

**An exploration of grade 9 teachers' understanding and practice of
assessment as it relates to the Economic Management Sciences
learning area.**

**A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty of Education of the
University of Kwa Zulu – Natal in**

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

**For the degree of
Masters in Education**

By

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research study is my entirely my own effort. All sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. It is submitted for the Degree of Masters of Education (M.Ed) of the University of Kwa Zulu – Natal and it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any university.

Tohida Cassim

Signed on this _____ day of January 2010.

ABSTRACT

A key purpose of this qualitative study was to explore grade 9 teachers' understanding and practices of assessment as it relates to the Economic Management Sciences (EMS) learning area. The process of data collection included interviews of three teachers' and the observation analysis of learner portfolios. The three participants were grade 9 EMS teachers' from a secondary school in Chatsworth, Durban. The findings of this study indicated that teachers' understand and practise assessment by using summative forms of assessment as required by the school's assessment policy. There were several constrictive factors which influenced teachers' understandings and practices of assessment. This influenced teachers' to adopt an '**assessment of learning**' approach. It was revealed that inadequate resources, time, policy interpretation and large number of learners' classes were major influences which shaped teacher's understanding and practice of assessment. The contest of the school's rigid and structured assessment policy was a key inducing factor which influenced teachers' assessment practices.

This study suggests that if classroom teachers are to become effective '*mediators*' of assessing they must be provided with a better theoretical grounding of assessment. The Department of Education needs to provide more guidelines, practical demonstrations and workshops to assist to teachers to understand and implement new concepts of assessment practices. Reduction of the number of learners in the classes and stipulated assessment requirements must be considered by the Department of Education. Schools and teachers must be provided with the necessary and appropriate resources. Facilitation of adequate professional development courses for teachers, head of department and principals will support teachers to accept change and remove feelings of reluctance towards assessment, thus this will promote teachers' understanding and practices of assessment towards an '**assessment for learning**' approach.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been made possible through the effort, time and support of a number of people. I would like to express my humble gratitude to the following:

- I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Maistry for the constant support, guidance, professional expertise and most importantly constructive criticisms despite his busy schedule. His sincerity shown for my research that helped to sustain the input into this research.
- To the participants who in this study, who instilled their trust, confidence and who consented to engage with me in this research project and gave of their time so willingly, despite their busy agendas. Thank you for sharing your time, ideas with me
- To my parents, Shabnam and Mohammed Basheer Cassim, for teaching me to saunter in confidence and live with hope.
- I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to my family and my friend Priya for the unwavering encouragement and patience throughout the striving period of my studies.
- To my husband who encouraged me to move on and his constant support and encouragement. Thank you for being patient.
- To my colleague Kishore who was supportive during the time this study, I'm forever grateful for your resourcefulness and the amount of time you spent on reading, editing and criticizing my work with constructive feedback.

- To my in laws (Anwar and Zora Khan), I wish to express my sincere gratitude for their support they showed during the course of this study. Indeed, this has given confidence to me in accomplishing my research study.
- Lastly and mostly, I thank the Almighty for the strength and determination that was given to me to endeavor my study. That's why; I have all the reasons to exult in the Almighty.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my priceless parents Mr. & Mrs Cassim.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE EXPLORATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter one is the background to the study, which covers the introduction, as it provides a preliminary review of the literature, purpose of the study, the rationale and research design. In chapter two, a literature review is provided as an initial theoretical referent for the study. Chapter three is an account of the data collection tools, methods chosen and how they were used. It includes a justification of the choice of the data collection techniques and also sampling techniques and problems encountered in collecting data. In Chapter four, an analysis of the data is provided. Lastly, Chapter five is the conclusion which provides a summary of the findings, implications and reflections of the study.

This exploration focused on teachers' understandings and practices of assessment as it relates to the Economic Management Sciences (EMS) learning area. The intention of the first chapter was to present the reader with an inclusive outline of the initial effort undertaken preceding the actual beginning of the exploration. This chapter provides the problem statement, research questions, rationale, research method and strategies, theoretical framework and time frame of the research process.

The problem statement consisted of several rationales as to why I was prompted to pursue this exploration. A wide range of literature was analysed on the transformation of the South African Education system and this shaped the foundation and basis for the research study.

The research questions, aims, research methods were also presented in this chapter. This provided the reader with the justification of the research study and assisted the reader

once again, to keep focused on the exploration of teachers' understandings and practices of assessment as it relates to the Economic Management Sciences learning area.

The research methods were also included in this chapter as this informed the reader how the exploration was conducted. The various research methods were discussed; this provided the reader with reasons as to why these strategies and methodology were appropriate for this study, as well as to justify the selection of its appropriateness to the study.

The time frame of the research study will enlighten the reader on how the investigation was prepared and planned.

The conclusion of this chapter provides the reader with a synopsis of the most important points included in this chapter.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In any research it is fundamental to know why it is being conducted. To a large extent, questioning the purpose of the research assisted me in maintaining focus throughout the study. In addition, identifying the problem statement supported the rationale for the research study and also assisted me in constructing a firm foundation on what was to be explored. This research aimed to explore grade 9 teachers' understanding and practice of assessment in relation to the Economic Management Sciences learning area. The reason I had chosen to explore this topic, was that as a grade 9 teacher of Economic Management Sciences (EMS), I have found that assessment within this learning area is fairly new and rather complex as grade 9 is the exit level of the General Education and Training (GET). Interpreting various assessment policies make the understanding and practice of assessment a tedious task. Also, knowing that research in the economics and the EMS learning area seems to be non-existent but has been starting to emerge (see Maistry, 2008 & Mtshali, 2008).

An issue facing teachers was that of determining the status of the various policy and guideline documents emanating from the Department of Education (DoE) (Wilmot, 2005). Actions in the classroom cannot be divorced from either the philosophy on which the curriculum is based or from the educator's philosophy or worldview (Van Harmelen, 1997). I believe that the way in which we teach and interact with our learners is influenced by how we think about the nature of education. On these grounds it was evident that the DoE focuses on process issues without conceptual understanding of assessment.

Additionally, the international concept of quality in education was one of the prevailing trends that had influenced education development during the last decade. The exploration for quality in schools calls for an improvement in all aspects of education and consequently strives to achieve, amongst other things, excellence in classroom assessment practices so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are attained (Global Campaign for Education (GCE), 2008, p. 12).

As soon as the South African school curriculum was transformed, an Outcomes Based Education (OBE) approach was adopted. The phasing in of OBE in all South African schools in the year 1998 meant that all teachers' involved had to adopt new approaches to teaching-learning and assessment. This change brought with it various implications for transforms to assessment practices as it required teachers to follow several new approaches to planning, teaching and assessment (Gouw, 2008). Teachers had to transform from the traditional practices of assessment being done only at the end of learning activities to assessment being linked to outcomes that learners should achieve.

It was very challenging for seasoned teachers particularly, who implemented traditional methods of assessment (which were mostly teacher-centred and summative), to discard such methods and adopt OBE methods and teaching approaches. However, recent studies (Vandeyar & Killen, 2007) in the field of assessment showed that teachers were still excessively reliant on tests and examinations as the only means of assessment in order to maintain the status quo.

Curriculum transformation was underpinned by modernist liberal ideals of a fairer and more just society, increased individual freedom, and a vibrant economy with efficient and skilled workers (Popkewitz, 2000). Consequently, South Africa had to reflect on what has been done internationally in the field of assessment of learning to be in stability and competitiveness in the global marketplace and still uphold its own distinctive character.

The international literature indicates that the transition to school-based formative assessment has led to the development of a myriad of new and 'authentic' tasks and assessment procedures to encourage 'deep' rather than 'thin' knowledge (Gipps & Stobart; Atkins, Black & Coffey, 2001). Within a South African context, the findings of the Review Committee of C2005 suggest a similar trend with C2005 in primary schools (Chisholm, 2000) as the shortcoming of an outcomes-based curriculum design is dominated by assessment language and processes.

In terms of continuous assessment (CASS), teachers are required to design and implement a range of different assessment strategies to develop and apply criterion-referenced assessment sheets and rubrics, and to implement and assess the externally set summative component (known as the Common Tasks for Assessment or CTA). As a result in viewing the two components together, the demand on the teacher is burdensome as there is a considerable increase in paperwork (Wilmot, 2005). Gouw (2008) maintains that the demands of assessment in OBE challenge teachers because the role of the teacher in the success of assessment is one which is complex and critical.

Within a Southern African context, Lolwana (1996), Lubisi, Wedekind and Parker (1997), Siebörger (2000) examine some of the challenges experienced by teachers trying to make sense of outcomes-based assessment practices. Teachers are unclear as to what they were doing. Malcolm (2000) argues that in South Africa it was unclear how assessment information should be collected and used. Malcolm (2001) maintains that in assessments, as in curriculum design, educators have to work back and forth between

course and fine grains. By course and fine grains, he refers to the generality and specificity of outcomes. Furthermore, Murray and Wilmot's (2000) research has indicated that testing and norm referenced assessment still dominates teachers' assessment practices because teachers have a relatively limited understanding of the new theories of assessment. Furthermore, many teachers found it complex to channel through the labyrinth of the new-fangled language that was accompanied by OBE and Curriculum 2005 (Jansen, 1999).

Despite, these challenges Black and William's (1998) research which was carried out internationally indicated that teachers' understanding of assessment was generally feeble. Black and William (1998) argued that assessment changes need to be introduced slowly because it was not easy for teachers to change practices that were deeply embedded within their pedagogy. The findings of Carrim's (2002) research, which were consistent with those of the Review Committee of C2005, suggest that contemporary South African teachers are caught in the ways of the 'old' whilst wanting to work in the ways of the 'new'. This could be viewed as a contributing factor making teachers nervous in trying to make sense of outcomes-based assessment.

However, Vandeyar and Killen (2003) dispute that if teachers understand the principles of high-quality assessment; they will be able to adapt their practices of assessment to the new OBE approach. In addition, Vandeyar and Killen (2003) presented evidence of how learning was seriously compromised when teachers lack such understanding. Thus, they concluded that the assessment 'paradigm shift' advocated by C2005 was misleading, and that the frustration and confusion it gave rise to was inevitable.

Research on C2005 shows a lack of relationship between curriculum and assessment policy and a lack of clarity regarding assessment policy and practice; moreover, it seems, too much time is being spent on assessment (Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999; Chisholm, 2000). Chisholm (2000) has stressed the need for greater attention to be given to assessment in teacher preparation, and for a coherent and concise guideline document on assessment. As South African teachers do not have a good track record as curriculum developers and

assessors (Malcolm, 2001), it would be inequitable to take for granted that teachers will manage to implement assessment in the OBE approach in a meaningful way.

The reluctance of many South African educators to transform their assessment practices in response to new policies and curriculum guidelines may be due to their ingrained conceptions of assessment (Vandeyar & Killen, 2007). It is imperative that teachers understand the concepts relating to assessment in conjunction with OBE, as Naicker (1999) maintains that ‘understanding’ forms the basis for implementation.

In the previous discussion from an international and South African perspective it is highlighted that issue in the field of assessment relating to teachers understanding and practices of assessment have yet to be reconciled. It is for this reason that I attempted this study as it will allow me to explore grade 9 teachers’ understanding and practice of assessment as it relates to the EMS learning area. Assessment has played a significant role in the educational transformation because it has influenced the entire educational reform purpose. One of the driving forces behind educational reform is the desire to initiate improvement of standards and measure learners’ attainment (Vandeyar & Killen, 2003).

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions have been outlined to provide direction and focus to the research study:

What are grade 9 teachers’ understanding of assessment as it relates to the EMS learning area?

How do grade 9 teachers’ understanding of assessment influence their practise of classroom assessment as it relates to the EMS learning area?

