. The principles underlying *OBE*

Educators' assessment of learning should conform to certain principles in order to be useful in an outcomes-based education system. The OBE principles are listed below (Killen, 2000). An explanation of those principles that required clarification is given in brackets.

- The assessment procedures should be valid – (they should actually assess what you intend them to assess).

- The assessment procedures should be reliable – (they should give consistent results).

- The assessment procedures should be fair – (they should not be influenced by any irrelevant factors such as the learner's cultural background).

- Assessment should reflect the knowledge and skills that are most important for students to learn.

- Assessment should tell educators and individual learners something that they do not already know – (it should stretch learners to the limits of their understanding and ability to apply their knowledge).

- Assessment should be comprehensive.

-   Assessment should be based on explicit standards of achievement.

-   Assessment should support every learner's opportunity to learn things that are important.

-   Learners are individuals, so assessment should allow this individuality to be demonstrated.

I found that the language educators in the study had a sound knowledge of the principles of outcomes-based assessment. Hence, they conformed to the OBE principles of fairness and reliability in an attempt to ensure that their assessments were accurate, objective and valid.

2.6. Features of OBE assessment

A review of literature on assessment within OBE (Pahad, 1997; Pretorius, 1998; Van der Horst and McDonald, 2000; Dreyer, 2000), indicates that OBE assessment should be:

    continuous
    formative
    summative
    diagnostic
    criterion-referenced and norm-referenced
    authentic
    performance-driven.

A brief discussion of each of these features follows.

2.6.1. Continuous assessment

Continuous assessment acknowledges that we cannot change the instructional process unless we change the assessment process (Dreyer, 2000: 269). If learners are assessed in an ongoing way, it means that the whole range of school – and homework – can be acknowledged. All the work the learner does will then be given the status and value reserved in the past (pre-C2005) for examinations and tests (Pahad, 1997). In South Africa this system of assessment is usually referred to as Continuous Assessment (CASS).

CASS must be an integral part of the teaching and learning process (Department of Education, 2000). CASS is an ongoing everyday process that finds out what a learner knows, understands, values and can do. It provides information that is used to support the learner's development and enable improvements to be made in the learning and teaching process. All types of assessment must be continuous. Consequently, educators implementing continuous assessments are required to develop a sound assessment record to track the learning progress and to provide useful data for reporting and progression.

The CASS model for assessing learners in an OBE approach has two major components of assessment, namely formative assessment and summative assessment.

2.6.2. Formative assessment

Formative assessment helps to determine what the learner's strengths and developmental needs are in relation to a particular outcome or criteria and feeds back into their lesson planning (Department of Education, 1997). Formative assessment will indicate which situations help or hinder the learner's strengths. The express purpose of formative assessment is the improvement of pupil learning (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). Formative assessment is – "assessment 'for' learning" (Weeden, Winter, Broadfoot, 2002: 13). Kramer (1999) agrees that formative assessment, which happens during the learning process, helps to make decisions about how to proceed with the learning process. Kramer goes on to add that formative assessment allows us to make adjustments, to take account of new issues, learning problems, changes or other factors that influence learning.

Formative assessment should thus involve a developmental approach and is designed to maintain and support learning progress. It is built into learning activities on a continuous basis, guiding the learner and the educator through constructive feedback. It also informs the educator's decisions with reference to selecting appropriate follow-up activities.

2.6.3. Summative assessment

The aim of summative assessment is to summarize the level of achievement of a learner at a given time (Dreyer, 2000). Summative

assessment is used to determine how well a learner has progressed towards

the achievement of selected outcomes. Summative assessment must thus be

used to provide formative feedback to the educator, and to lead into the next

planning session (Department of Education, 2000a).

Torrance and Pryor (1998) state that summative assessment is generally

undertaken at the end of a course or program of study in order to measure and

communicate the student's performance for purposes of certification and

or checking what has been learned at the end of a particular stage of learning,

(latterly) accountability. Summative assessment is the process of summing up

it is - "assessment 'of' learning" (Weeden, Winter and Broadfoot, 2002: 13).

Summative assessment 'summarizes' the progress made. "It is the final

statement of achievement used to make an evaluation of learning" (Kramer,

1999: 43). Dreyer (2000) agrees that information gained from summative

assessment has been largely used to select – for promotion to the next year, or

for entrance into university.

Table 2.2. illustrates the differences between formative and summative

assessment. Educators have to be aware of these distinct differences in order

to prevent any tension between the two forms of assessments.

Table 2.2. Formative and Summative Assessment

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT	SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT
. Designed to support the teaching and learning process. . Assists in the planning of future learning. . Diagnoses the learner's strength and weaknesses. . Provides feedback to the learner on his/her progress. . Helps to make decisions on the readiness of learners to do a summative assessment. . Is developmental in nature. . Credits/certificates are awarded.	. At the end of a learning programme (qualification, unit standard, or part qualification). . To determine whether the learner is competent or not yet competent. . In knowledge and inputs-based systems, this usually occurs after a specified period of study, e.g. one year. . In OBET, learner-readiness determines when assessment will take place. . Is carried out when the assessor and the learner agree that the learner is ready for assessment.

2.6.4. Diagnostic assessment

Diagnostic assessment, as an instrument of formative assessment, is used to

guide the educator in terms of remedial action required to improve learning.

Hughes (1989) cited in Dreyer (2000) states that diagnostic assessment is

usually done at the beginning of the term, year or a new topic of study to

ascertain the starting point for teaching. It examines the learner's existing

knowledge, skills, interests and attitudes, as well as determines what

misconceptions are evident, that is, strengths and weaknesses. Diagnostic

assessment is assessment that is specifically focused on finding out the nature

and cause of a learning difficulty, and providing appropriate remedial help

and guidance. Educators ignoring the range of capacity in the class, for

example, can cause learning difficulties; gifted learners may not be

sufficiently challenged, and others may be given activities beyond their

capacity. Problems may also be the result of specific learning difficulties.

Diagnostic assessment determines when specialist advice and support should

be requested from Education Auxiliary Services (Department of Education,

2000a).

2.6.5. Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment

Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced testing is often referred to as if

they serve the same purpose, or share the same characteristics. However,

norm referencing places candidates in rank order after assessing them at a

particular point in time. Norm – referenced assessment and reporting occurs

when "assessing a student's achievement and progress in comparison to other

students," (Department of Education, 1997a: 28).

Criterion - referenced assessments, on the other hand, record positive

achievements at different levels. Criterion – referenced school assignments

and examinations try to provide measurable criteria so that a learner's progress can be monitored and his achievements acknowledged in a similar manner. Criterion – referenced assessment and reporting occurs when "assessing and reporting a student's achievement and progress in comparison to predetermined criteria," (Department of Education, 1997a: 28). Anyone who meets these criteria is credited with the appropriate pass in that subject.

The OBE shift to criterion referencing reflects a desire to move away from an assessment system that is primarily designed to credit achievement at different levels. Mabry (1999) states that criterion –referenced assessment is an evaluation based on criteria and/or standards. In scoring student achievement, criteria tell what the student must do. Criterion referencing also makes the assessment criteria quite explicit, so that every learner should be able to understand how his or her work is assessed (Mabry, 1999; Department of Education, 2000). Similarly, every educator should be able to explain results with reference to stated criteria. Clearly criterion referencing is more philosophically in tune with a society that aims to give the whole population a good general education and stresses the idea of access, equity and redress (Department of Education, 2000).

2.6.6. Authentic assessment

Perhaps the most important recent advance in both instruction and assessment is the emphasis on authenticity (Wiggins, 1992). Authentic instruction

and assessment focus on knowledge, thinking and skills exhibited in real-life settings outside school that produce the learner's best, rather than typical, performance. To accomplish this, students need multiple "authentic" opportunities to demonstrate the knowledge and skills and continuous feedback. This kind of emphasis results in greater student motivation and improved achievement. In this way authenticity effectively integrates instruction, assessment, and motivation (McMillan, 2001).

According to Gipps (1994) authentic assessment is a term used largely in the USA where the intention is to design assessment that moves away from the standardized multiple-choice type towards approaches where the assessment task closely matches the desired performance and takes place in an authentic, or classroom, context. Torrance (1995) believes that the basic implication of the term authentic seems to be that the assessment tasks designed for learners should be more practical, realistic and challenging than the traditional pencil-paper tests. Spady (1994) sees authentic assessment as virtually identical to criterion validation – to assess exactly what the outcome demonstration requires.

Assessment is authentic when it enables students to successfully communicate their strengths and educational needs, and when results can be used to improve instruction based on accurate knowledge of student progress. Such assessment mirrors good classroom instruction and it gives students ongoing feedback that enables them to reflect on their accomplishments,

identifies future learning needs, and develop goals and strategies for attaining them. This type of assessment empowers students to become self-directed learners and empowers educators to use assessment information for instructional purposes (O'Malley, 1997 cited in Dreyer, 2000).

Fraser (1999:16) describes authentic assessment as ..." assessment tasks that resemble skills, activities and functions in the real world and school". Authentic assessment aims at determining competencies in contexts that closely resemble situations in which these competences are required. Assessment then becomes a learning experience in which learners are prepared to apply their knowledge, skills and values in an integrated manner.