Since the above critical questions focus is on a relatively new and complex educational field, a thorough investigation into their background is undoubtedly required.

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EXPLORATION

The aim of this research study was to explore grade 9 teachers understanding of assessment and to determine how their understandings of assessment influences their practice/s of classroom assessment as it relates to the EMS learning area. This was achieved through interviews with teachers. Teachers' responses during interviews assisted in gaining an insight into their understanding of assessment. Furthermore, an analysis of learners' portfolios helped to draw inferences on how teachers' understanding of assessment influenced their practice of assessment.

1.5 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study can be useful to teachers, learners and curriculum designers and the Department of Education. This study will assist teachers to identify their understanding of assessment as well as its impact on their planning, teaching and learning of assessment practices in the classroom. If teachers identify themselves as having little or no understanding of assessment, this may impact negatively on their assessment practices in the classroom. As a result, the curriculum designers and DoE will become aware of the need to assist and provide supervision to teachers in gaining a better insight of understanding the principles and concepts related to assessment. Furthermore, learners may be given the opportunity in finding out if they are managing and meeting the demands of the curriculum. The outcome of the study may also be used to examine the quality standards of assessment practices and monitor whether they were achieved and maintained.

This study intends to contribute to the discussion of teachers' understanding and practices of assessment, within the transformation of our education system.

1.6 THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

“A conceptual framework can be distinguished from a theoretical framework as it is a less developed explanation for events” (Vithal & Jansen, 1997, p.19). In this study, the conceptual framework was similar to Januário’s (2008) research. Teachers’ understandings and practice of assessment are based on three intertwined but distinct assessment purposes which are *assessment for learning*; *assessment as learning* and *assessment of learning*. It was imperative to have noted that these three concepts vary and it is also noticed that it was misused in several pieces of literature. It is for this reason that ‘**assessment for learning**’, ‘**assessment of learning**’ and ‘**assessment as learning**’ provided me with a clear and concise framework which teachers’ understanding and practices of assessment were explored.

According to Black, Harrison, Marshall and William (2004) **assessment for learning** is any assessment where the first priority is to serve the purpose of promoting student learning. This kind of assessment is usually informal, embedded in all aspects of teaching and learning and is conducted differently by diverse teachers as part of their own individual teacher styles. On the other hand **assessment of learning** is utilized for grading and certification, which occurs in formal settings or rituals, involves non-frequent tests and is isolated from everyday teaching and learning. **Assessment of learning** is carried out on special occasions and is conducted by methods over which individual teachers have little or no control when practising assessment. **Assessment as learning** accentuates making use of assessment as a method of developing and supporting metacognition for learners. **Assessment as learning** focuses on the role of the learner as the critical connector between assessment and learning (Earl, 2003). This means that learners are perceived to be active, engaged and critical assessors which make sense of information, by relating it to previous knowledge, thus utilizing it for new learning. This is the regulatory process in metacognition, these takes place when learners monitor what they are learning and make use of the feedback from this monitoring to make modifications, adaptations and even key changes in what they understand. When teachers focus on *assessment as learning*, they use classroom assessment as the vehicle

for helping students develop, practice and become comfortable with reflection and with critical analysis of their own learning (Earl & Cousins, 1995).

I applied the ‘*assessment for learning*’ and ‘*assessment of learning*’ framework to my study, as it aimed to explore teachers’ understanding and practice of assessment. In addition, these concepts of assessment assisted me in identifying how teachers’ continually adapt instructions to meet learner needs. In turn, it allowed me to interpret teachers’ understanding of assessment and these understandings will assist in identifying how teachers practise assessment in their chosen way which is in relation to the EMS learning area. It was for these reasons that ‘*assessment for learning*’ and ‘*assessment of learning*’ were chosen as a suitable framework as it allowed me to interpret teachers’ understandings and practices of assessment in relation to the EMS learning area.

This conceptual framework is located in the interpretive paradigm as it has been preferred because it explicitly works from within the human perspective and is relevant to this study. It aims at unpacking by interpreting social meanings created by the participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). According to Kuiper (1997) the general aim of interpretive paradigm is to describe the phenomena and to some extent explain them. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) asserted that the tradition of the interpretive paradigm emphasizes an interpretive understanding of human interactions. My intention was to interpret teachers’ understanding and practice of assessment in relation to the EMS learning area.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

1.7.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

My study attempted to use a qualitative research approach. Wildemuth (1993) argued that qualitative approach is used to understand the social world from the viewpoint of respondents, through detailed descriptions of their cognitive and symbolic actions, and through the richness of meaning associated with observable behavior. As a result, the

nature of reality was based on the assumptions that the world is constructed of multiple realities which are tentative and constantly changing. The goal of qualitative research is to obtain insights into particular educational, social, and familial processes and practices that exist within a specific location (Connolly, 1998). In an attempt to gain insights, qualitative researchers tend to seek and extract meaning from their data. That is, qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings and strive to make sense of, or to interpret them with respect to the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This approach is relevant to my study as it attempts to explore grade 9 teachers' understanding and practice of assessment as it relates to the EMS learning area. Moreover, this approach assisted in revealing a greater clarity of teachers' understanding and practice of assessment.

1.7.2 METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY

My study was concerned with understanding an educational phenomenon in a specific context, a case study method was chosen. This method allowed for a depth of investigation into a phenomenon, and is thus productive of rich interpretation and thorough understanding (Bassegy, 1999; Stake, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Merriam, 2001). Seeing that my study attempted to explore three grade 9 teachers' understanding and practise of assessment as it relates to EMS from the same school, a case study was deemed appropriate. A case study aims to capture the reality of the participant's live experiences and thoughts about, a particular phenomenon (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Merriam (1988) further described case study research as a deep, holistic description and analysis of a specific instance, social group or phenomenon that involves a contextualised interpretation of events.

It is for the above reasons that I believe that a qualitative case study is most suitable for the purpose of my research, in obtaining an "insider perspective on social action" in interpreting the phenomenon under study (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). According to Robottom (1993), different traditions within educational research were referred to as paradigms and were referred to as being epistemologically and ideologically different.

Every research is guided by some theoretical orientation (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). This research is positioned under the interpretive paradigm as the general aim of interpretive paradigm is to describe phenomena and to some extent explain them (Kuiper, 1997).

There are several ways in which data can be collected. In this research the study of different qualities were utilised. Semi-structured interviews and the analysis of learner portfolios were conducted.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to obtain in-depth teachers' understanding of assessment and how teachers practise assessment. The analysis of learners' portfolios would help me to draw inferences about teachers' understanding and how they facilitate assessment practices in the classroom. The strategies for data collection and sampling technique were chosen for this research study and this will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

1.8 TIME FRAME OF THE STUDY

This study is aimed to explore grade 9 teachers understanding of assessment in relation to the EMS learning area and to determine the impact it has on their practice/s of classroom assessment during a specific time frame. This was achieved through interviews and the observation analysis of learner portfolios. Interviews with teachers' were conducted after school so that they would have adequate time and not feel pressured during the interview process. The observation analysis of learner- portfolios were conducted to determine how teachers' understanding of assessment influences teachers' practices of assessment by looking at the types of assessments utilized by teachers. These portfolios contained selected pieces of work.

The interviews were conducted in two and a half weeks and the analysis of learner-portfolios took three days.

Interviews and observation analysis of learners' portfolios were conducted in mid-August 2009 and ended in the first week of September 2009. Data was collected in a period of three weeks. When the data collection was completed, it was ready to be analysed. Immediately after the interviews, a learner portfolio analysis was conducted. The next step of analysing the data started in the second week of September and ended in the second week of November and thereafter findings were deduced.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of the literature review echoes the aims of my study. This was achieved by means of clarifying key principles which underpinned assessment. The elucidation of the principles of assessment enabled me to understand the premises of teachers' understanding and practices of assessment as it relates to the EMS learning area.

The following sections were addressed in this chapter. The nature of assessment, in this section the characteristics and purposes of assessment were discussed. This was illuminated as it familiarised the reader with a general understanding of assessment. Subsequently, continuous assessment was an essential feature and model of assessment which was detached from the nature of assessment as it served to impress its purpose and characteristics. This was followed by continuous assessment which highlighted a common strategy which teachers utilized to collect evidence were portfolios. This is viewed as an indispensable tool which displayed assessment strategies that were utilized by the teacher. Feedback in assessment was discussed as this featured as an important aspect which teachers' understood and practiced assessment. Assessment practices in pre-OBE and OBE were discussed, as this discussion allowed me to make inferences on teachers' understanding and practices of assessment. The role of the teacher as an assessor was explicated as this reflected the responsibility of the teacher during assessment; in turn this will enlighten the reader regarding teachers' practices of assessment (“**assessment for/of learning**”). Assessment policy and its implications were discussed; this allowed me to understand how policy influences teachers' understanding and practices of assessment.

Just about a decade following the implementation of the new post-apartheid curriculum, the provision of appropriate support to teachers to effectively use classroom assessment remained one of the most crucial challenges which confronted the Department of Education in South Africa. Within this new post-apartheid curriculum lay countless tensions with educational assessment. However, there were several efforts in many countries which made assessment more authentic. The new emphasis on assessment was a tool to promote quality across a whole education system which created great education of demands.

Present debates in the field of educational assessment centred on research evidence that assessment, as a regular element in classroom work which holds a key to better learning (Black & William, 1998). Therefore, teachers and researchers in the field of assessment have a strong professional interest with current thinking and what constitutes effective educational assessment at the classroom level.

An outcomes-based approach to education in South Africa was established in an attempt to improve education for many citizens in the country. The traditional system of education had been overly academic and had failed to prepare them adequately to enter into the job market (Fraser, 2006). South Africa's associations with other countries in several activities namely agriculture, tourism and trade have compelled the country to compete globally. A review of the literature (Popkewitz, 2000; Ball, 2004; Olssen, Codd & O'Neill, 2004) revealed that South Africa's education system, like those in other national contexts, have been forced to respond to the needs of a global economy. Gilmore (2002) argued that internationally there was a marked growth in the need for high quality and dependable assessment information to fulfill a variety of purposes such as decision making and accountability, reporting students' achievements, awarding qualifications and informing and optimizing learners' learning within the classroom. To achieve stability and to be able to compete in the global marketplace and still uphold its own distinctive character, South Africa had to reflect on what has been done in education internationally.

Education policy transformations were driven by the government's drive to "redress past injustices in educational provision" (Department of Education (DoE), 1996, p.1). Recent research findings (Chisholm, 2004) suggested that curriculum and assessment policies developed since 1994, have conducted to the expansion of a racially integrated middle class rather than achieving the declared goals of redress and equity. When outcomes-based education (OBE) was introduced into the South African education system, teachers were encouraged to make a paradigm shift – to question their assumptions and to adopt new ways of thinking about teaching and learning (Fleisch 2002; Kraak & Young 2001). Furthermore OBE required teachers to follow some new approaches to planning, teaching and assessment. Teachers' are now required to assess learners according to learner outcomes and assessment standards. However, teachers have not necessarily experienced major changes at classroom level as a number of teachers still apply the same pedagogical practices they used a decade ago (Vandeyar & Killen, 2003). This dilemma related mainly to assessment since, as Collis (1992, p.36) disputed, "curriculum designed on the finest principles with the very best of intentions makes no change to what goes on in the classroom if assessment procedures remain the same".

The crucial success of the proposed changes relied and mainly were dependently on the way teachers responded to these calls for change because as Delandshere and Jones (1999, p. 214) maintained, only teachers' 'understanding and transformation of reform proposals into teaching action can change educational practice'. The reluctance of many South African educators to transform their assessment practices in response to new policies and curriculum guidelines may be due to their ingrained conceptions of assessment (Vandeyar & Killen, 2007). Fullan (1997) stated that real transformation requires individuals to alter their ways of thinking and their actions will then be changed. Thus, new assessment approaches need to be accompanied by teachers of assessment before the change of assessment practices can take place.

2.2 THE NATURE OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment is not just something you do at the end of the learning process; it is an integral part of teaching and learning. Assessment is the process by which information about students is gathered. Different methods such as observation of the student, testing of knowledge and skills or the examination of student product, may be used (Hart, 1994). Furthermore, assessment plays an integral part of education, is linked to all learning activities and is at the heart of educational endeavor (Clarke, 1996).

According to Shephard (2000), assessment plays an imperative role in shifting to a learner-centred and outcomes based approach because it provides important information to both learners and teachers at all stages of the learning process. Fundamental to the development of appropriate assessment must be a direct link between what is being "taught" and what is being "learned". This suggests that assessments must be founded on the relationship of how learners are taught and what they have learnt. Clarke (1996) defined assessment as having three fundamental functions; to model, monitor and inform. It was understandable that this definition recognized that assessment was a process whereby teachers administer assessments in a variety of ways. Learners receive feedback from teachers based on their performance. Thus, the results of the assessments help to ensure that all pupils make learning progress to their full potential thereby increasing their academic achievement. The primary purpose of learner assessment was to support this learning. Learning was not possible without thoughtful use of quality assessment information by learners.

According to Fraser (1995, p.12) and Sieboërger and Macintosh (1998, p.5) assessment is fundamentally about developing measuring instruments, generating evidence and making judgments. Consequently, it can be argued that one of the most important aspects of the assessment and evaluation of competence is the selection of suitable measuring instruments to generate evidence in support of decisions about competent or incompetent behaviour (Fraser 1995, p.12; Fraser 1996, p.82).

The principal role of assessment is to provide a balanced methodology for monitoring, confirming, and improving student learning (Aswegen & Dreyer, 2004) Furthermore, if assessment is used in the right way, as part of teaching to support and enhance learning, it has the most significant impact on the learning and teaching process (Shepard, 2000).

On the other hand outcomes based education places a great emphasis on high quality forms of assessment. Quality assessment in education is one of the dominant trends influencing education development and transformation worldwide (Marias, Niemann & Kotze, 2008). As assessment forms a basic component of teacher instruction, the development, implementation and evaluation of the assessment practices need to be developed with a view to improving the quality of teaching-learning process. These views can be understood, when the implementation of quality assessment is aimed at developing sound assessment practices which will improve learners' learning, as well as the quality of learning programmes (DoE, 1998, p. 3). In turn, transformed and improved assessment practices were meant to make the best use of learners' access to knowledge, skills and attitudes, and eventually improve learners' performance as they move towards achieving the desired learning outcomes.

By looking at the main purpose of assessment it was clear that assessment is not a once of activity, but one which is continuous in developing the learner holistically. Outcomes based assessment is thus a continuous activity assessing, knowledge skills, values and achievement of critical cross-field outcomes (Olivier 2002, p. 68-69).

2.2.1 CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

Outcomes Based Education placed a strong emphasis on continuous assessment that was usually defined as "the assessment of the whole learner on an ongoing basis over a period of time where cumulative judgments of the learners' abilities in specific areas are made in order to facilitate further positive learning" (Le Grange & Reddy, 1998, p. 11).

Continuous assessment is assessment performed over a period of time, on an ongoing basis.

Continuous assessment (CASS) in Economic Management Sciences implied that the teachers should undertake assessment activities intermittently during the year, using a variety of forms of assessment (Assessment Guidelines for Economic Management Sciences, NCS, 2003, p. 5). It is prescribed by the Assessment Guidelines for Economic Management Sciences that for each form of assessment which is implemented the teacher should utilize different strategies for collecting evidence of learning. It may include various assessment methods, such as tests, assignments, portfolios, projects and examinations.

Several pieces of literature reviewed indicate that CASS impacted positively on teaching and learning. The National Protocol on Assessment for Schools Grade R-12 (Department of Education, 2005) stated that:

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

The characteristics of CASS (Economic and Management Sciences Learning Area Statement, NCS Policy, 2002, p.49) covers all the outcomes –based education assessment principles and ensures that assessment: takes place over a period of time and that it is ongoing; supports the growth and development of the learners; provides feedback from learning and teaching; uses strategies to cater for a variety of learner needs (language, physical, psychological, emotional and cultural) and allows for summative assessment. In the EMS learning programmes, the following forms of assessment (although they are several others) are prescribed for assessing subject skills, knowledge and attitudes, (Assessment Guidelines for Economic Management Sciences, NCS, 2003, p.9), they are: tests, projects, data response, graph analysis, structured questions, examinations, simulations, presentations, case studies, demonstrations, assignments, posters, surveys.

According to the South African Policy CASS is considered the best model to assess outcomes of learning throughout the system and enables improvements to be made in the learning and teaching process. Malan (1997) pointed out that the purpose of CASS as it is practised in most classes is to daily monitor learning progress and to diagnose leaning problems. Thus, this contributed to CASS being formative in nature. Malan (1997) claims that CASS can ensure sustained teaching and learning and can contribute to learners overall performance. CASS allows for frequent interactions between pupils and teachers which mean that teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of their learners. In turn, these exchanges foster a learner -teacher relationship based on individual interactions. It also allows teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching strategies in relation to the curriculum, and to change these strategies as dictated by the needs of their learners.

The principle of criterion-referenced assessment underlines all assessment in CASS and it is it is no longer necessary to compare a learner's performance with that of others (Vandeyar & Killen, 2003, p.122). This is a clear indication from the traditional model of assessment prior to OBE which focused merely on once of tests and examinations which determined learners promotion to the next grade. Worthen (1993) stated that the proponents of alternative assessment maintain that a learner's achievements cannot be accurately assessed on the basis of the limited information obtained from an examination or test. Furthermore, learners need to be assessed from an examination of the learner's processes and products, which would include self-assessment checklists, products such as diaries and portfolios, and performances such as typing tests (Worthen, 1993). The continuing formative assessment proposed was for the intention of monitoring learners' progress, identifying their strengths and weaknesses and providing them with constructive feedback. The initiatives assessment policies aspired to shift the focus from the memorization of facts and content to promote learner centredness in the teaching and learning process.

The Department of Education (2001, p.5) pointed out that the benefits of CASS include: paced learner assessment; assessment in authentic contexts; assessment carried out by an educator who works directly with the learner; the promotion of formative assessment and continuous feedback about learning and teaching processes and better informed summative content. In contrast Bajah (1984) suggested that the concept of CASS, let alone the modalities of implementation remain uncertain to many teachers and they do not have a comprehensible mode of operation of CASS.

In addition CASS increased teachers' workload and they found it very challenging to implement, for the simple reason that there was a lack of clarity in terms of its interpretation, guidelines as well as a lack of support from Departmental officials (Kanjee, 2009). To many teachers, continuous assessment is a new and unfamiliar concept.

2.2.2 PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

The Department of Education of South Africa emphasized the importance of the variety of methods by which information about the learner's competence should be gathered. These methods include, among others, tests and examinations, learner portfolios, self-and peer assessment, and projects (Department of Education, 1997).

Airasian (2001) has pointed out that teachers normally use three main strategies to gather their assessment information, namely observation, oral questioning and paper and pencil tests. However, other authors discussed several other means of assessment strategies, one of them being portfolios- assessment. A portfolio can be defined as a purposeful collection of a learner's work that will "exhibit the student's efforts, progress and achievements in one or more areas" (Paulson, Paulson & Meyer, in Van Niekerk, 1998, p. 82).

Gillespie, Ford, Gillespie and Leavell (1996, p.487) presented a similar definition of portfolio as a means of assessment, “Portfolio-assessment is a purposeful, multidimensional process of collecting evidence that illustrates a student’s accomplishments, efforts, and progress (utilizing a variety of authentic evidence) over time.” It demonstrates to what extent the learner achieved the required outcomes (Vermeulen, 2000). Furthermore, Kemp and Toeperoff (1998) defined portfolios as collections of learners’ best pieces and the learners’ evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the pieces of work. Portfolios are valued as an assessment tool because they represent classroom based performance; in turn this can be fully integrated into the curriculum. Portfolio assessment is regarded as a means with which to inform a learner about his or her actual performance level (Tillema, 1998).

The validity and reliability of classroom assessment is increased when students are involved in collecting evidence of learning (Davies & Le Mahieu, 2003). Tillema (1998) points out that although portfolios provide a means of feedback about the level and quality of the learner’s performance in a concrete way, the validity of portfolio-assessment as an assessment tool has not yet been established. On the other hand, there is no detailed purpose of portfolios, except portfolios can be used to show growth over time (Politano, Cameron, Tate & MacNaughton, 1997) and to provide evidence of progression towards curriculum standards (Gipps, 1994). Several teachers and researchers believe that portfolios assessment are more effective than the old style tests for measuring academic skills and updating instructional decisions. Cole, Ryan and Kick (1995) defined portfolios as a systematic and organized collection of evidence used by the educator and learner to monitor growth of the learners’ knowledge, skills and attitudes.

From an assessment standpoint Davies and Le Mahieu (2003) maintained that portfolios provided no less than four potential “values added” to more traditional means of producing evidence of learning. Firstly, they are extensive over time and therefore reveal growth and development over time; secondly, they allow for more sustained engagement and therefore permit the examination of sustained effort and deeper performance; thirdly, to the extent that choice is involved in the selection of content (both teacher and most

especially learner choice), then portfolios reveal learners' understandings about and dispositions towards learning (including the unique special purposes that portfolios might address and their consequent selection guidelines); and fourthly they offer the opportunity for students to interact with and reflect upon their own work Davies and Le Mahieu (2003).

Sieborger and Macintosh (1998) asserted that learners are given the responsibility of keeping a portfolio of everything they have done. In this way learners feel a sense of ownership and this allows them to act responsibly. Portfolios impact positively on learning in terms of increased student motivation, ownership, and responsibility (Paulson, Paulson & Meyer, 1991). Allowing learners to play an active role in the portfolio process is critical to its success as means of being an assessment tool. Portfolios are viewed as having the potential to allow learners to show the breadth and depth of their learning (Howard & Le Mahieu, 1995 Davies, 2000). Research examining the impact of the use of portfolios on learners' learning focuses on the impact of portfolios on learning in terms of learners' motivation, ownership and responsibility, feedback and self reflection.

Barrett (1999) illustrated three approaches to assessment: portfolio; teacher-centred; learner-centred, and mixed model. Within the teacher-centred model, the teacher takes responsibility for the portfolio and there is little or no self-assessment by the learner. In the peer assessment, peers are involved mostly in the process of assessment. In the learner-centred model, learners are in charge of their own portfolios and they choose what constitutes their portfolio. Additionally, learners show evidence of learner self-assessment, peer-assessment and collaboration with others such as parents, teachers and fellow learners. In the mixed model, both the teacher and the learner take responsibility in the assessment process and compilation.

In the field of education, a portfolio is a systematic collection of selected student work (Popham, 2002). As discussed earlier a portfolio engages learners in assessing their own progress or accomplishments in establishing ongoing learning goals. It can be concluded that a portfolio does not contain unrelated compilation of learners work but instead

includes consciously selected examples of work which aim to show learners' growth towards important learning objectives. Sieborger and Macintosh's (1998) study disclosed that teachers claim that portfolios are an authentic way of assembling evidence for assessing learners. It is for this reason that learners' portfolios were analysed because they provided an insight on how teachers understand and practise assessment.

Worthen (1992) stated that portfolio assessment (which is continuous assessment), should become the principal assessment procedure in the classroom. Portfolios are seen as an important assessment tool which is productive as it provides learners with guidance and direct learning with on-going feedback.