2.6.7. Performance-based assessment

Performance-based assessment is the direct, systematic observation and rating of the performance of an educational outcome, often an ongoing observation over a period of time, and typically involving the creation of products. The assessment may be a continuing interaction between educator and learner and should ideally be part of the learning process. The assessment should be a real world (that is, authentic) performance with relevance to the learner and learning community. Performance-based assessment is a test of the ability to apply knowledge in a real-life setting (Brualdi, 1998 cited in Dreyer, 2000).

In its simplest terms, a performance assessment is one that requires learners to demonstrate that they have mastered specific skills and competences by performing or producing something. This type of assessment provides educators with information about how a learner understands and applies knowledge. A key feature of performance assessments is that they require students to be active participants. Rather than choosing from presented options, as in traditional multiple-choice tests, students are responsible for creating and constructing their responses. Their responses may vary in complexity from writing short answers or essays to designing and conducting experiments and demonstrations or creating comprehensive portfolios. This study investigated how language educators implemented their performance-based assessments.

2.7. The Purpose Of Outcomes-Based Assessment

The purpose of assessment is to determine if the objectives are being met. Every course of instruction has certain objectives, even if these objectives are not explicitly stated. Outcomes - based education stresses the need to be clear about what the learners are expected to achieve. These expectations can be expressed as outcomes and the teaching and learning is guided by these outcomes. Assessment is essential to outcomes-based education because it is necessary to be able to measure to what degree a learner has achieved each outcome (Sieborger, 1998).

Any assessment presupposes a decision to be taken. If there were no decision to be taken, then there would be no need for assessment. Cunningham (1998), states that educators should think about the objectives before assessing, irrespective of whether the objectives are formally stated or not. Outcomes-based education makes it clear on what basis these assessments should be undertaken. In OBE the aims of the curriculum are contained in the outcomes that state the results expected at the end of the learning process. These outcomes refer to the knowledge, skills and/or attitudes, which the learners should be able to demonstrate that they can understand and apply within particular contexts. Outcomes link the aims, content and the assessment of the curriculum. Because outcomes describe the expected performance, they make it possible to specify the kind of assessment that is needed to measure it by specifying particular performance indicators (Department of Education 1997; Cunningham, 1998; Sieborger 1998).

Sieborger (1998) states that the way in which an outcome is written has an important effect on the assessment of the outcome. The verb indicates the performance, competency or achievement expected and the words that follow it describe the object intended. The wording of the outcome evidently affects the assessment, so it is necessary to provide more detailed guidelines of what is expected. These guidelines are contained in assessment criteria, range statements and performance indicators (Jacobs, Gawe, Vakalisa, 2001). "Assessment is to help the learner, not to provide a set of marks for the teacher," Sieborger (1998, 58). Outcomes should improve planned progress,

42

since learners can be informed in advance of the outcome that they need to achieve. The learners are told what the income is and they are informed about the process that will help them to achieve the assessment criteria at the appropriate level. The use of outcomes will lead to greater authenticity in assessment, as the assessment will be directly dependent on the outcome and the assessment criteria . Assessment needs to be used in a formative way to show the learners what progress has been made and what still needs to be achieved. Continuous assessment benefits the achievement of outcomes, as it helps the learners to progress towards them. (Sieborger, 1998)

Outcomes-based education requires criterion-referenced assessment, that is, teachers are required to evaluate continuously how individual learners are performing against the criteria listed in the learning area. Subsequently, each learner has a detailed profile of continuous assessments under very detailed and specific headings. The language educators are required to assess the learners' portfolios that are comprised of tasks done over a set period, or smaller tasks, pieces of writing on themes and projects. Ideally, learners' communication, is assessed in terms of their effective use of language according to contextual criteria. In an attempt to gauge the success, or otherwise, of the outcomes-based approach to assessment in the learning area of language, literacy and communication, this study looked at selected language educators' assessment practices.

2.8. Reliability and Validity of Assessment

Outcomes-based assessment in the Language, Literacy and Communication learning area is a complex process and it is imperative for language educators to establish reliable criteria in the assessment process. Subjectivity and teacher bias is a salient factor that can influence the reliability and validity of assessment. In this regard it is necessary to define what reliability and validity of assessment entails. Reliability of the assessment process refers to the consistency with which different educators execute the assessment task at different times and places. Validity refers to the extent the assessment of a learning outcome measures that which it claims to measure (Department of Education, 1998). It is essential that educators apply strategies to control factors that influence the reliability and validity of the assessment process.

Educators using the CASS model employ three mechanisms to control the assessment process, namely, the assessment criteria, range statement and performance indicator. The assessment criteria for each learning outcome provide a framework for assessment to guide the educator. The assessment criteria are indications of the observable processes of the demonstration of learning outcomes in broad terms. However, a limitation of the assessment criteria is that it lacks sufficient detail of exactly what must be demonstrated by learners to indicate an acceptable level of achievement (Department of National Education, 1997c).

The range statement is another mechanism and indicates the scope and depth

of learner achievement. The range statement is directly linked to the specific achievement described by the assessment criteria. Thus, the assessment criteria and range statement provide statements in terms of what evidence is needed for learners to demonstrate that they have achieved an outcome.

The third mechanism, the performance indicator, is clustered with the assessment criteria and range statement to provide more detailed information of what a learner should know and do to achieve an outcome (Department of National Education, 1997c). These reliable strategies in the assessment process will ensure that the results of learning are reliable, valid and fair.

2.9. Conclusion

This chapter has given a snapshot of assessment in South African schooling from a historical as well as a current perspective. The appeal to the history in the discussion is intended to encourage the reader to appreciate the difficulties of transforming an assessment system from an historical base which has potentially contradictory elements to the system to which a country aspires. This was illustrated by the historical conception of Continuous Assessment as a summative examination phenomenon as opposed to its broadly defined sense in the new assessment policy in South Africa. This poses serious challenges for those seeking to transform assessment in South African schools, the main one being to facilitate the assessment 'paradigm shift' advocated in policy aspirations.

An overview of the main features of assessment indicates that the focus in assessment has shifted from the notions of "passing" and "failing", to the concept of ongoing growth. The emphasis is also on learners developing skills, knowledge and understandings, whereas previously the emphasis was on one individual compared to another.

The implementation of outcomes-based assessment and reporting systems in educational programmes has been accompanied by a range of political and technical problems, including tensions between the summative and formative purposes of assessments and the doubts surrounding the validity and reliability of teacher-constructed tasks. The present study examined ways in which these problems have been manifested and addressed, using the assessment tasks that were used to assess the achievement of language competencies in the school.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented a literature review that focused on the theoretical foundations of outcomes-based education. The influence of these theories on assessment was discussed with special reference to the language, literacy and communication learning area. A detailed description of the methods of data collection and data analysis is discussed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

The research emanated from educational change that occurred in South Africa with the adoption of a new education system. The major change in the education system is from content-based education to outcomes-based education. The assessment methods in an outcomes-based model are criterion-referenced and continuous in nature, consequently requiring that teachers employ multiple assessment strategies for assessing learners.

This chapter deals with the theoretical framework, the research and sampling design, the research instrument, method of scoring and the proposed method of data analysis. The researcher will describe the reasoning behind the methodology and how she conducted the research.

47

3.2. A Theoretical Framework

In many educational quarters, educators are seen as merely implementing policy as advocated by educational bureaucrats. This view, unfortunately, does not take human subjectivity into account. However, educators have their own perspectives and feelings and thus each educator is likely to attach different meanings to different curriculum practices. This does not mean that different interpretations would be distinct or without common qualities – it means that the interpretations will result from each educator's own processes of sense making (Lubisi, 2000). In keeping with this view, I have chosen to adopt symbolic interactionism as the main component of the theoretical framework for this study. In this section, I briefly describe the key principles of symbolic interactionism, and indicate how it influenced the formulation of the research problem.

3.2.1. Symbolic interactionism

The theory of symbolic interactionism is said to be based on three root assumptions Denzin (1992) and Blumer (1969).

- Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them.

- The meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.

- These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.

In the proposed study an attempt will be made to focus on the educators'

subjective meanings, motivations, and interpretations arising out of their

engagement with an aspect of curriculum change, namely, outcomes-based

assessment. Symbolic interactionist theory views the socialized individual as

capable of thought, invention and self-determination. The peculiarity consists

in the fact that human beings interpret each other's actions instead of merely

reacting to each other's actions. The proposed study will investigate how the

educators have adapted to and negotiated change, how they engage in joint

action, how they respond to other actors in their world, and how they

encounter, and resolve problems that arise in the process of implementing

outcomes-based assessment.

3.2.2. Research implications of symbolic interactionism

Denzin (1970) lists four implications of symbolic interactionism for the

researcher. The first implication is the need for the researcher to take a closer

look at the symbols used in interactions, and the settings in which interactions

take place. The second implication is studying phenomena from the point of

view of those being studied; thus, in order to understand things from the

research subjects' perspectives, the researcher has to obtain information data

in the form of descriptive accounts from the subjects. This view gives some

idea of the status of interview data in symbolic interactionism. The third

implication is the need for the researcher to link the participants' perceptions

49

with those of his/her society. The fourth implication identified by Denzin is that researchers need to record the dynamics of the situations that they observe, and in which human practices are situated.

The above implications of symbolic interactionism on methodology will be revealed as the chapter unfolds.

3.3. Research Design

The researcher selected a qualitative, interpretivist approach for data collection and analysis as this study investigates the perceptions and experiences of language educators of outcomes-based assessment. Johnson (1999) notes that qualitative methodologies are powerful tools for enhancing our understanding of teaching and learning. This paradigm rejects the viewpoint of a detached, objective observer and believes that the researcher must understand the subjects' frame of reference. Data was gathered through engaging with the research subjects and getting their perspectives on their current assessment practices. Thus, the aim of qualitative research is to inform our understanding of educational practices and to expand our frames of reference; it is not a "verification of a predetermined idea, but discovery that leads to new insights of a phenomenon" (Sherman and Webb 1988: 5, cited in Cresswell 1998). Qualitative research aims to give meaning to people's experiences (Cresswell 1998); furthermore, it is stressed that the methods of an inquiry must be appropriate and aligned to the objectives and

50

the aims of an investigation.

Fundamental to the qualitative, interpretivist tradition is the concept of
verstehen, a convention which according to Patton (1990):

> Stresses understanding that focuses on the
> meaning of human behaviour, the context of
> social interaction, an empathetic understanding
> based on subjective experience, and the
> connections between subjective states and
> behavior. The tradition of **verstehen** or understanding
> places emphasis on the human capacity to know and
> understand others through sympathetic introspection and
> reflection from detailed description and observation.
> (Patton, 1990:45)

The research was conducted in the qualitative, naturalistic paradigm. There is

a growing body of literature devoted to qualitative research in education

some of which is synthesized here. The goals of this chapter are to elaborate

on the reasons for choosing the qualitative methodology, and to provide a

basic introduction into the features of this type of research.

I conducted a review of available literature (Blumer 1969, Denzin 1970 and

1992, Lubisi, 2000, Paton 1990) in order to support the research with a

sound theoretical foundation and a conceptual framework for the study.

3.3.1. The choice of a case study

This study took the form of a small-scale case study. As Cohen, Manion and

Morrison (2000) suggest, a case study concentrates on the characteristics of a

single unit of analysis, in this case a group of language educators. The focus on a single unit does not mean that the study was simplistic - each case had a number of elements within it, and this provided a complete picture for the researcher.

Merriam (1988) defines a case study in terms of its end product. "A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit," (Merriam, 1988: 21). A case study is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. Merriam states that a case study is particularistic in nature because the study can suggest to the reader what actions might be taken in similar situations and can illuminate general problems based on specific instances. The researcher sought to provide helpful information on outcomes-based assessment to the educators of Language, Literacy and Communication, firstly to the constituents of this particular secondary school under study, and then possibly to other secondary schools.

Stake (1995) describes a case study as: "A specific, a complex, functioning thing," (p. 2). He also purports that people and education programmes are easily studied by case design. Likewise, in this study, the researcher encountered no difficulty in examining the assessment practices and experiences of the Language, Literacy and Communication educators by means of the case design.

In this study I sought to understand the beliefs, knowledge, and

opinions of grade nine educators of Language, Literacy and Communication

in a secondary school. This provided insight into how the educators

experience outcomes-based education, and the meanings they attach to events

or actions associated with their assessment practices. The study yielded

meaningful insights into the educators' experiences, beliefs, and judgements

about outcomes-based assessment in their own context of teaching and

learning. The case study was best suited to the study because it allowed the

researcher to concentrate on teachers in the context of language teaching

bounded in time and place, and to identify the various interactive processes at

work (Rose & Grosvenor, 2001; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

Furthermore, the research was focused on depth rather than breadth.

The descriptive nature of a case study measures the complexities of a

situation, shows that hindsight can be relevant to the future, and shows the

influence of personalities on the issue, according to Merriam (1988). The

heuristic quality of the case study explains the reasons and background of a

situation and explains the effectiveness of innovations. The researcher richly

described the background of outcomes-based education and training and

detailed the effectiveness of outcomes-based education assessment practices

through the eyes of the research subjects.

I attempted to display all the features of a case study, as described by

Creswell (1998) and Stake (1995). Creswell (1998) describes a case study as

the examination of a bounded system via multiple data sources. The case was a bounded system in which the secondary school Language, Literacy and Communication educators were studied. Data collection included interviews, which provided a detailed description of the educators' perceptions and experiences regarding outcomes-based education assessment practices in grade nine.

The rationale for conducting a case study in this situation was to determine the strengths and weaknesses of current assessment practices in the Language, Literacy and Communication learning area, in grade nine. These strengths and weaknesses were evaluated and studied, and possible solutions to issues are offered. Merriam (1998) states that case studies are often utilized to examine educational processes, problems and programmes, which in turn result in understanding that affect and possibly improve practice. This may be due to the fact that case study research is anchored in real-life situations and provides rich and holistic descriptions of a phenomenon. A case study is definitely "a slice of life," (Merriam, 1998: 42).

Greig and Taylor (1998) state that case study triangulation involves obtaining more than one, usually three perspectives, on a given phenomenon. This entails using multiple data collection techniques (cited in Merriam, 1998). This study used two research methods, namely, document analysis and interviews. Validity was ensured by the use of triangulation both in the sense of one method being used to investigate different subjects' perspectives and,

different methods of data being used to investigate different subjects' perspectives and, different methods of data collection being used to study a single phenomenon. This prevented bias and distortion. Equal credence was given to all views expressed.

This case study was limited to producing conclusions regarding the grade nine Language, Literacy and Communication educators' implementation of outcomes-based education and assessment. However, areas of learning obtained from this study could be carefully examined for applicability of findings to other grade nine educators who are implementing the outcomes-based system of education and training.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

The researcher chose to use various research methods, namely, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and informal conversations.

3.4.1. Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were used as the primary strategy for data collection, in conjunction with document analysis and informal discussions with the participants. Qualitative interviewing utilizes open-ended questions that allow for individual variations (Patton, 1990). The interviewer used an interview guide, or 'schedule', with a list of questions

that she wanted to explore during each interview. Although it was prepared to ensure that basically the same information was obtained from each person, there were no predetermined responses, and the interviewer was free to probe and explore within the predetermined inquiry areas.

The interview guide ensured good use of limited interview time; it made interviewing the subjects more systematic and comprehensive and it helped to keep interactions focused. In keeping with the flexible nature of qualitative research designs, the interview guide could be modified over time to focus attention on areas of particular importance, or to exclude questions I had found to be unproductive for the goals of the research.

A basic decision going into the interview process was how to record interview data. Whether one relies on written notes or a tape recorder appears to be largely a matter of personal preference. For instance, Patton (1990) says that a tape recorder is 'indispensable'. On the other hand, Lincoln and Guba (1985) do not recommend recording except for 'unusual' reasons. Lincoln and Guba base their recommendation on the intrusiveness of recording devices and the possibility of technical failure. I found that recordings have the advantage of capturing data more faithfully than hurriedly written notes, and it made it easier for the researcher to focus on the interview.

The semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection allowed all participants to express themselves openly and freely. The goal of the

interview process was to find out each person's beliefs, perceptions, understanding, and knowledge about outcomes-based education and training in general, and in particular with reference to assessment of learners in the Language, Literacy and Communication learning area. The researcher also wished to determine what further supports would be helpful to the participants.

Certain basic questions (cf Appendix A) were asked as a framework. However, the subjects were given scope to voice their opinions on any issue they deemed to be of import. The participants were allowed to digress from the given open-ended question in order to express their complete opinions. These interviews were audio taped and then transcribed verbatim. Notes were taken during the interview. Informal discussions with the teachers helped generate data that was used to prompt them during the interviews, and to broaden the study's perspective on certain issues about outcomes-based assessment.

3.4.1.1. Developing the interview schedule

I was guided by the literature review in developing the semi-structured interview schedule and in gaining insight into the problem being investigated. A literature control was employed also as a mechanism to endorse or refute the research subjects' perceptions. This is an important strategy in a qualitative investigation as it validates or refutes the perceptions of the

57

participants.

A qualitative interview is a conversation with a purpose (Mason 1996, cited in Vereen 2001), and thus requires a great deal of planning. The researcher prepared a semi-structured interview in order to discover the language educators' perceptions and experiences of assessment in an outcomes-based situation. I used the research questions and the literature study as guidelines to phrase the interview questions. The interview questions were open-ended and specific in content to allow for individual responses. The purpose of the semi-structured interview in this study was to ensure that the participants were asked the same questions in the same sequence.

3.4.2. Document analysis

Another source of information that proved to be invaluable to this qualitative researcher was analysis of documents. By critically analyzing documents through basic questions, I could expose the clues and truths in its construction This analysis provided insights into the culture of outcomes-based assessment in the Language, Literacy and Communication learning area. Various documents relating to departmental and school assessment policy, practices and record keeping were examined, along with samples of the learners' work. The department policy on assessment gave an insight into what was expected of the educators in terms of assessing the learners, and record keeping. The school assessment policy was very similar

to the departmental policy, with a few minor changes regarding record keeping.

3.5. Research Context and Procedures

3.5.1. Selection of the Site

The research site for this study was a secondary school in Pietermaritzburg with a learner population of 917 from grade 8 to grade 12. The historically Indian school has the following learner population ratios: 5 % Coloured learners; 43 % Black learners and 52 % Indian learners. The reason for the choice of site is twofold, firstly, the researcher is a colleague of the participants and this facilitated access to the school; and, secondly, the school was one of the schools where C2005 was piloted in the year 2000

The principal of the school granted permission for this study to be conducted and the grade nine language teachers were willing to be participants. The principal and the educators, the researcher included, are strong proponents of outcomes-based research and endorsed this research project in the hope of gaining valuable information that may be used to improve the educators' ability to translate the assessment policy into practice.