2.3 FEEDBACK IN ASSESSMENT

Assessment should provide short term feedback so that obstacles can be identified and be tackled at an early stage in the learning process (Januário, 2008). Rather than assessment feedback only being carried out at the end of the term or a section of what is being taught, feedback in assessment is now regarded as a significant process which describes learners' performance over a period of time and allows for a variety of strategies to collate evidence of the learners' best performance. These assessment strategies or methods range from tests and examinations, performance assessments such as practical and oral demonstrations of learning, teacher or classroom-based assessment, portfolios of work and student self-assessment (Gipps, 1994). Wragg (2001, p.53) stated that if assessment is to be linked to learning, then feedback is an important part of this connection. Feedback is an important aspect of assessment and without feedback, much significance of assessment is lost. Feedback has always been recognized as a crucial feature of the teaching – learning process; see for example, Bennett's (1982) and Bloom, Hasting & Madaus (1971) models where the former included teacher feedback, while the latter included feedback, correctives and reinforcements. A collaborative relationship is critical to feedback and is central to effective assessment practice. Whilst learners receive feedback, they receive it in the context of their relationship with their teacher.

There are several definitions to feedback but then again feedback is a complex term to identify with (Askew & Lodge, 2000). Here, feedback will be defined in its relation to assessment. Several authors view feedback as imparting knowledge about learner performance. In contrast, “feedback is information about how an individual performed in light of what he/she attempted” (Wiggins, 1998, p.46). Bloom et. al (1971) viewed feedback as mechanism of indicating what each student has learnt and what is yet to be learnt. Zeller Mayer (1989) maintained that feedback is a way to describe the parameters of constructive response to learners’ work. Hattie (1993) defined feedback as means to direct learners in ways to improve by providing information regarding learners’ “ability or inability to understand. Additionally, several authors view feedback as information concerning learner performances, whilst others refer to feedback as identifying the gap between where learners are and where they ought to be.

Feedback is an important aspect of the assessment process as it provides the teacher with an insight to modify and improve on teaching and learning activities. Feedback from classroom assessment can impact on learners positively as it can assist them in becoming more mindful of the fact that they are learning and to make them aware of how they are moving closer, through the steps of interrelated learning activities, to fulfilling their own intrinsically motivating purposes for learning. In turn, providing feedback will support learner autonomy and self-determining learning skills and help learners to become more self-directed in their learning plans and activities (Coombe & Kinney, 1998; Muirhead, 2002). According to Black and William (1998), the information obtained through assessment is used to offer learners feedback to modify their learning activities.

Wiggins (1998) considered that if the purpose of assessment is to improve learners’ performance, then the methods of assessments must be accompanied by quality feedback. As for the importance of ongoing feedback provided a detail analysis of how quality feedback can be given to learners (Race, Brown & Smith, 2005). Among the several characteristics of quality feedback highlighted by these authors, they point out the

following aspects of quality feedback, *time*: the sooner the feedback is given the better, *personality*: it needs to fit in with each learners' achievement, *expressed*: whether congratulatory or critical and *empowerment*: both congratulatory or critical feedback must not deteriorate learning but rather strengthen and consolidate learning.

Stobart (1993) differentiated between descriptive and evaluative feedback. Descriptive feedback serves three goals; firstly it describes strengths upon which further growth and development can be established; secondly, it articulates the manner in which performance falls short of desired criteria with an eye to suggesting how that can be remediated; and thirdly, it gives information that allows the learner to adjust what he or she is doing in order to get better. Descriptive feedback is derived from several sources. It may be specific comments about the work, information such as posted criteria that describe quality, or models and exemplars that show what quality looks like and the many ways in which it can be expressed. On the other hand, evaluative feedback is very diverse as it informs the learner how she/he has performed as compared to others or to some standard. Evaluative feedback is highly reduced, often communicated using letters, numbers, checks, or other symbols.

It could be assumed that the use of portfolios in assessment is a form of descriptive feedback. Considering that, the use of portfolios in assessment increases the amount of descriptive specific feedback available to learners while they are learning.

2.4 RETHINKING ASSESSMENT IN LEARNING

In traditional education and training, assessment often is the tail that wags the dog.
(Sutherland & Peckham, 1998, p. 98).

In order to examine why many South African teachers were struggling to deal with the assessment requirements of outcomes-based education, it was crucial to look at how these assessment requirements differ from pre- OBE assessment.

Prior to OBE, assessment in schools was mostly driven by the need to produce marks that could be recorded and reported to prove to the relevant authorities that assessment had taken place, rather than being an integral part of the learning process (Cockburn, 1997, p. 5). The format of assessment procedures was dictated by strict bureaucratic structures that instructed when and how assessment should be accomplished.

Within this system assessment was largely summative, norm-referenced and judgmental in nature (Department of Education, 1997, p.3). Assessment culture typically characterized tests and examinations dominated assessment throughout the school (Dreyer, 2000, p. 267). Assessment in this paradigm was measurement driven emphasised academic exercises and the recall of textbook-based knowledge (Vandeyar & Killen, 2003).

In traditional assessment, teachers were mainly concerned with the cognitive aspect of assessment, particularly knowledge at the expense of attitudes and skills. This was because they were overly dependent on tests and examinations as the only modes of assessments. According to Hargreaves (1989) assessment was primarily based on strengthening of standardised testing. Assessment had a short-term focus and it had very little to do with unlocking the potential of the learner. Assessment tasks emphasized content and factual recall, and "often entailed learning in parrot-fashion" (Cockburn, 1997, p. 5). Those learners, who were not in a good position to regurgitate the subject content, would fail a grade because of a single test or examination. Teachers ended up teaching for tests somewhat rather than being resourceful and using their professional judgment. Assessment was also time based and a once off event. The study by Muller (2000) revealed that during the apartheid era, the assessment policy for learners other than exit grade 12 was not specified. Furthermore, Muller (2000) maintained that in practice for many learners, assessment was norm referenced and summative.

Most South African schools adopted an approach to learning and assessment that placed a strong emphasis on the accumulation of isolated facts and skills (Vandeyar & Killen, 2003). According to Segers, Dochy and De Corte (1999), traditional assessment

perspectives (i.e. testing) tend to taper the learning processes to a consumption process of knowledge provided by the teacher. Vandeyar and Killen (2003) stated earlier that assessment was largely norm referenced with a strong emphasis on competition amongst learners, learners could be ranked and these rankings could be reported to parents. This led to a general belief that performance relative to the class average was more important than learning in some absolute sense. Learners' performance was compared to the class average. Those learners, who were not in a good position to reproduce the subject content, could even fail a grade because of a single test or examination. Learners' performance was compared to the class average. The emphasis was more on learners' grades as opposed to the quality of learning and teaching

Learners were graded according to the academic syllabus and the end result was the concentration of knowledge that did not necessary include the skills and abilities of learners to analyse and synthesize, to evaluate a situation and propose a meaningful solution for an authentic problem (Norms and Standards for Teachers Education, Training and Development 1997, p.22). Teachers were seen as the submissive deliverers of the official curriculum, which was geared towards producing learners for the labour market rather than producing learners who could engage with issues critically.

Most teachers assessed learners to make certain that they have learnt what they were taught in the classrooms. Vandeyar and Killen (2003) suggested that many teachers within this system simply assessed what they believed they had taught well, so that the learners' marks would reflect highly on their teaching ability. Assessment contained by this paradigm was only reflected only after teaching had transpired. Vandeyar and Killen (2003) asserted that the shortfall of this approach is clear if we consider assessment to have a dual purpose - informing the teacher of learners' progress and providing a basis for reflection on teaching. The main objective of assessment was therefore not on the development of the learner, or in the interests of the learner as assessment was teacher centred.

When OBE was introduced in South Africa, the clear message from the Department of Education was that educators would be required to make "a paradigm shift from a teacher and content-driven curriculum to an outcomes-based and learner-centered curriculum" (Geysler, 2000, p. 2). This 'paradigm shift' brought with it many suggestions for changes to assessment practices.

Assessment is now defined and seen as an integral aspect of the teaching and learning cycle (Biggs, 1996; Hattie & Jaeger, 1998). Rather than being an affair that illustrates learners' typical performance at the closing stages of learning, it is now an elementary process that describes learners' progress at different stages with the use of several methods to capture evidence of learner progress. These methods range from tests and examinations, performance assessments such as practical and oral demonstrations of learning, teacher or classroom-based assessment, portfolios of work and student self-assessment (Gipps, 1994). Killen (2003) mentioned several reasons why learners are assessed. He stated that assessment could be done for: certification and classification, diagnosis, progression, programme evaluation, instructional improvement and selection. The new assessment culture (Birenbaum, 1996) strongly emphasized the integration of instruction and assessment.

Assessment in OBE is done to determine whether learners have achieved the desired outcomes. According to Harden (2002, p.117) assessment is a process which is matched to the learning outcomes. Harden (2002) defines outcomes as road statements of what is achieved at the end of a course of study. Spady and Schleich (1999) argued that an outcome is a result what teachers want learners to be successful in once they have finished their studies. According to Reynhardt, Morare and Wilson (2000, p.7), outcomes-based assessment encourages that learners' performance should be assessed against criteria that indicate if an outcome has been attained, rather than against other learners' performances. The emphasis is on the achievement of clearly defined outcomes, making it possible to credit learners' performance at every level, (Government Gazette, 2003). The thought behind this idea is that assessment is a process of gathering sufficient evidence of learners' progress towards achieving the desired outcomes. It is clear from

the above discussion that assessment is done as a once of activity as it happens within the progression of the learner. Educational assessment helps learners to identify what they have already learned, to observe their personal learning progress and also allows them to direct their learning progress. Educational assessment is a process of drawing reasonable inferences about what learners know on the basis of evidence (Pellegirno, Chudowsky & Glaser, 2001). Educational assessment does not exist in isolation, but should be supported with the instruction in order to support and enhance learning. Assessment functions may be varied, ranging from a need to identify prior knowledge to a need to draw conclusions about learners' overall understanding of the subject matter.

Assessment is the most significant prompt for learning. One of the most important outcomes of research on learning is the recognition that learning must fundamentally be seen as relational (Ramsden, 1985). This meant that learning is a purpose of both teaching and the context in which it transpires. It is surely, not an issue of learners engaging with a body of knowledge which they have been taught, but of how this is understood by them and the actions which they take as a result of these interpretations. Assessment can encourage passive, reproductive forms of learning while simultaneously hiding the inadequate understanding to which such forms of learning inevitably lead (Entwistle & Ramsden 1985, Ramsden 1988).

2.5 TEACHERS' ROLE AS AN ASSESSOR

Along with the outcomes –based approach to teaching, learning and assessment, teachers are confronted with a paradigm shift and are required to familiarize themselves with learning outcomes and assessment standards in order to effectively implement the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) in schools. Gipps, Brown, McCallum and McCallister (1995) and Hill (2000), Brown (2003) differentiated that teachers embrace one of four major conceptions of assessment, i.e. assessment is: (a) useful because it can provide information for improving instruction and learning; (b) a necessary process for making learners accountable for their learning; (c) a process by which teachers and/or

schools are made accountable; and (d) relevant to the work of teachers and the life of learners. These diverse conceptions direct teachers to diverse assessment practices

Assessment in OBE can provide several purposes, ranging from the progress of learners up to evaluating the effectiveness of teaching strategies. The Department of Education policy (2000, p.2) stated that assessment involves four steps i.e. generating and collecting evidence of achievement, evaluating this evidence against the outcomes, recording the findings of this evaluation and using this information to assist the learner's development and improving the process of learning and teaching. To an extent these guidelines provide a general idea to teachers when assessing learners. Classroom assessment can assist teachers in identifying learner strengths and weaknesses, provide teachers with ideas for relevant interventions, allow teachers to evaluate their teaching approaches, and provide information to learners on what they need to do to improve their understanding (McMillan, 2001; Stiggins, 2001). Lubisi et al. (1998, p.14) advised that teachers establish the purpose of assessment before they can even think of the content and methods of assessing. The teacher should assess learners in achieving desirable outcomes. The assessment process should involve the process of gathering evidence of learners' progress and this which should be recorded will assist learners' development and the teaching process.