3.5.2. Participants

The primary participants were six grade nine language educators at the

school. They were between 30 and 40 years of age, four females and two males. The interviewees experience in education ranged between 10 and 20 years. Two of the participants had Honours degrees and the remaining four had Bachelors degrees. Five of the educators studied full-time at various universities, and one educator studied part-time through correspondence. All participants are English first language speakers.

Participation of all participants was voluntary, and no coercion was used. educators could withdraw from the study at any time, but none of them chose to do so. The participants were asked to participate in a 45 to 60 minute semi-structured interview. All information was kept strictly confidential. No names were used in data reporting. Each educator was provided a copy of the results. After data was transcribed, tapes were destroyed.

One strength of the participant selection process was that the educators selected are direct participants in outcomes-based education and training at the school. In addition, the educators are very collegial and personally friendly with one another. Often, opinions are shared between educators, and groups of educators adopt similar opinions with regard to issues about outcomes-based assessment. Limitations of the selection process are the small number of educators available to participate, due to the small size of the school, and the fact that the study was confined to grade nine language educators.

3.5.3. Informed consent

The researcher had to request permission from the principal to interview the staff members because educational research data gathering involves some invasion of privacy. Informed consent was obtained by providing the educators with an explanation of the study. The researcher had to explain the purpose, objectives and the ethics of the study to the principal. The names of the participants were not recorded as confidentiality and anonymity are central to the ethical aspects of research. The ethics of the research were explained to educators prior to the commencement of each interview; I promised full confidentiality of the interviewees and the institution.

3.5.4. The dilemmas of being the researcher in the context

Stake (1995) describes case researcher roles as educator, advocate, evaluator, biographer, and interpreter. I assumed the role of interviewer in this study and thus stressed the roles of educator, advocate and evaluator. I intended to provide an accurate description of the beliefs and opinions of the participants in this study.

A methodological issue that I was very much aware of, and had to engage with emanated from the tension of being a researcher on one hand, an educator in the Language, Literacy and Communication learning area, and a colleague of the participants in the study. Firstly, as researcher I had to deal with the issue of "insider-outsider" dialogue (Babbie, 2002) – this relates to

the tension between description (inside perspective) and interpretation (outsider). As a researcher, I had to not only understand but also actively interpret the voices of the participants who are my colleagues. Secondly, I was concerned that as an educator engaging with outcomes-based assessment I might have brought my own conscious and unconscious 'baggage' to the research process, in particular when I conducted the interviews and analyzed the data. Scheurisch (1997) suggests a researcher should be open and foreground the indeterminacy of the interview process.

Several methods were used to eliminate researcher bias. These included transcription of interviews and subsequent checking. The researcher then provided each participant with a copy of the interview in which the individual participated. The interviewees were allowed to make changes to clarify their opinions or thoughts. The researcher then made changes to the transcripts prior to analysis. Five interviewees made no changes in their transcript. The remaining interviewee made one change in his transcript – he wanted to substantiate one of his responses.

Stake (1995) describes the researcher as evaluator, which is the role of choosing specific criteria or interpretations of a program's strengths and weaknesses, and successes and failures. The illumination of these areas allowed the researcher to provide detailed information for improvement of teachers' assessment practices.

3.6. Data Analysis

I used a word processor to transcribe the six sets of audiotaped data. I then checked the transcriptions against the audio-tapes to ensure that all the data was accounted for. The data sets were then printed for analysis.

Stake (1995) recommends that categorical aggregation, direct interpretation, establishing patterns, and *naturalistic generalizations* be utilized in analyzing data in case study research. In categorical aggregation, I looked for repeated instances from the data, anticipating issues and relevant meanings will emerge. In direct interpretation, I examined and determined the meaning attached to a single instance. Patterns emerged from the data, and occasionally, the patterns suggested a relationship between categories might exist. Thus, naturalistic generalizations occurred, which is what can be learned from this specific case.

The constant comparison method was used to analyze and interpret data from this study. Merriam (1998) describes constant comparison method as the development of categories, properties and tentative hypotheses and observed relationships as data evolve into a theoretical framework. Inductive category coding was combined with a simultaneous comparison of interviews. The analysis was extended to developing categories and themes that helped the researcher to interpret the meaning of the data. The categories emerged and became the themes, and after analysis, led to general outcomes of the study. The purpose of pattern seeking was to identify major themes of meaning and

understanding of language educators of outcomes-based assessment. The researcher began analysis at the outset of the study and continued until the process could provide no further relevant information. I tried to remain flexible and open to new possibilities throughout this process. The major themes that emerged from these patterns constitute Chapter 4 of the dissertation.

3.7. Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this case study may have been the researcher's projection, sampling model, and researcher mood and style (Boyatsis, cited in Merriam 1998). In this study the researcher's support for outcomes-based education and training may have affected the responses of the participants. Boyatsis suggests several methods to avoid complicity. These include developing an explicit code, establishing consistency of judgment, and remaining close to the raw data when establishing codes and themes. In this study, themes were determined as the interviews proceeded. I kept notes as to the themes as the educators mentioned them when interviewed. Codes were revealed to the researcher during the actual coding process. Codes and themes were rechecked at least twice. Finally, observations were made regarding the frequency of the code being mentioned by the interviewees, which interviewees mentioned the code, and differences of opinions of the participants regarding a specific code.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter gives account of the research design that was used in the study. The research followed a case study approach. The data collection tools, semi-structured interviews and document analysis are described. The researcher describes the research context and procedures in terms of data collection and data analysis. A detailed description of the data collection procedure was given as well as the analysis processes of coding and pattern seeking. The themes that emerged from the analysis of data will be outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4.1. Introduction

C2005 has made it incumbent on language educators to apply assessment strategies that are consistent with outcomes-based education as an approach to the new educational system. This implies that language educators are required to employ continuous assessment and outcomes-based education teaching strategies that facilitate the development of learners' potential. In this study, an investigation was undertaken to determine the language educators' perceptions of assessment in an outcomes-based education approach.

In this chapter the researcher presents the findings to the main research question that was formulated as : What are the grade nine language educators' perceptions on and experiences of assessment in an outcomes-based education approach? Furthermore, answers to the following sub-questions are presented:

- Do language educators consider themselves adequately trained to translate outcomes-based assessment into practice?

- What are some of the dilemmas, tensions and problems that educators are experiencing in translating OBE assessment policy into practice?

- What are some of the strategies, and /or techniques, those language educators employ to overcome their problems/dilemmas in OBE assessment.

4.2. Discussion of Findings

I chose to use a qualitative approach for this research study and therefore the semi-structured interview was selected as the data collection instrument. The interviews were audio-taped to enhance the trustworthiness of the investigation. The data was transcribed; coding and pattern seeking were then used to identify the major themes and related categories. The themes and categories that emerged from the data analysis are presented in this chapter.

The researcher used participants' verbatim comments as a mechanism to validate this investigation. A literature control is employed to identify and endorse the participants' perceptions. Quotation marks are used for the educators' verbatim comments and italics for direct quotations from related literature.

The findings of the study are analyzed and discussed using table 4.1. as reference.

Table 4.1.

THEMES AND CATEGORIES OF RESPONSES THAT EMERGED FROM THE FINDINGS	
MAIN THEMES	RELATED CATEGORIES
4.3. Theme 1: 'I am really into this idea of OBE.'	4.3.1. Sound understanding of OBE assessment. 4.3.2. Learners need to be credited for what they know and can do. 4.3.3. OBE assessment is meaningful. 4.3.4. Ongoing assessment has positive effects.
4.4. Theme 2: Benefits of learner-centred assessment in the language, literacy and communication learning area.	4.4.1. The voice of the learner in OBE assessment. 4.4.2. Meeting the needs of learners with difficulty in learning through diagnostic assessment. 4.4.3. Identifying strengths and weaknesses through formative assessment.
4.5. Theme 3: Problems, contradictions and dilemmas in OBE assessment.	4.5.1. 'I don't always get a good grasp of the OBE concepts. 4.5.2. Shifting assessment practices. 4.5.3. Cumbersome administration of large class units. 4.5.4. Validity and reliability of educator developed assessment tasks. 4.5.5. Heavy marking loads.

4.3. Theme 1: 'I am really into this idea of OBE.'

This theme presents the participants' general perceptions of outcomes-based assessment. In general, the language educators who participated in this study positively perceived outcomes-based assessment. The findings suggest that these educators had a fairly good understanding of the goals of outcomes-based assessment. An educator reported,

" OBE is geared toward promoting the achievements of learners."

She went on to add,

" ... there must be something the learner can do and he/she deserves to be credited for this knowledge or ability."

The language educators had positive experiences of translating OBE assessment policy into practice. One of the educators said,

"I am really into this idea of OBE ... "

An educator reported,

"Every event /situation in the classroom is regarded as a learning experience, for both the learner and the educator."

This implies that the outcomes-based approach to assessment seems to be meaningful for the educators as well as the learners. According to the participants, the merits of continuous assessment seem to be the perceived advantages that it holds for the learners. A participant said,

"Assessment that is ongoing also illustrates what the learner knows and is

able to do."

It is apparent that the language educators who participated in the study are enthusiastic and motivated to make a success of the outcomes-based approach to assessment. This can be attributed to their perceptions of the advantages of continuous assessment for learners. The positive attitudes and enthusiasm of the participants for the new assessment approach is consistent with the findings of Foxcroft and Elkonin (1998: 8) who state that *in spite of their* (teachers') *confusion and experience of exhaustion,* educators have positive attitudes that can be seen as a positive factor (cited in Vereen 2001). Hence, this implies that the quest for success is a priority for the language teachers who participated in this study. The reason for educators' optimism and enthusiasm, I believe, is that the majority of the educators, regardless of the constraints that they experience, are evidently in support of the new educational curriculum.

"I am really into this idea of OBE ... and continuous assessment,"
said one educator. Another teacher mentioned,
"I believe that learners must be given opportunities to be successful, ... and OBE gives all learners this opportunity."

4.4. Theme 2: Benefits of learner-centred assessment

The research study revealed the many benefits of a learner-centred approach

to assessment. A discussion of these benefits will follow.

4.4.1. The voice of the learner in OBE assessment

The findings of the study indicate that the language educators adopted a learner-centred approach to assessment. The assessment strategies that they employed included assessment of prior learning, diagnostic assessment, performance assessment, self-assessment, peer-assessment and portfolio assessment. Continuous assessment is perceived as learner-centred because the learner is part of the assessment process. One educator's view on learner-centred assessment is:

"The learner is in charge of his learning."

This participant believes that the educator is there to guide and promote the learning process. On this issue of learner-centredness, another educator is reported as saying,

"… learners play an active, constructive role in their own education."

The participants saw assessment as a continuous and ongoing process.

According to one respondent,

"The learner can be assessed on various tasks, … reading, speaking, assignments/projects, group activity, etc."

The purpose of these assessments is to "develop the learner's knowledge and skills" and to illustrate what the learner "knows and is able to do".

4.4.2. Meeting the needs of learners with learning difficulty through diagnostic assessment

The findings suggest that the participants are aware of the importance of diagnostic assessment.

"Diagnostic assessment helps the educator to help the learners with learning difficulties," stated one educator. The learners are aware of the assessment criteria; if they do not satisfy these criteria then the educator has to "diagnose the problem". The educator said he then "takes the necessary steps to assist the learning process".

There is evidence to suggest that diagnostic assessment assists in the improvement of learning. One participant said, "the educator is there to provide support to the learners who are not performing to their full potential."

Hence, the major purpose of diagnostic assessment, is to identify learning problems encountered by learners during instruction and assessment. The language educators were aware that all learners learn at their own pace; the teachers therefore offer alternative learning strategies to help rectify the learning problems. For instance, the educators designed more assignments and projects for the 'slow' learners in their classes. These learners were able to perform better in these tasks because they were given more time and scope to express their abilities and skills. However, learners are also able to obtain diagnostic feedback on the success of their learning since explicit performance criteria are provided against which they can judge their

progress.

4.4.3. Identifying strengths and weaknesses through formative and summative assessment

There is a thin dividing line between formative and summative assessment (Department of Education 1998). There is, however, no clear advice as to how educators are expected to deal with the ambiguous relationship between formative and summative assessment (Lubisi and Murphy, 2000). One participant suggests that formative assessment "guides the learner and educator because of the positive feedback that it is designed to provide."

Thus, formative assessment helps to
"determine the learner's strengths and weaknesses in relation to a particular outcome,"
said another educator. The same educator stated,
"formative assessment helps me to decide on which assessment methods to use in an effort to promote the learning process."

For instance, the language educators found that most learners seldom participate in classroom discussions. One educator stated,
"I found that only one or two learners contributed to a group discussion – again, this was not a true reflection of the learners' ability."

Consequently, in order to assess a specific language, literacy and communication outcome, namely, the learners' ability to use appropriate

communication strategies for specific purposes and situations the educators choose to use oral activities. The learners were assessed on their participation in organized group activities, namely, short sketches and plays. All the learners demonstrated that they possessed the ability to communicate effectively as they were able to successfully act out a part assigned to them in a group context.

Paper and pen assessment, that is, traditional tests, still take up the lion's share of many educators' assessment practices. Tests are demonstrably fair in that learners have all the same tasks to do in the same way and within the same timescale. The educators find it easier to be sure that the work being assessed was done by the learners, and not by other people (friends, siblings, parents, etc.). One participant had this to say about learners' projects and assignments,

"Another problem is the learners from affluent, 'advantaged' backgrounds seek help from their parents, and they have access to computers and the internet, etc. to assist them in completing projects, assignments, etc. This is not a true reflection of the learner's ability."

It is evident from the research findings that because of the positive feedback that formative assessment provides, it does facilitate the learning process.

4.5.   Theme 3: Problems, Contradictions and Dilemmas in OBE Assessment

The findings from the study suggest that the participants encountered various problems with the implementation of OBE assessment. Some of the problems that have been identified are:

- I don't always get a good grasp of the OBE concepts.
- Shifting assessment practices.
- Cumbersome administration of large class units.
- Validity and reliability of educator developed assessment tasks.
- Heavy marking loads.

4.5.1.   "I don't always get a good grasp of OBE concepts"

All the participants expressed concern about the terminology used in OBE policy documents. The participants were unanimous in their perceptions that the OBE terminology used in policy documents is difficult to understand and often leads to misunderstanding of the concepts. Some educators described the terminology as "complex and confusing". The terminology evidently seems to overwhelm the participants. One participant perceived the complex terminology as a contributing factor to the lack of uniformity in educators' assessment practices. In this regard the participant mentioned,

"... if we were told in 'simple' terms what, and how, we are to assess the learners' performances, I'm sure there would be no more misunderstandings

...this would result in uniformity in assessments."

The participants' perception that the OBE terminology is difficult concurs with Jansen (1998: 325) who states that the *language of innovation associated with OBE, is too complex and sometimes contradictory.* Jansen goes on to add that an educator who attempts to make sense of OBE, has to come to terms with the different meanings of the terminology, thereby implying the ambiguous nature of the terminology. Some of the respondents have still not come to terms with the OBE jargon. For instance, one educator said, "I don't always get a good 'grasp' of the OBE concepts."

Another respondent said she finds the assessment policy documents "mystifying" and she sometimes finds herself "grappling with the OBE jargon".

This confusion with the OBE jargon has invariably resulted in educators' failure to come to grips with the basic implications of OBE assessment practices and this, according to one participant, has led to "a lack of uniformity in our assessments."

4.5.2. Shifting assessment practices

The findings of the study suggest that three of the participants preferred to use the traditional teaching and assessment methods, and that there was no radical change in their practices. One educator disclosed,

" I often have to resort to a traditional testing programme."

She found the traditional tests to be a more objective assessment of learners' performance. On this issue another educator stated,

"... I'm often confused about how to assess the learners' ability if I don't use the traditional testing system."

Yet another participant who said, "... it's just so much easier and more objective." endorses the conventional teaching method. This educator believed that traditional tests yielded more valid, reliable and fair assessments of learners' abilities and knowledge.

It is apparent that some participants still practiced traditional teaching and assessment methods. The fact that educators employ strategies that are inconsistent with OBE, can be attributed to their misconceptions of the realities of OBE. These findings suggest that educators tend to use conventional teaching and assessment methods that they are familiar with. This finding was reinforced by an educator who stated:

"I still prefer the traditional methods of assessments that I know, even if it is not an outcomes-based approach."

4.5.3. Cumbersome administration of large class units

The findings of the study indicate that all the participants were in unison that the multiple assessment strategies in continuous assessment placed additional

administrative burden on them. One participant stressed,

" ... you are forever assessing the learners' performance ... this means you have tons of efforts, be it projects/assignments, whatever ... to assess."

The findings suggest that the major factor contributing to the additional administrative work seemed to be the large class units that educators had to contend with. An educator revealed,

"this problem is tied up to the fact that the class units are too large."

This educator went on to add that valid and reliable assessments are only possible "if the teacher gets to work with small, manageable class units."

Another participant said,

" It is often difficult to supervise the work of all learners because of the large class units."

The assessment policy documents allow for a broader, more objective assessment of learners' abilities. Unfortunately, this wider spectrum of assessment practices and techniques, entails "a lot of monitoring / supervision from the teacher." The educators unanimously agreed that it is a mammoth task to attempt to maintain discipline in "such large classes", and this makes it difficult to monitor, or assess learners' performance.

"The intensive recording of learners' development and learning progress is a real 'downer' for me," said one educator. She further mentioned that she is "constantly 'bogged down' with assessing learners' efforts ... the huge piles of marking are no joke ... and then I have to record these assessments."

Continuous assessment demands the systematic execution and recording of multiple assessment strategies. Educators are required to record the assessment for different learners on a continuous basis; thus larger class units in a learner-centered classroom result in more administrative work for the educators. According to Jansen (1997) this management function of OBE *will multiply the administrative burden* placed on teachers. Thus, it becomes obvious that the large class units and the additional administrative work of practicing a system of continuous assessment pose a daunting challenge to language educators. In this regard one participant said,

" This brings us back to the common problem faced by all language educators … we do get overburdened with assessing learners' performance tasks."

The cumbersome burden of large class units is an organizational and management concern and not a problem caused by OBE itself. Educators, however, perceive that the OBE approach is the root cause of this problem. For instance, one educator is reported as saying,

"OBE can be very problematic … I am constantly 'bogged down' with the huge piles of marking … a tedious, laborious task that I honestly dislike."