According to Olivier (1998, p.45), the assessment process should be regarded as part of the learning process. This implied that teachers should not assess learners at the end of an activity only, but must consider assessing them during the activity. It can be understood that assessment plays an imperative role in the lesson, thus it should not be disconnected from the learning process. Assessment helps an educator to see what learners understand. Criticos, Long, Moletsane and Mthiyane (2002, p.94) further suggested that assessment tasks should be clearly stated and understood by both the learner and the teacher at the beginning of any assessment activity and assessment tasks should be linked clearly to the kinds of learning outcomes that teachers have been working towards in class. In order for classroom assessment to be effectively applied, teachers must possess appropriate

knowledge of their subject area, possess relevant assessment skills and have access to high quality teaching resources (Gipps, 1994; McMillan, 2001; National Research Council, 2001; Popham, 2003). McMillan (2001) maintained that teachers require specific assessment skills to enable them to effectively apply or develop appropriate assessment tools, to use assessment results, to make decisions about individual learners to improve learning, and to provide information to parents, stakeholders and other teachers. However, in South African schools, many teachers have limited experience and understanding of assessment (Pryor & Lubisi, 2002; Vandeyar & Killen, 2007); in turn this did not allow them to practice assessment to the best of their abilities due to their lack of understanding assessment.

Van der Horst and McDonald (1997) made certain that assessment should form an integral part of planning and preparation, it is imperative that the assessment process indicate what learners are learning. During the planning of the assessment process, the teacher has to decide and determine the basic elements of the assessment process such as the purpose (formative or summative), the education and assessment goals, which are necessary to support the assessment process and the assessment tools. The determination of these elements depends on several factors, one of them being the teachers' understanding of assessment.

According to Sutton (1991, p.2) assessment lies at the heart of promoting children which is a human process involving and conducted by human beings. It can be said that through assessment teachers can determine learners' progress and performance level achieved during the learning process. Furthermore, when the teacher understands how to interpret learners' assessment results, the teacher will be able to incorporate learners' performance into the teaching process for the improvement of the learning and teaching process. Also, teachers can make use of learners' progress results by providing learners with appropriate feedback and support, in turn this will allow the teacher to formulate judgment about the quality and the effectiveness of the educational material and modifying assessment practices.

The Norms and Standards document (DoE, 2000, p.14) explained one of the seven roles of being a teacher is to be an assessor and one who will understand that assessment is an essential feature of the teaching and learning process, as well as knowing how to integrate it into this process. A teacher as an assessor must have an understanding of the purpose and methods of teaching and learning and needs to understand what to assess and how to go about doing assessment as this will inform their practices of assessment.

2.6 POLICY AND CURRICULUM CHALLENGE TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF ASSESSMENT

The post-apartheid South African educational system in 1994 signified major modifications to the national curriculum, most noticeably in terms of changes to the development and implementation of assessment policies at every level of the educational system. In this instance, teachers had to digest a whole suite of assessment related policies and guidelines that place greater emphasis on classroom assessments (Kanjee, 2009), most notably the Assessment Policy in the General Education and Training Band (Grade R to 9) and the national protocol on assessment for schools in the General Training Band (Grades R to 12) (Department of Education, 2005). The difficulties that teachers experienced in coping with new assessment policies have been reported by Dassa, Vazquez-Abad, and Ajar (1993) and Grisay (1991).

The new policy (Department of Education, 2007) placed greater emphasis on classroom assessment by outlining the range of assessment information available to teachers, specifying the frequency and types of assessment information required for reporting on learner performance at the different grade levels and providing templates for recording and reporting the performance of learners (Kanjee, 2009). While the aim of the policies was commendable, they seemed to have caused several challenges for teachers who practise assessment in the classroom. The change in educational policy had set new and more challenging demands on teachers who practise assessment in the classroom.

There was a shift from an exclusively norm referenced summative form of assessment in a content-based education system to criterion-reference formative assessment in an OBE system (Department of Education, 1997) is one of the major changes which makes the role of a the teacher as an assessor a complex one. The majority of teachers experienced and still experience a considerable demand to deal with the more transformational assessment for a learning approach that underpins the new curriculum, demands that diverge significantly from the traditional assessment of learning that had been a support of the old education system (Grosser and Lombard, 2003). Yet, evidence from the observation of assessment practices of teachers indicate that they are struggling to make sense of the demands which they seem to be deserted in (Harley & Wedekind, 2004; Sieborger & Nakabugo, 2001; Vandeyar & Killen 2003). Several teachers mention their concern regarding the implementation and mechanics of this form of assessment (Le Grange & Reddy, 1998) and the intense paper-dependent process of meticulously recording learners' progress.

Within South African schools these factors include inadequate teacher expertise and content knowledge, limited access to relevant teaching and learning resources, poor understanding of assessment in the new curriculum, high teacher workloads and large class sizes; continued reliance on traditional assessment practices; and the unwillingness and/or inability of teachers to adapt their assessment practices to the changing demands of the new education system (Combrinck, 2003; Kanjee, 2003; Pryor & Lubisi, 2002; Vandeyar, 2005; Vandeyar & Killen, 2007). Killen (2002) also stated some of the problems that teachers have raised. These teachers complained about effectiveness of assessment in larger classes, lack of facilities and multicultural classrooms.

Vandeyar and Killen (2007) study illustrates how teachers still hold very strong teacher-centred conceptions of assessment which is inconsistent with an outcomes based approach to assessment. On the other hand, Sokopo (2004) states that teachers interpreted the implementation of classroom assessment by merely fulfilling the purpose of the accumulation of learners' marks rather than improving learning and teaching.

While these policies are challenging to implement, it has not provided the potential to develop a more authentic way of assessing learners. The availability of varied and relevant tools for the effective application of classroom assessment is critical in supporting teachers to address the specific needs of their learners (National Research Council, 2003). According to Lewin and Dunne (2000, p. 395); an assessment policy should generate instruments that reinforce valued learning outcomes.

However, it should be noted that the process of assessment is not just a matter of following technical procedures and policies, nor is it merely a social matter; but both these factors are jointly important. The common thread in most literature findings is that when new assessment policies require teachers to change their assessment practices, the teacher often resists reconciling these stipulations with his/ her principles about teaching and assessment, in turn teachers do not feel confident and secure when assessing learners as they do not understand the principles of assessment. According to Killen and Van Niekerk (2000), attitudes values and ideologies should shift so that fundamental reforms in education can take place. This means that teachers' mindsets should change so they can accept and transform from their traditional practices of assessment.

It is imperative that teachers should be involved when the policies are prepared. In this way teachers are in a better position to understand what is intended by policies as expected. In order for teachers to implement the assessment policy, they need to have a fairly good understanding of the policy. Pahad in Jansen and Chisholm (1999, p. 254) argues that South Africa has excellent policies but teachers know nothing about how to implement these policies in the classroom, all due to their lack of understanding.

It can be concluded that whether teachers understand assessment policies or not, it has some implication towards implementing or not implementing assessment. If they understand assessment they will implement it accordingly in their classrooms. If they do not understand it, they may not implement it. Thus teachers' practices depend on their understanding of assessment. The concern that emerges here is the close link of

assessment practices with other components of the teachers' own pedagogy of understanding assessment.

2.7 THEORETICAL ORIENTATION IN ASSESSMENT

In this study, two aspects provide a conceptual orientation in teachers' understanding and practice of assessment. These aspects are assessment for learning and assessment of learning. The conceptual framework outlined in this study is similar to Januário's (2008) research. It is supported on the conceptual understanding that teachers have two understanding of assessment which is '**assessment for learning**' and '**assessment of learning**'.

Assessment for learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there. The research conducted in Britain (Black & Wiliam, 1998) **assessment for learning** provides firm evidence that "formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work and that its development can raise standards of achievement" more effectively than any other strategy. According to Black, Harrison, Marshall and William (2003) **assessment for learning** is any assessment where the first priority is to serve the purpose of encouraging in promoting student learning. Assessment should provide some form of feedback so that difficulties can be identified and dealt with at an early stage in the learning process. This type of assessment aims at improving learning and is called assessment of formative assessment. **Assessment for learning** takes the notion of formative assessment moving away from summative assessments.

Lubisi *et al.* (1993, p.31) suggest two models of assessment summative (also known as input-based) and formative (also known as outcomes-based, norm-referenced assessment) and criterion-referenced assessment). The former is related with the traditional approach to assessment while the latter is linked to the new approach to assessment as per OBE. In schools, the most evident assessments are summative. Summative assessments are used

to determine what learners have learnt at the end of a unit, to promote learners, to make certain that they have met required standards by means to school completion or as a process for selecting students for entry into further education specializations.

The summative model is more centred on the input by teachers and textbooks. It assesses learners' learning by comparing individual learners against a norm, and it uses assessment primarily in a summative way (to measure what learners had learnt at the end of the process). This model gives an overall picture of learners' progress at a given time; for example, at the end of a term or a year, or on transfer to another school (The assessment guide for the Senior Phase, 2005, p.9). Summative assessment takes place over time at the end of the learning experience. Summative assessment is usually applied in a formal manner in the form of a test, examinations, assignments or demonstrations (Vermeulen, 2000). Teachers who view assessment mostly as a mechanism for making learners accountable for their learning will favour formal, summative, high-stakes assessment, and they may tend to absolve themselves from responsibility for learner failure by blaming the learners' socio-economic conditions or lack of ability (Delandshere & Jones, 1999).

On the other hand, “formative assessment is a process, one in which information about learning is induced and then used to improve the teaching and learning activities in which teachers and learners are engaged” (Black et al. 2004, p.122).

Formative assessment focuses on the outcomes which learners achieve during and after the learning-teaching process. Furthermore, it assesses learners by comparing individual learners' progress to a set of criteria and uses assessment as a means of improving the teaching and learning process. Malan (1997) describes the purpose of formative assessment which provides feedback to learners and teachers about the learning progress. Formative assessment refers to frequent, interactive assessments of learner progress and understanding to identify learning needs and change teaching appropriately. In turn, teachers who use formative assessment approaches and techniques are better organized in

meeting learners of mixed abilities through differentiation and change of teaching, thus learner achievement is to a greater extent in which learner outcomes will be attained. In carrying out an effective assessment for learning, it is worth mentioning that the role of teachers as facilitators is crucial in monitoring the assessment process. It is imperative to know why teachers assess and what shapes their understandings, in turn this will dictate their practice of assessment. On the other hand, the role of both the teacher and learners are imperative for the success of any assessment strategies. Harlen (2006) discussed that **assessment for learning** as a cycle of events with the student in the centre of it. Formative assessment in classrooms characterizes on-going, interactive assessments of learner progress and understanding to identify learning needs, in turn, improving teaching appropriately. Teachers using formative assessment approaches and techniques are better prepared to meet diverse learners' needs through differentiation and adaptation of teaching to raise levels of student achievement and to achieve a greater equity of student outcomes.

With reference to **assessment for learning** serving as a theoretical framework, it will assist in identifying how teachers constantly adapt instruction to meet learner needs. As a result, **assessment for learning** will allow the researcher to interpret teachers' understanding of assessment, which will consequently assist in identifying how teachers practise assessment in the way that they do as in relation to the EMS learning area. The review of literature has put an emphasis on **assessment for learning**, where the results are used to enlighten the teaching and learning process, as opposed to assessment of learning. It is perceived that if teachers understand why they do what they do in the classroom, they will be able to reflect critically on their teaching and learning environment and thus they will be able to develop their teaching skills.