4.5.4. Validity and reliability of educator developed assessment tasks

Educator assessments are increasingly being used as a basis for reporting achievement in outcomes-based systems. Thus, it is imperative that these assessments are able to provide valid and reliable information for decision-

making purposes (Brindley, 2001). However, the analysis of the data has revealed a range of concerns in relation to the measurement qualities of educator-constructed assessment tasks and the manner in which they are administered. There were two problem areas that I had identified, namely, low reliability of educators' judgment of learners' performance; and, educator constructed assessment tasks were inconsistent in the interpretation and application of the assessment criteria.

The language educators had designed a common performance task : 'The effect of drugs on the youth in the local community.' In addition to having students learn more about drugs, the task was designed to help learners learn and practice the following skills: developing questionnaires, interviewing, taking notes and transcribing them, working with other learners, developing conclusions, giving an oral presentation and writing a report. The educators designed common rubrics that they would use to assess the learners' performance. I used six of these learners' efforts to evaluate the reliability of the educators' assessments. All the participants assessed the efforts, independently, using the rubrics. I found little consistency in the educators' assessments. The findings suggest that even though common criteria were used for the assessment process, educators' subjectivity affected the results.

One of the most notable findings from this study has been that there is a good deal of variation – both in design and administration – in the tasks that different educators use to assess the same competency. In the area of essay

writing, for example, it was found that educators' assessments of learners' efforts differed considerably, even though common rubrics were used. This lack of uniformity in assessment was attributed to the educators' subjectivity and bias, which according to Brindley (2001), can be attributed to the major differences in assessor severity. In addition, Brindley proved that ratings given by a single educator in a generalizability study were highly unreliable; however, the reliability of a single rating improved with the addition of a second rater.

The findings suggest that some educators perceive that subjectivity and bias cannot be ruled out in the assessment process. A participant mentioned, "teachers' assessments are always subjective."

According to another participant, educators' subjectivity can be controlled. On this issue she stated,

" ... I consult with my colleagues, and try to get their opinions about my assessments."

However, I noted that this is a rare occurrence because the educators have very little time to spare for consultation with their colleagues. Thus, educators seldom compare their assessment practices with their colleagues – this comparison would serve as a means of moderation of educators' assessments and this would help to minimize educator subjectivity and bias. Gipps (1994) offers a practical way of addressing the variations in assessment practices that have been identified. In order to ensure that assessment tasks

are consistent across educators and locations, a long-term project has been undertaken with two main purposes. The first is to develop, in collaboration with practitioners a bank of fully piloted exemplar assessment tasks with known measurement properties that educators can use either for specific assessment in their classrooms or as models for writing their own tasks. Secondly, since it has become apparent that constructing good assessment tasks is time-consuming and requires considerable skill, the creation of professional development guidelines will assist teachers to design their own assessment tasks (Gipps, 1994). It would be unrealistic to expect that the tasks that are produced will be exactly parallel, it is hoped that providing this information will help to reduce the variability in educator-developed tasks that has been observed, and thus ensure fairer assessment for learners (Brindley, 2001).

It was also found that educators tend to rely on their experience as 'assessors', rather than employing the outcomes-based assessment criteria, to ensure that their assessment of the learners' performance is valid and reliable. Hence, the educators perceive the employment of different assessment strategies as presenting a lack of uniformity in the application of strategies to ensure valid and reliable assessments. Consequently, it is very difficult eliminate subjectivity and bias from language educators' assessments of learners' performance. This subjectivity in educators' assessments is particularly evident in the area of oral communication, namely, speaking and reading. The findings suggest that educators generally rely on their

82

experience to assess the learners' communicative abilities. Thus, educators' assessments of the same learners often differ because they allow their biases to influence their assessments. In this regard, it was found that the language educators who used the assessment criteria as specified by departmental policy, were more objective in their assessments. Hence, the research findings suggest that the participants who use specific assessment rubrics are more likely to attain valid, reliable and fair assessments.

4.5.5. Heavy marking loads

The research findings suggest that the language educators are unanimous in their perceptions that the workload of language educators is immense and very challenging. One participant declared,

"This brings us back to the common problem faced by all language educators … we do get overburdened with assessing learners' performance tasks."

Another participant re-iterated this concern,

"I find the workload just too much."

Another participant commented,

"I believe the greatest challenge of OBE assessment is finding the time to assess the many tasks, efforts, and performances."

All the language educators agreed that they have to "burn the midnight oil" in an attempt to satisfy the demands of an OBE assessment system.

"We language educators are always 'bogged down' with huge loads of

marking,"

commented one participant. The general finding was that the language

educators felt they were being "overworked" because of the great demands

on them regarding OBE assessment. One educator stated,

"The huge piles of marking are no joke!"

The educators even went on to declare that they had perceived that they were

"forever" assessing learners' performance.

Young (1997) endorses the sentiments expressed by the participants. He

believes that assessment has come to mean a daily regime of incessant

marking of essays, tests and assignments.

4.6.   Conclusion

This chapter presents the findings and a discussion of the perceptions and

experiences of language educators of translating OBE assessment policy into

practice. The concerns and problems of the participants were also presented

in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Introduction

Curriculum 2005 (C2005) presents a turning point in the history of the South African education system. An OBE approach to education was introduced to replace the content-based system as this system failed to meet the education and training needs of the whole learning community (Vereen, 2001). The fundamental differences between the two approaches in terms of their assessment instruments were that the traditional system employed examinations and tests as assessment methods, thus emphasizing recall and rote learning. OBE, on the other hand, a learner-centred educational approach, employed formative assessment instruments for assessing learners' knowledge and abilities.

Against this background, the aims of the study were to determine the perceptions and experiences of grade nine language educators in translating outcomes-based assessment policy into practice.

5.2. Overview of Literature

I contextualized the study by citing literature related to OBE and to assessment in the language, literacy and communication learning area in

particular. The literature revealed that the educators' dissimilar beliefs and perceptions was the most frequent source of bias and error in the assessment process. Consequently, the reliability and validity of the assessment process are questioned.

Outcomes-based education assessment is multi-modal and various assessment instruments are employed in the assessment process. OBE assessment is a continuous, ongoing process and is conducted during learning activities. The purpose is to facilitate the development of learners to become reflective, self-regulating and autonomous by allowing learners to be in control of their own learning. Finally, the success of the assessment practices of the language educators requires that educators are knowledgeable about the assessment criteria.

5.3. The Research Process

I used a qualitative approach to the study as perceptions of grade nine teachers were investigated. A semi-structured interview was selected as the primary data collection instrument. A small sample of the learners' work that the educators had assessed were examined to find out whether they validate what transpired from the interviews through a process of validation. Using coding and pattern seeking processes, I analyzed the data. The emergent themes from the findings are presented in Chapter 4.

5.4. Synthesis and Conclusions of the Findings

The synthesis and conclusions of the findings now follows.

5.4.1. Educators' general perceptions of outcomes-based assessment

The participants are positive and enthusiastic about adopting an outcomes-based approach to assessment in the language, literacy and communication learning area, despite the constraints they encounter in their daily practices, namely, the cumbersome administration of large class units and heavy marking loads. This enthusiasm can be attributed to the educators' professional commitment and their recognition that continuous assessment is advantageous to learners.

The findings suggest that the underlying beliefs of outcomes-based education and continuous assessment empower the language educator to facilitate the development of the learners' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The participants are in agreement that this system of assessment is aimed at developing the learners' full potential. They acknowledged that the new educational approach assesses the learners' attitudes, skills, values and knowledge, whereas the traditional approach emphasized memory testing and rote learning and focused on the quantitative assessment of the learner. The teachers perceived that continuous assessment reflects a broad integrated approach for assessing learners and allows learners to have control over their learning.

The outcomes-based approach to assessment appears to be conducive to education as learners are now active participants in the learning process. Learners can contribute to their own and their peers' learning through self-assessment and peer-assessment.

5.4.2. The role of continuous assessment in the learning process

Continuous assessment plays a major role in the learning process of learners. It reflects an integrated, ongoing process that cannot be separated from the teaching methods that language educators employ in their daily practices. The findings suggest that the participants employ various assessment strategies in an effort to elicit effective student learning, namely, group activities, projects, assignments and oral activities. However, educators are aware that certain criteria and conditions need to be satisfied in order to allow purposeful learning to take place. The participants clearly defined to the learners the learning outcomes so that learners were always aware of what was expected of them. The educators also informed the learners in advance what they would be assessed on and the assessment criteria that would be used to assess their learning progress. For instance, the educators would inform learners that their essay writing skills would be assessed and the rubrics that would be used for the assessment. Finally, the language educators ensured that the learners understood the learning material before purposeful learning could take place.

5.4.3. Complexity of the OBE terminology

The OBE terminology in the language, literacy and communication learning area is perceived as being ambiguous and vague. For example, the learning outcome that language educators find difficult to interpret is: 'Learners will understand, know and apply language structures and conventions in context'. Consequently, the participants struggle with the essential aspects of outcomes-based assessment. Educators tend to replace unfamiliar terms with terms they are familiar with and this leads to unnecessary confusion. In this instance, educators might focus attention only on formal language structures (grammar), whereas this outcome encompasses both formal and informal (incidental) language. The complex terminology appears to be a contributing factor to the shallow understanding of outcomes-based assessment.