Teachers' understandings of assessment are unlikely to be impervious from the authorities of the system contained by to which they work. As soon as the system emphasizes content, conformity, and high-stakes summative assessment, as it did in South Africa during the apartheid era (Jansen, 1999), it is not expected for teachers to

believe that assessment is primarily about learner and school accountability. Once such conceptions are established, it is difficult to change them.

This study anticipates exploring the extent to which the understandings and practices of assessment held by a small sample of teachers of a secondary school could be revealed through the frameworks of '**assessment *for* learning**' and '**assessment *of* learning**'.

CHAPTER 3
DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH STRATEGIES
METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION PLAN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focused on the research methodology followed in this study. This was discussed to supply the reader with reasons as to why these strategies and methodology were appropriate for this study. The process data collection plan was also discussed. Methodology did not only concern itself with the description of the sources, methods and instruments of this research, but also addressed the importance of such sources, methods and instruments, justifying the selection to its appropriateness to the study. Patton (2002) revealed that a good methodology leads to a successful research study with accuracy and usefulness. Methods in social research are ways of proceeding and gathering and collection of data. They consisted of listening to the subjects, observing what people do and say, or collecting and examining documents which human beings constructed (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995).

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

My study made use of qualitative data collection and analysis methods and aimed to understand the social world from the viewpoint of respondents, through detailed descriptions of their cognitive and symbolic actions, and through the richness of meaning associated with observable behaviour (Wildemuth, 1993). Babbie and Mouton (2001, p.270), Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.2) as well as Marshall and Rossman (1995, p. 1-5) described qualitative research as a paradigm that presumes that the researcher will obtain an “insider perspective on social action”. I chose a qualitative approach for this study because of the fact that qualitative research pays more attention to the context of data gathering in order to enhance the value of the data. Analysis of qualitative material is more explicitly interpretative, creative and personal than a quantitative analysis (Walker, 1985, p. 3).

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001, p.395) qualitative research describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions. The data collected from the teacher - participants served to reveal their developed understanding and practise of assessment. The goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' understanding of assessment in the specific context. The goal of qualitative research typically was to obtain insights into particular educational, social, and familial processes and practices that exist within a specific location (Connolly, 1998). In an attempt to gain insights, qualitative researchers tend to seek to extract meaning from their data. That is, qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings and strive to make sense of, or to interpret them with respect to the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The data collected assisted me in providing an insight of teachers' understanding and practices of classroom assessment. During the interviews and the analysis of learner portfolios, it could be established what teachers' understanding of assessment was and how this leads to their different assessment practices. According to Merriam (1998) questions for understanding are appropriate for qualitative research. According to Schwartz and Jacobs (1979, p. 7), the qualitative approach focuses on the understanding of people studied in relation to their environment and their perception of their context. Babbie and Mouton (2001, p.270) described the primary goal of qualitative research as describing and then understanding as opposed to just too simply explaining the social action. My role as a qualitative researcher is to perceive concepts and analyse an in- depth understanding of a phenomenon.

Qualitative research can be described as any type of research that procedure findings are not arrived at by any statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Straus & Corbin, 1998, p.10). An advantage of the application of the qualitative research methodology is that it allowed me to view participants' behavior in their natural surroundings without the artificiality that encloses experimental survey research from time to time (Dillon, Madden & Firtle, 1993, p.130). However, a possible disadvantage in a qualitative research is that the sample sizes are commonly too small for me to generalise the data beyond the sample selected for the specific study. Therefore,

qualitative research is often conducted preliminary to quantitative research for the purpose of enlightening and operationalising concepts, if the ultimate purpose of such research is intended at quantification or generalisation (Dillon et al.1993, p.131).

Qualitative research shares the theoretical assumptions of the interpretative paradigm, which is based on the notion that social reality is created and sustained through the subjective experience of people involved in communication (Morgan, 1980). It was suitable for this study to use a qualitative approach because this type of research focused more attention to the context of data gathering in order to enhance the value of the data. Qualitative researchers are concerned with attempting to accurately describe, decode, and interpret the meanings of phenomena occurring in their normal social contexts (Fryer, 1991).

3.3 METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), a paradigm is a loose collection of logically held together assumptions, concepts or propositions that orientates thinking in research. All types of research are guided by some kind of theoretical orientation. My study is positioned in the interpretive paradigm and is conducted as a case study approach. The interpretive paradigm had been preferred because it explicitly works from within the human perspective and is relevant to this study as it aims in unpacking by interpreting social meanings created by the participants.

The interpretive paradigm can be defined as knowledge which is established through the meanings attached to the phenomena interpreted. Furthermore, it explained implications of circumstances and understanding associates of the situation and thereafter scrutinised the course of objective realities that were produced. Researchers operating within the framework of the interpretative paradigm were focused on investigating the complexity, authenticity, contextualization, shared subjectivity of the researcher and the researched, and minimization of illusion (Fryer, 1991). They interpret events and situations and they act on the basis of these constructs (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Thus,

individually constructed realities were an essential part of the environment. Moreover, by using qualitative research methodology, we can begin to understand the social world through the eyes of the participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000), in these lens a case study approach is ‘fit for the purpose’ of this study. It was clear, that the paradigm was appropriate for my research as in most instances interpretive paradigm falls within the qualitative research.

3.3.1 CASE STUDY

My study was concerned with understanding an educational phenomenon in a specific context and therefore a case study method was chosen for this study. This method allowed for an in-depth of investigation into a phenomenon, and is thus productive of rich interpretation through understanding (Bassey, 1999; Stake, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Merriam, 2001). Seeing that this study attempted to explore three grade 9 teachers understanding and practices of assessment from the same school, a case study was seen as most appropriate.

A case study (qualitative in nature), in this study, provided an exceptional example of real people in real situations (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003), easily understood, directly interpreted and is good for investigating issues in-depth (Bassey, 1999; Burns, 1997; Merriam, 1998). This case study aimed to capture the reality of the participants’ live experiences and thoughts about, a particular phenomenon (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Merriam (1988) further described a case study research as a deep, holistic description and analysis of a specific instance, social group or phenomenon that involves a contextualised interpretation of events.

The primary interest of case studies was the “process rather than outcome, in context rather than on specific variables, in discovery rather than confirmation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 60). Case studies can establish cause and effect, indeed one of their strengths is that this method observes the facts in real contexts, recognizing that context is a powerful

determinant of both cause and effect (Shaughnassey, Zechmeister, Zechmeister (2000). A case study can be taken by a single researcher without needing a full research team (Nisbet & Watt, 1984). Moreover, case studies can provide insights into other, similar situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar cases (Nisbet & Watt, 1984).

According to Cohen and Manion (2000, p. 181-184) the following were the weaknesses of case studies: The result may not be generalisable except where other readers or researchers see their application. Case studies were not easily open to cross-checking; consequently they may be selective, bias, personal and subjective. Bias introduced by the investigator in the collection and analysis of the data remained a constant threat. Also, it is difficult to generalize findings from a case study. In addition case studies were prone to problems of observer bias, despite attempts made to address reflexivity.

Nevertheless, a case study was chosen for my study as it permitted for the gathering of data in a real context, and it takes into account the political and ideological context within which the research is situated (Cohen et al., 2000). A case study approach was used for my study, as this approach allowed me to interact with the participants in confidence and in a contented manner. Seeing that this study involved the theory of reflective practice and the understanding of the experiences of three grade nine teachers from the same school, it qualified as a case study.

3.3.2 INTERVIEWS AS QUALITATIVE DATA GATHERING

Interviews were seen as the most important source of case study information (Yin, 2004, p.89). An interview is “a conversation where one person – the interviewer – is seeking responses for a particular purpose from the other person: the interviewee” (Gillham, 2000, p.1). Qualitative interviews were increasingly employed as a research method as it is regarded as essential for obtaining knowledge and information about the social world where the subject matter are meaningful relations to be interpreted (Kvale, 1996). The interview “provides access to what is inside a person’s head, makes it possible to measure

what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (value and preferences) and what a person thinks (attitude and beliefs)” (Tuckman, 1972, cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p. 268).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p.267) maintained that interviews allow the interview and interviewer flexibility in discussing their interpretations of the world they live in and how they view situations from their own personal experiences. Conducting interviews has been important in order to determine teachers’ understanding of assessment and assessment practices. Tuckman (1994, p.366) argued that events cannot be understood unless one understands how these events are interpreted by people who participate in them. It was therefore important to gather information regarding teachers’ understanding of assessment and how this influenced their assessment practices in the classroom. Patton (1990, p.278) maintained that, ‘the purpose of an interview is to find out what is in someone’s mind’. Patton (2002) stated that interviews take place in order to determine those things which cannot be observed easily.

3.3.3 SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

My choice of semi-structured, one-to-one interviews was influenced by Ezzy’s (2002, p.45) contention which enabled one to “gain access to people’s ideas and thoughts, their perceptions of change and their fears and concerns in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher.” The semi-structured interview method, being less formal was a better way of capturing the point of view of the people. Clarification of information was obtained with the use of semi-structured interviews allowed for the collection of specific data from all the participants and at the same time permitted the respondent to define their experiences in their own unique way (Merriam, 2001). Semi- structured interviews is a combination of structured and unstructured interviews.

The structured interview would not have been appropriate because it had closed questions, which did not allow the interviewer to pursue issues that were not anticipated when the interview schedule was drawn (Patton; 2002).

In semi-structured interviews, I prepared questions beforehand, just like in a structured interview; but the difference was that in the former, I was able to use my own discretion, if need be. This approach enabled me to structure the questions that were to be asked in advance in a way that is done when planning for the structured interviews. This created a sense of flexibility that enabled me to probe for more information when the responses given by the interviewee lacked clarity (Cohen & Manion, 1994). In addition, semi structured interviews were not only flexible, but yielded information that the researcher had not planned to conduct.

The use of the semi structured interviews was intended to make certain that the same general areas of information was collected from each interviewee; this provided me with more focus than the conversational approach, but still allowed me a measure extent of freedom and adaptability in getting the information from the interviewee. In addition, this type of interview schedule allowed for probing the interviewees' initial response. The interview schedule was divided into three parts. The first part of the interview was to obtain the background profile of the participants, that is; their age, qualifications, where they obtained their qualifications and the number of years of teaching experience. The second part formed the core of the interview guided by questions that allowed probing and prompting.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather information about three grade 9 teachers' understanding of assessment and how this influenced their assessment practices in the classroom. Before conducting interviews, assurance of confidentiality was given to teachers. The teachers were informed in advance of the purpose of the interview and given a copy of the open-ended questions that formed the beginning of the interview. Some of the questions were planned prior to the interview, whilst some were formulated from teachers' responses. Questions that were premeditated for the interview did not confine teachers' responses but created a sense of flexibility. Teachers were supposed to provide their understanding of assessment as it related to the EMS learning area and explain how their understanding influenced their assessment practices in the classroom.

The interview questions for the study were designed to elicit specific information about teachers' understanding of assessment in the EMS learning area.

The format of the interviews was a traditional question and answer-type structure based on a set of open-ended questions. However, one of their disadvantages was that responses can be so different that the researcher may have a problem to collate and compare information. Interviews for this study were conducted as "reflective conversations" in order to develop rapport with the participants and to allow the discussion to evolve from the teachers themselves.

It was arranged with the teachers that the interviews take place after school, so that the interviews did not impede upon school activities. Interviews took place on three separate occasions in private rooms and they were tape-recorded. Also, all three teachers answered the same questions, thus increasing the comparability of responses (Cohen et al., 2005). Throughout the interview a tape recorder was used so that all the information teachers supplied were recorded (with their permission) to ensure that everything said was captured and preserved for analysis. Recording allowed the researcher to replay the cassette where necessary to ensure the accuracy of data captured. Once the interviews had taken place, the tapes were transcribed so that an analysis of the interviews was completed easily.