5.4.4. Continuous assessment and OBE teaching methods

The findings suggest that the language educators employ assessment tools that are consistent with a learner-centred approach to education, namely, self-assessment, peer-assessment, portfolios and projects. The language educators employed formative strategies to enhance the learning process, namely, portfolio assessment. According to the participants, one of the main benefits of portfolio assessment is the promotion of learner reflection. In the process of reflective analysis, learners examine their efforts and the consequences of their actions; thus, learners are encouraged to improve their work. The study

revealed evidence that the educators grasp the salient and underlying beliefs of continuous assessment by applying the conditions and criteria that facilitate the development of learners.

It is evident that assessment and teaching cannot be separated in a learner-centred curriculum. The language educators agree that assessment should be integrated with lesson instruction and be built into learning as a part of a structured learning environment.

5.4.5. The reliability and validity of the assessment process

Continuous assessment is a multi-dimensional process and the educator has the responsibility to ensure that assessment is reliable, valid and fair. Some of the language educators were unsure of their assessment of learners' performance. A factor that contributed to this uncertainty is the absence of expected levels of performances. Consequently, the educators had to rely on their experience to assess learners' performance. Thus, bias and error could influence the outcome of their assessments. Another factor that affects the reliability and validity of the assessment process is the absence of a proper system of moderation of the educators' assessments. The participants were in agreement that a moderation of learners' assessments would ensure uniformity and consistency of educators' assessment practices. Thus, educators should always use assessment procedures that are valid, reliable and fair (Killen, 2000).

5.4.6. The effects of an inflated educator-learner ratio

The language educators have a educator-learner ratio of 1:48. This is not conducive to a learner-centred classroom. A learner-centred approach requires that individual attention be given to learners to gauge their strengths and weaknesses on a continuous basis. However, language educators cannot give individual attention to each learner on a daily basis because of the inflated teacher-learner ratios. This situation is in conflict with the principles of learner-centred education, and as such goes against the educational vision to offer quality education to all learners. The high educator-learner ratio also adds to the language educators' administrative workload.

5.5. Implications of the Study

Against the background of the findings of this investigation, future research in the following areas is suggested to determine:

- the effects of the absence of moderation of the assessment process on the quality of the education system.
- the effects of educator-learner ratio on learners in an OBE system.

5.6. Conclusion

The researcher feels that the aims of this study have been achieved and that the study is highly applicable. The topic is researchable and the variables

discussed lent themselves to measurement, analysis and interpretation. This

research study opens up avenues for further research in this area. A more

comprehensive study would be most beneficial to learners and educators.

REFERENCES

Babbie, E. (2002) Basics of Social Research. Wadsworth. Thompson/Engelwood.

Blumer, H. (1969) Symbolic Interaction. Perspective and Method. Engelwood Cliffs. New York Prentice Hall.

Brindley, G. (1998) Outcomes-based assessment and reporting in language programs: a review of issues. Language Testing. Macquire University.

Brindley, G. (2001) Outcomes-based assessment in practice : some examples and emerging insights. Macquire University.

Broadfoot, P. (1996) Education, Assessment and Society. A Sociological Analysis. Open Chicago Press. Buckingham. Philadephia.

Cresswell, J. W. (1998) Qualitative inquiry and research design. London: Sage.

Cunningham, G. K. (1998) Assessment in the Classroom: Constructing and Interpreting Tests. London. Falmer Press.

Denzin, N.K. (1992) Symbolic Interaction and Cultural Studies. The politics of interpretation. Blackwell Publishers. USA.

Department of National Education. (1995) South African Qualifications Authority Act. Pretoria. Government Printers.

Department of National Education (1997a) Curriculum 2005. Lifelong Learning for the 21st century. Pretoria. Government Printers.

Department of National Education (1997b) Outcomes-based Education in South Africa. Pretoria. Government Printers.

Department of National Education (1997c) Curriculum 2005.: Specific outcomes, assessment criteria, range statements grades 1 to 9. Pretoria. Government Printers.

Department of Education (1998a) Draft Assessment Policy in the General and Further Education and Training Phase. Grade R to 9 and ABET. Unpublished working document.

Department of Education (1998b) Assessment Policy in the General Education and Training Band. Grade R to 9 and ABET. Pretoria. Government Printers.

Department of Education (2000a) OBE Assessment. Facilitator's Guide. C2005 Pilot. Pretoria. Government Printers.

Department of Education (2000b) Assessment. Pretoria. Government Printers.

Department of National Education (2001) Guidelines for the Assessment of Learners in Grade 9 in 2001.

Dreyer, C. (2000) Journal of Language Teaching, Vol. 34, November. Assessment on OBE: a guide for teachers. p. 266 – 284.

Filer, A. (2000) Assessment. Social Practice and Social Product. Routledge Falmer. London.

Foxcroft, C. D. and Elkonin, D. S. (1998) Perceptions of Grade 1 practitioners regarding the implementation of OBE in the Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage districts of the Western region and Cradock of the Northern region. Research report developed by the Department of Psychology, University of Port Elizabeth. Port Elizabeth: University of Port Elizabeth.

Fraser, W. J. (1999) The Foundations of Continuous assessment: its link to performance-based, authentic, competence-based and outcomes-based assessment. University of Pretoria. Unpublished article.

Gipps, C. (1994) Beyond Testing. Towards a Theory of Educational Assessment. London. Falmer.

Gipps, C. and Murphy, P. (1996) A Fair Test? Assessment, Achievement and Equity. Open University Press. Buckingham. Philadephia.

Haralambos, M. and Heald, R. (1985) Sociology Themes and Perspectives. Unwin Hyman Ltd. London.

Hughes, A (1989) Testing for language teachers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jacobs, M., Gawe, N. and Vakalisa N. (2001) Teaching-Learning Dynamics: a participative approach to OBE. 2nd edition. Heinemann. Johannesburg.

Jansen, J.D. (1997) Why OBE will fail. Unpublished paper. Durban: Macro-Education Policy Unit, Faculty of Education, University of Durban-Westville.

Jansen, J. and Christie, P. (1999) Changing Curriculum. Studies on Outcomes-based Education in South Africa. Juta & Co Ltd. Kenwyn.

Johnson, K. (1999) Understanding Language Teaching: reasoning in action. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.

Killen, R. (2000) Standards-referenced Assessment: Linking outcomes, assessment and reporting. Keynote address at the Annual Conference Association for the Study of Evaluation in Education in Southern Africa, Port Elizabeth, South Africa. 26-29 September.

Kramer, D. (1999) O.B.E. Teaching Toolbox. OBE Strategies, Tools, Techniques for Implementing Curriculum 2005. Vivlia Publishers. Cape Town.

Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. (1985) Naturalistic Enquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Linn, R. L. (2000) Assessment and Accountability. Educational Research. Open University Press. Buckingham. Philadephia.

Lubisi, R. C. (2000) An investigation into Maths Teachers' perceptions and practices of Classroom Assessment in South African Lower Secondary Schools. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. School of Education; University of Notthingham.

Lubisi, R. C. and Murphy R. J. L. Assessment in Education. Vol. 9, No.2, 2002.

Mabry, L. (1999) Portfolios Plus. A Critical Guide to Alternative Assessment. Corwin Press, Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks, California.

Malan, B. (1997) Excellence through outcomes. Cape Town. Juta.

Masters, G. and Forster, M. (1996) Developmental assessment: Assessment resource kit. Melbourne: The Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd.

McMillan, J. H. (2001) Classroom Assessment. Principles and Practice for Effective Instruction. Allyn and Bacon. London.

Merriam, R. (1998) The Cushman Case Study. (Online). Available http://www.Ne.../research method semi-structured interviews. Chapter III.ht.

Mouton, J. (2001) How to succeed in your Masters & Doctoral Studies. A South African Guide and Resource Book. Van Schaik Publishers. Pretoria.

Mungazi, D. A. (1991) The Challenge of Educational Innovation and National Development in Southern Africa. Peter Lang Publishing: New York.

Nel, B. F. (1995) Critical Theory: origins, central concepts and education. In: Higgs, P. (ed). Meta theories in philosophy of education. Isando: Heinemann.

OBE Assessment – Facilitator's Guide. C2005 Pilot.

Pahad, M. (1997) Curriculum 2005. Assessment and the National Qualifications Framework. A guide for teachers. Heinemann. Sandton.

Patton, M. Q. (1990) Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods. 2nd edition. CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Pretorious, F. (1998) Outcomes-Based Education in South Africa. Hodder & Stoughton. Johannesburg.

Republic of South Africa. (1998) Assessment Policy in the general education and training band. Grade R to 9 and ABET. Government Gazette, vol. 402. no 19640. Cape Town: Office of the President (no 6397).

Scriven, M. (1980) Evaluation Thesaurus. 2nd edition. Inverness, California. Edgepress.

Sieborger, R. (1998) Transforming Assessment. A Guide for South African Teachers. Juta. Cape Town.

South African Qualifications Authority. (1997). Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF Registered Unit Standards and Qualifications. Pretoria.

Spady, W. and Schlesbusch, A. (1999) Curriculum 2005. A guide for Parents. Renaissance. Cape Town.

Stake, E. R. (1995) The case study method in social inquiry. Educational Researcher, 7 (2).

Taylor, N. and Vinjevold, P. (1999) Getting Learning Right. Cape Town. Juta.

Torrance, H. (1995) Evaluating Authentic Assessment. Open University Press. Buckingham. Philadephia.

Torrance, H. and Pryor, J. (1998) Investigating Formative Assessment, Teaching, Learning And Assessment in the Classroom. Open Press University. Buckingham. Philadephia.

Van der Horst, H. and McDonald, R. (2001) Outcomes-Based Education. Theory and Practice. Tee Vee Printers. Irene.