3.3.4 PORTFOLIOS

Portfolios contained consciously selected examples of work that were intended to show learners' growth toward important learning outcomes and this was an indicator of teachers' understanding of assessment. The portfolio also displayed teachers' practise of assessment; this was accomplished by looking at the types of assessment included in the learners' portfolio. Observation analysis of learners' portfolios were analysed to determine how teachers' understanding of assessment influenced their practises of classroom assessment as it relates to the EMS learning area. Learner portfolios were analysed with the aid of a portfolio analysis schedule. Appointments were made to visit

teachers during their non-teaching periods allowing the researcher to analyse learner portfolios. Teachers presented learner portfolios in batches of the different divisions within the grade. At random learner portfolios were selected for analysis.

3.4 SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Three grade 9 Economic Management Sciences teachers from one secondary school in the Chatsworth area served as the research participants for this study. Since the study is a qualitative one, the sample size is allowed to be small (Payze, 2002). Chatsworth as a location for the study was chosen due to its close proximity to my area of residence and the multicultural character of the learner population. These teachers were chosen on a convenient sampling method. This method of sampling is chosen with the knowledge that it involves selecting the nearest individuals to serve as respondents (Cohen et al, 2000, p.102). This sampling method was the most appropriate because it was substantially suitable for the researcher to access participants for the study.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGY

"Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data."

(Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p 111)

Data analysis was an ongoing repeated process integrated into all phases of qualitative research. It is a process of selecting, categorising, synthesizing and interpreting data.

Because of this process, all data collected required reading and re-reading in order to develop the clearest pictures of the teacher's assessment practices (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Burns, (2000) suggested that in order to generate findings that transform raw data into new knowledge, a researcher must be capable of engaging in the analysis of the data collected during the research process.

Qualitative research produced an incredible amount of data. It was only in the researcher's analysis of that data that meaningful themes and understandings could be revealed. Analysing the data required a scrupulous and comprehensive approach. Consistent with qualitative research, data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously. Merriam (1998) affirmed the interactive nature of data collection, analysis, and reporting.

I have transcribed and translated the interview data of the three participants for this research project and then analysed the data for common themes in order to answer the research questions. One of the strategies I employed to identify common themes was coding. Coding is the process of classifying and categorizing data into themes, issues and concepts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The data obtained was manually coded, with teachers' similar responses, grouped together. Pattern seeking helped me to make general statements about relationships among categories of data. The data was then compared and analysed. Content analysis will be used help uncover themes and connections. Content analysis is defined by Holtsi (1969) cited in Babbie and Mouton, (2001) as any technique used for aiming inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of data. For the purposes of this study conceptual analysis will be used because it is useful in establishing themes (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Traditional concepts of reliability and validity, vital in surveys and experiments, do not apply to case study research (Basse, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Validity in research ensured that a study is judged by what it should be measuring. Reliability ensured that the research methodology could be replicated and that it is consistent throughout the study (Merriam, 1998).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided the concept of "trustworthiness" as the measure of a case study's truth. Trustworthiness describes the extent to which the conclusions were sensible and accurate in their representation of the research. There were several ways in

which this study's trustworthiness had been developed. This desired trustworthiness was attained by firstly using data collection instruments that were fit for their purpose (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The data collection instruments used, served to ensure that the data generated was trustworthy. Creswell (1998) maintained that multiple sources of data gave continual opportunities to verify the data from one source to another.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted the importance of peer review in the data analysis process. Peers can play a role to test emerging themes and conclusions. A colleague was requested by the researcher to read the transcriptions and analyse schedules to corroborate the themes derived. This made to ensure "peer de-briefing" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.247) to enhance the credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of the study. The use of peer debriefing created an opportunity for critical feedback with a view to establishing whether my research processes and emergent findings were reasonable and justifiable.

The trustworthiness of this study was enhanced by returning transcriptions to the participants for verification. The participants were given free access to transcripts of interviews and were asked to review them for accurateness. Participants were encouraged to reflect upon data collection sessions as transparency was desired to ensure an open relationship between participant and myself. In addition, participants viewed the data and could make adjustments as they desired. Lincoln and Guba (1985) confirmed this as one of the most critical techniques for establishing trustworthiness in case study research.

This study required a deep descriptive data of teachers' understandings and practices of assessment in the EMS learning area, thus open-ended questions and methods were required to probe for such data. The use of interviews and learner portfolios offered a number of methods by which data regarding teachers' understandings and practices of assessment may be accessed (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). By comparing the data obtained from interviews, to the assessments that were accessible in the portfolio, it was possible to establish the authenticity of data collection. Interviews were corroborated by data collected through learner portfolios. Cohen and Manion define triangulation as "the

use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of the aspects of human behaviour” (1989, p. 254). Hence triangulation, assisted not only to reduce the researcher’s bias, but also contributed to increased clarity about how teachers’ understanding of assessment informed their assessment practices

Trustworthiness as a feature qualitative research means at the least, that the processes of the research were carried out fairly; that the products represented as closely as possible the experiences of the people who were studied. The entire endeavor must be grounded in ethical principles about how data are collected and analyzed, how one’s own assumptions and conclusions are checked, how participants are involved, and how results are communicated. (Ely, 1991, p. 93)

A concluding characteristic of trustworthiness is the confidence one has in the researcher, as in a qualitative research, the researcher becomes an integral part of the process and this contributes to the researcher’s subjectivity. My role as the researcher acknowledged teachers’ extensive experience in the school (as a teacher); this could impact on the way data is viewed. It was mentioned earlier that subjectivity was attained through peer review and participants involvement in the findings.

3.7 ETHICAL CONCERNS

The subject of ethics in social research is potentially an extensive and challenging one. Therefore, it is important in a research study that ethical issues are addressed as this provides a form of transparency to the reader.

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) maintained that ethics plays a fundamental role in research, particularly with research involving humans and animals. Nevertheless it is imperative, that research studies follow certain ethical principles. These principles were autonomy, nonmaleficence and beneficence (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 2001, p. 66). In any research, respondents need to give informed consent to participate. This meant that participants must be fully aware about the research in which the interview is going to be used. Fontana and Frey (1994) maintained that informed consent involves “receiving

consent from the subject after he/she has been carefully and truthfully informed about the research” and how the research is to be conducted, disseminated and any possible implications for participating in the study (Cohen et al., 2000). Written informed consent will be crucial in order for them to participate in the research study.

Several aspects of ethical concerns were considered for the course of the research.

Confidentiality and privacy: my role as researcher guaranteed anonymity or permission was requested to identify individual participants. During the course of data collection, the interviews had to be tape recorded, permission was required from the participants and the participants were informed and given assurance that the recordings were preserved and only utilized as means of anonymous data for the sole use of research. Additionally, participants were also assured anonymity and that the use of their names will remain anonymous. Right to privacy means protecting the identity of the participants (Cohen et al., 2000; Fontana & Frey, 1994). The school’s and participants’ right to privacy in this study was maintained by making every effort not to reveal their identities in the final writing of the report. In reporting the findings of the study, I ensured that the names of the participants were not revealed. In this way, it will not be possible for any other persons to identify the participants with any part of the information given in the study, more so that the nature of responses did not have any apparent uniqueness that could jeopardize their anonymity. Identifiable pseudonyms were used as an alternative for their real names and background information minimised.

Debriefing and the right to non-participation (Coolican, 1999), all participants in this research were informed prior to the research about the full nature and rationale of the study. They were enlightened about their role in the study and it was emphasised that if there was any part of the process that they were uncomfortable with, they had the right to withdraw certain information or withdraw (if they wish) from the entire study. This is known as debriefing and right to the non-participation.

3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

There were a few limitations involved in using the research design proposed. There were social and professional limitations. Collectively these limitations posed some threat to the value of the data collected and the conclusions drawn.

The sample in this study was small and inhibited the drawings of generalizations, which was not the main purpose of this qualitative study. Cohen et. al (2000, p. 103) stated that convenience sampling cannot represent any group apart from itself as it “does not seek to generalise about the wider population, for a convenience sample, that is an irrelevance”. It is imperative, however to realize that although this study did not aim to create generalisations, it cannot claim to be a representative of **all** EMS teachers understanding and practices of assessment.

Conversely to this notion, a few participants may be viewed as delimitating; however in light of the intended depth of each participant’s contribution to this research, I do not see it as a limitation towards the purpose of this research. A detailed ethnographic study is ideal for this kind of research. However, the monetary constraints and time are factors which discard the study being an ethnographic one.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter has dealt with the research strategies implemented during the course of this study. Only the research strategies which were followed in this research study have been discussed. The most important method of data generation followed in this research study was semi-structured interviews and learner portfolios. Furthermore, the interviews and learners’ portfolios were analysed. The sampling procedures and data collection plan had been discussed in great detail and the issue of trustworthiness and the research design limitations have been argued and justified. The next chapter will provide the analysis and findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As stated in previous chapters, this research explored three grade 9 Economic Management Science teachers' understanding and practice of assessment. This case study has allowed me to gain a rich insight into teachers' understandings of assessment which influenced their assessment practices in the classroom. The teachers' understanding and practices were the main focus of organizing and analyzing the data. Learners' portfolios were analysed with the intention of to determining how teachers' understandings influences their practice assessment within the EMS learning area. The results emanating from this study were organized in formal themes derived from the participants' interview transcripts and the observation analysis of learner portfolios.

Once the interviews had taken place, data was managed by first transcribing all responses from the audio tape recorder onto paper. This allowed me to become familiar with the content of the interview and to be "in a position to note subtle nuances in the responses of the interviewees" (Brown and Dowling; 1998, p. 172). Fictitious names (Jenna, Mary and Mike) were used to record each participant's responses. The transcripts were then read through and compared with the portfolio analysis schedule. Thereafter, categories of analysis were drawn; data was organized into categories that made it easy to identify any relationship among different aspects and themes that emerged from the participants' responses. The main objective of the analysis was to find ways of gathering units of relevant meaning into categories and show how the themes from data represent the constructed categories.

Teachers' articulated an unclear, uncertain and anxious understanding of assessment which influenced their assessment practices. This was because teachers still continue to hold on to what they know, understand and what was familiar to them and most certainly

what was valuable to them. This is why they understand and practice assessment in the way that they do.

Understanding and practices of assessment were shaped by:

- Participants' school environment such as the school's resource context
- The school's assessment policy
- Teacher participants' training and background
- Inadequate professional development and support
- Multiple assessment demands
- Difficulty in interpreting assessment policy
- Assessment of learning

4.2 A NARRATIVE VIGNETTE DESCRIPTION OF THE EMPIRICAL SITE

Prior to entering into the detailed findings and conversations held with the participants, it was imperative to provide a thick description of the organizational environment of the school at which the participants were employed so, as to how to provide a context within which the data was generated. The term thick descriptions was first used by Ryle (1949) and later by Geertz (1973) who applied it in [ethnography](#). According to Geertz (1973) a thick description explains the context of the practices and discourse that take place within a society, such that these practices become meaningful to an 'outsider'. This requires thick description.

Classroom assessment takes place on an ongoing basis in an extensive variation of classroom environments. When taking account of teachers' classroom assessment practices, several aspects such as school organization, traditions and school assessment policy must also be taken into account. Factors such as the school resources, the number of students per classroom all contribute to a teacher's perceived practicality of assessment practices. It is for this reason the school context is described.

This research was conducted in a secondary, government school located in a residential area in Chatsworth (a working class suburb in Kwa Zulu-Natal). The school has just over one thousand three hundred (1300) learners in classes ranging from grade 8-12. The parents of the learners who attend this school are predominantly working class. Learners are of mixed race, a mixture of forty percent Black African and sixty percent Indian learners. Learners are attracted to the school because of the high pass rate (100% attained for the past five years). In the recent years the school had to deal with several challenges related to handling administrative duties and dealing with the social problems of learners, as the majority of the learners come from backgrounds of single parent homes, foster homes and drug abuse is rife in the wider community.