Venter, M. (2000) Assessing OBE Assessment. Mini Virtual Conference. An article published for online conferences in Australia.

Vereen, V. D. J. (2001) Foundation Phase Teachers' Perceptions of Assessment in an OBE Approach. Unpublished Masters Thesis. Department of Education, Vista University.

Weeden, P. Winter, J. and Broadfoot, P. (2002) Assessment. What's in it for Schools? Routledge Falmer. London.

Wiggins, G. P. (1992) Assessing Students' Performance: exploring the purpose and limits of testing. San Francisco. CA: Jossey-Bass.

Wits EPU : Quarterly Review of Education and Training in South Africa. Vol. 4. No. 4. 15 June 1997. New Policies and the Challenges of Budgetary Constraints.

Young, D. (1997) Curriculum 2005 and OBE. Language Teachers' Dream or Nightmare? School of Education. University of Cape Town.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Background

I am a researcher in the KZNDEC currently doing a study of outcomes-based education and assessment for degree purposes. I am trying to find out how grade nine educators in the Language, Literacy and Communication learning area experience outcomes-based assessment in their classes. As part of my study, I am interviewing the language educators in this school in some depth about their perspectives on and experience of translating assessment policy in practice.

Purpose of the Interview

In this interview, I hope that I will begin to:

- develop an understanding of educators' perspectives on and experiences of outcomes-based assessment in the Language, Literacy and Communication learning area,

- learn more about the tensions, dilemmas, successes and problems that educators are experiencing in translating assessment policy in practice.

- identify strategies that educators can employ to overcome the problems they are experiencing in translating assessment policy into practice.

Ethics of the Interview

The interview data will be treated as confidential. After writing up the data, we can check, if you wish, that it accurately reflects your viewpoints. If you are willing, I would to tape the interview, and erase the tape once it has been transcribed. The data will be used for research purposes only, and neither the school nor the principal nor the teachers will be named.

Format of the Interview

The interview will take about 60 minutes. The questions are divided into three sections: Section A: Background Information; Section B: Outcomes-Based Education and Assessment Policy in Language, Literacy and Communication; Section C: Teachers' Perspectives on and Experiences in Translating Assessment Policy into Practice. Before the interview, I will arrange a time and place for the interview that is convenient to you. During the interview, I will ask questions, and make some notes on your responses. With your permission, I would like to tape the interview to help me remember what was said. The interview questions will be given to you before the interview so that you can think about your responses. May I ask you not to write down any answers, as I am interested in your verbal responses.

**Thank you for your willingness to assist me.
I am very grateful for your time and effort.**

SECTION A : BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In this section, the questions are about 'factual' biographical information, as well as your own early history as a person and a teacher.

1. Tell me about your family background - where you lived and grew up.

   PROMPTS: Region; brothers and sisters; parents' work; most important influences in your life; most important 'lessons' you learnt.

2. Some people say that teachers teach in the way that they themselves were taught. When you were a learner at school, were there important events or experiences that influenced your career as a teacher?

   PROMPTS : Type of school and resources; subjects you enjoyed; good/bad teachers you remember; forms of teacher control; positive/negative experience; etc.

3. Do you think your experience of schooling has influenced how you teach?

   PROBE: In what way(s)?

4. Where did you train as a teacher, and what were the most

important/useful things you learnt during your training?

PROMPTS : The same/different to what you'd expected? How

would you describe the institution's view of

teaching? Criticisms of your professional training;

key events/influences.

5. What formal qualifications do you hold?

PROMPTS : School; diploma; degree.

6.(a). How many years teaching experience do you have?

(b). How many schools have you taught at during your career?

(c). How many years have you spent at your present school?

7. Do you have any extra responsibilities at school?

PROBE : If so, what are they?

SECTION B : OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION AND ASSESSMENT
POLICY IN LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND
COMMUNICATION

✝ NOTE : The questions are open-ended and there are no right
and wrong answers

1. What would you say are the main goals of outcomes-based
education?

PROMPT : Literacy; numeracy; content subjects; academic

goals; equip for life/survival outside school;

citizenship/values; social skills; culture, etc.

PROBE : Can you expand on why you consider these goals

especially important?

2. To what extent do you feel you are able to meet these goals?

PROBE : What factors, if any, seem to stand in the way?

3. What is expected of you as a Language, Literacy and

Communication educator in terms of departmental policy with

regards to outcomes-based teaching and classroom

assessment?

PROMPTS : What are the learning outcomes of LLC?

Do you think the learning outcomes are

attainable?

Can you substantiate your answer – give reasons?

SECTION B : TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON AND EXPERIENCES
OF TRANSLATING ASSESSMENT POLICY INTO
PRACTICE

1. Are you able to put the assessment policy into practice?

PROMPT : What are your feelings about the assessment policy?

Do you think the demands made on teachers are

reasonable?

If not, how do you cope with these demands?

2. How do these assessment practices impact on your teaching?

    PROMPT : Does it have a positive effect; has your teaching

        practice improved/ become more meaningful?

        If it has a negative impact, how are you coping?

3. What are some of the dilemmas/problems that you encounter

    in translating assessment policy into practice?

    PROMPTS : What are some of the difficulties/dilemmas that

        you face in translating assessment policy?

        How do you cope with difficulties you

        encounter?

4. Do you always understand what is expected of you as a

    teacher, in terms of assessment?

    PROMPTS : Do you find that you are sometimes unsure of

        what is really expected of you as an assessor?

        How do you cope with these

        uncertainties/dilemmas?

5. What do you think can be done to improve teachers'

    assessment practices?

    PROMPTS : What strategies can be adopted to improve

        teachers' assessment practices?

        Should departmental policy be simplified for

        teachers?

THANK YOU.

EXAMPLE OF A CODED TRANSCRIPT

CODES

Admin: administrative work
Cont. ass: continuous assessment
Diag. Ass: diagnostic assessment
Enth- T: enthusiastic teachers
Form. Ass: formative assessment
Hol. dev: holistic development
Lrg cls: large class units
Ong. proc: ongoing process
Rel & val: reliability and validity
Term: terminology

Admin :   Language teachers have tons of administrative work. I
              forgot to tell you about the problems with recording and
              reporting the performance results. It's very tedious and
              time consuming to record the results.

Cont. ass: Classroom assessment is done on a continuous, ongoing
              basis.

Diag. ass: Continuous assessment also serves a diagnostic
              purpose. The teacher can discover the learners' problems
              and take the necessary steps to rectify the problems.

Enth- T: I do believe all the LLC learning outcomes are attainable.
              I have enjoyed success in those quarters.

Form ass: I believe that formative assessment is basically designed
              to monitor the learner's progress. It guides the teacher
              and learner because of the positive feedback that it is
              designed to provide.

Hol. dev: The language teacher is required to adopt a holistic
              approach to teaching and assessment.

Lrg cls: Another common problem is the large class units that we
            have to work with. Large units make it difficult for the
            'assessor' to give individual attention to every learner.

Ong. proc: Learners are assessed on ongoing process. Every
            experience is supposed to be a learning experience, and
            as such the learners have to be assessed accordingly.

Rel & val: Traditional testing for me is the only authentic
            method of assessment.

Term: The assessment policy documents can be quite mystifying.
         I sometimes find myself grappling with the OBE jargon.

EXAMPLE OF AN INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Participant 1

Interviewer: What would you say are the main goals of outcomes-based education? Is it literacy, numeracy, content, skills, values, etc.

Respondent: I would say the main objective behind an outcomes-based system of education is firstly, to ensure that all children have a basic education – I mean they must be literate, they must a mathematical and numeracy sense, have a cultural sense. In general I would say an outcomes-based education is life oriented, i.e. it prepares a child for child. I think the most important thing about outcomes-based education is that all children have equal opportunities to be successful at school. It is used to see what a learner can do. OBE is learner-centered; learners play an active, constructive role in their own education.

Interviewer: Can you please expand on why do consider these goals to be especially important.

Respondent: The system of continuous assessment ensures that all learners have an opportunity to be promoted to the next grade – the learners have numerous means by which to display their skills and knowledge. I t is almost impossible for a leaner to 'fail' a grade – so a learner can always be successful. In fact, one of the basic tenets of OBE is the elimination of failure. Learning basically means that learners' knowledge, skills and values are developed. OBE propagates that all learners shall succeed.

Interviewer: What is expected of you as a language, teacher in terms of departmental assessment policy? For instance, what are the learning outcomes; do you think the learning outcomes are attainable, etc. Substantiate your answer with example(s).

Interviewer: The language teacher is required to adopt a holistic approach to teaching and assessment. The teacher is required to adopt a system of continuous assessment. Formative assessment is also emphasized.

Interviewer: Can you explain what you understand by the terms continuous, and formative assessment?

Respondent: Yes. Continuous assessment, or CASS, is basically assessment that is ongoing. The purpose of continuous assessment is to find out what the learner knows, understands and can do. The teacher to support the learner's development then uses the information obtained from these assessments. Learning outcomes or targets are set for the learners and the learners are aware of the assessment criteria. So, the learner can take an active role in his/her learning.

I believe that formative assessment is basically designed to monitor the learner's progress. It guides the learner and teacher because of the positive feedback that it is designed to provide. Formative assessment also helps to determine the learner's strengths and weaknesses in relation to a particular learning outcome. Formative assessment helps me to decide on which assessment methods to use in an effort to promote the learning process.