4.2.1 SCHOOLS RESOURCE CONTEXT

The school once had a library resource centre. However, due to the shortage of classrooms the library had to be converted into a computer room. The computer room was used to teach Computer Applications Technology and Information Systems to the grade ten, eleven and twelve learners. The school has a laboratory and a technical drawing centre, two sick bays (male/females) and a counselling room. With regard to the school's financial status, the school is a section 21 non-profit institution. This means that the DoE allocates a subsidy to the school but the school governing body is responsible for the school's assets and liabilities. The DoE only subsidises twenty nine teachers, two of whom are administrative personnel. The other four teachers are employed and paid by the governing bodies of the school. Two security guards are also subsidized by the DoE as crime and drug peddling are rife in the area in which the school is located.

4.2.2 SCHOOL'S ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Teachers were asked if their school had an assessment policy. Their responses revealed the following about the school's assessment policy; in turn this revealed how the school's assessment policy shaped teachers' assessment practices.

Extracts from interview responses revealed:

Jenna: Yes...Assessment policy in general, which applies to all learning areas... made up of controlled tests and term exam...sometimes projects, if there's time.

Mary: Yes an assessment policy, this includes mostly tests and exams, two controlled tests per term and end of the term exam... is important as these tests get learners ready to pass and these tests marks are added to learners' end of the year marks...

Mike: Well yes, our assessment policy is a guideline to assessments. Assessment takes place in many forms; a term end basis... controlled tests and exams, projects.

It was apparent that management structures at participants' schools were rigid and structured with regard to assessment practices as a formal testing policy was central to the school's assessment policy. It was revealed from all three respondents that the school's assessment policy had concentrated mainly on controlled tests and exams as the school used a formal testing assessment policy. It was indicated by Mary that the controlled tests were regarded as important because they assisted learners in preparation for their final examinations and the scores they had attained in these controlled tests contributed to their final exam scores.

It was also revealed from the observation analysis of learners' portfolios that the school's assessment policy focused mainly on controlled tests and exams. It was the beginning of third school term in which these observations were made; learners' portfolios had contained five copies of controlled tests and the half year exams. Learners' portfolios consisted of copies of question papers of controlled tests; exam papers and learners' answer sheets. This observation was consistent with Jenna's, Mike's and Mary's learner portfolios. It was also evident that learners' portfolios were characterised by mostly formal testing methods as described by Jenna, Mary and Mike. This was conclusive to the formal structure of the school's assessment policy. Learner portfolios provided an insight into the way teachers' practised assessment and this indicated that teachers' assessment practices conformed to the school's structured assessment policy.

As a result from teachers' responses and the observation analysis of learners' portfolios, it was indicated that teachers' understanding of assessment practices were subject to bureaucratic practices that directed their understanding and practice of assessment. As a

result, their educational goals were often shaped by such constraints, which may have controlled teachers' understandings of assessment, thus influencing their practices of assessment in relation to EMS (grade 9).

There were several other challenging issues which influenced teachers' understanding and practices of assessment. I will discuss what factors influenced teachers' understanding of assessment and how their understanding influenced their practice of assessment in relation to EMS. Several themes have emerged; these will be discussed below.

4.2.3 MULTIPLE ASSESSMENT DEMANDS

Teachers were asked how assessment took place at their school. Their responses provided a great insight as to how their understanding of the school assessment policy influenced the way that they practise assessment; this placed several assessment demands on teachers'.

Responses from interviews revealed:

JENNA:...two types of testing methods; our school has an internal testing programme...covers two control tests per term...other forms of assessments such as the common tasks assessments (CTA).CTA requires teachers to administer each prescribed task...involves paperwork, marking, peer and teacher assessment...is a stressful task...

MIKE: Assessment is about testing what learners know... test how much they have learnt on a term basis. What is taught in the classroom is tested in the control tests, which we set and mark... we have CASS in our school which is done at the end of every term; this is mainly assignments and projects.

MARY: Assessment is managed by the schools testing policies. The programme of assessment...made of control tests and exams...Other aspects of assessment include CTA's...rather complex and lengthy procedure to complete. Both of these forms of assessment are very important as their final examinations are based on these CTA's.

Jenna revealed that there were two 'testing methods' which were common at her school. She first described the schools internal testing programme, which comprised of the two controlled tests as being one 'testing method'. She had indicated the other testing method as the common tasks assessment. Jenna disclosed that CTA's were a demanding task as

teachers including herself were required to administer tasks which were prepared by the DoE and this entailed intensive paperwork, marking and teacher and peer assessments.

Mike viewed the key aspects to assessment as the traditional pre-OBE methods of assessing were discussed in chapter 2. He considered that assessment comprised of only formal tests and examinations. He was of the belief that assessment was to test what learners know and have absorbed which was tested at the end of every school term. Mike's idea of assessment coincided with the school's internal testing policy. He explained that this form of assessment was prepared and marked by himself and his colleagues. He revealed that assessment also comprised of projects and assignments, which were given to learners at the end of every term.

Mary indicated that her practice of assessment was influenced and dictated by the school's testing policies. She had revealed that the programme of assessment comprised of controlled tests and exams. She acknowledged that other aspects of assessment incorporated CTA's. She felt that the completion of CTA's was a prolonged and difficult process. Mary reflected that the both the internal testing programme and CTA's were significant as the final promotion score.

It was evident from the observation analysis of learners' portfolios that teachers viewed the school assessment policy and CTA's as a form of assessment. Teachers' organization of learner portfolios indicated what their anticipation of assessment was. Learners' portfolios had been divided into three sections which were namely tests and exams and CTA's. Jenna's, Mike's and Mary's learners' portfolios were consistent in their layout; this revealed that learner portfolios served the purpose of being standardized. It was not possible to note the difficulties of the demands of CTA's as Jenna and Mary indicated, as CTA's were only going to be administered in term four and data collection had taken place in the third term.

Once more, it was comprehensible that the rigid school assessment policy influenced teachers' understanding of assessment and this in turn has influenced their assessment practices. The preparation of the controlled tests and the facilitation of the CTA's were demanding and stressful for teachers as noted from the interview extracts. Teachers'

assessment practices were summative (also known as input-based), this was apparent from both teachers' responses and the observation analysis of learners' portfolios.

Teachers were asked to identify the various kinds of assessment strategies that they utilized in their classes. This revealed that they felt that certain assessment strategies were demanding:

The following extracts reflect this:

Jenna: Tests, class work, assignments, I don't really use groupwork assessment...is rather time consuming, it not easy, especially when you have 40 and more learners.

Probe: What about the other assessment strategies?

Jenna: I feel the same about the rest!

Mike: Cyclical tests and exams are the common assessments...I don't feel right any other types.

Probe: Why don't you like to use peer or other types of assessment?

Mike: You know how learners are, they are disruptive, then they want to cling to their friends, it's just not on... there is no time for all of this... marking learners tests and exams just take up a lot of time, seriously there's not time...

Mary: I try and use a range of assessment approaches, groupwork, peer assessments but I just fail with assessing learners

Probe: Why do you think you fail when it comes you assessing learners?

Mary: As designing criteria or what you call... Rubrics are difficult to make and the ones in the textbook don't match with our marksheets.

Jenna's responses indicated that summative forms of assessment were the usual assessment methods she practised. She had a feeling of disapproval towards the use of groupwork assessment as she felt that groupwork was time consuming. Another factor which did not make it possible for her to practise groupwork assessment and other forms of assessment practices was the large number of learners. She appeared to have developed a negative disposition to assessment practices as she did not feel competent about.

Mike revealed that the common assessment practices he implemented were cyclical tests and exams. Mike showed great reluctance to consider the practice of other forms of assessment. He declared that he disliked peer assessment because of learners' unruly behavior. He found that learners resisted separation from their friends; in turn this caused learners to become unruly. Mike strongly believed that this approach was not possible

and was impractical because of contextual factors and of disruptive learners and time limitations. Mike explained that the marking of learners' tests and exams consumed a lot of his time. He felt that time constraints impacted on the choices he had to make with regard to assessment.

Mary attempted to use a variety of assessment approaches but she did not feel as if she was succeeding in effectively assessing learners. After probing she failed in assessing learners, she claimed that designing criteria which she refers to it as rubrics were complicated to create. Interestingly she indicated that the designing criteria/rubrics were not adequate as they did not 'match' 'our' (hers and her colleagues) marksheets. It appeared as if Mary was uncertain about the purpose of rubrics/designing criteria and this influenced her assessment practices. Mary's comments indicated her lack of confidence (uncertainty) and confusion with regard to assessment. She struggled to reconcile the structured programme of the school (marksheet) with assessment methods that the learning area policy and textbooks were advocating. This made her feel very inadequate, insecure and very frustrated.

Teachers' identified that tests and exams were imperative methods of assessing learners. There were several reasons as to why they did not implement other strategies of assessment in EMS. One of the reasons was time, the other being large class numbers and learners' disruptive behavior. An additional reason was the construction of the assessment criterion and its confliction to the original marksheet.

4.3 INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' TRAINING AND BACKGROUND

In each one of the three interviews, each participant was asked a range of questions ranging from questions on biography to questions that tried to establish teachers' understandings and practices of assessment as it relates to the EMS learning area.

The teaching experience of two teachers was twenty six years (Jenna and Mike) and whilst the other (Mary) had taught for 18 years. This suggested that these teachers had undertaken their pre-service teacher education training during the apartheid era. This is

important to note as their pre-service training prepared them to teach a content based curriculum in which a written examination was a key mode of assessing learners. Like many other teachers in South Africa, C2005 and OBE represented a significantly new approach to teaching and assessment. For example, the National Assessment Policy in the General Education and Training Band Grade R to 9 and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) encourages teachers to use continuous assessment rather than just end-of-year examinations (a well-established tradition in school education in South Africa) (Vandeyar & Killen, 2006).

4.3.1 TEACHERS' TRAINING IN ASSESSMENT AND EMS

Teachers were asked if they were trained to teach EMS and how they began to teach EMS. Teachers' responses provided an insight as to how teachers have responded to demands of assessment in relation to EMS.

Extracts from interview responses revealed:

Jenna: I was not trained in any way; ...neither did I choose to teach it... I was given this subject to teach.

Mike: I was not given training to teach EMS but...I can teach EMS...not a specialist... I was kind of placed in a position to teach EMS

Mary: I'm certainly not a specialist in EMS, for me it's an auxiliary learning area which I requested to teach... I don't really have any training but I do my best to teach it..

From the above transcript Jenna, Mike and Mary clearly indicated that they were not trained to teach EMS. Jenna and Mike's responses revealed that EMS was simply imposed upon them to teach. Mike stated that although he was not trained to teach EMS and considered that he had the capability to teach EMS. However, Mary stated that EMS was an additional learning area which she inquired to teach. Mary confirmed that she did not receive any training to teach EMS nevertheless she made an effort to teach the learning area. After probing why Jenna and Mike were given EMS to teach if they were not trained.

Jenna's and Mike's responses revealed:

Jenna: I guess, because I am a qualified commerce teacher. I was a business economics teacher but now I am an EMS teacher.

Mike: I don't really know... I have a background to teach Economics and Accounting... EMS does fall under the Commerce Department. You know, I have been teaching Accounting and Economic for a while now, its 26 years...

Jenna presumed that the reason for her being chosen to teach EMS was merely because she was a qualified commerce teacher. She acknowledged that previously she was a Business Economics teacher and but now has to see herself as an EMS teacher. This suggested that Jenna was not prepared to teach EMS as it was simply enforced upon her because of her existing knowledge and previous teaching experience of Business Economics. Mike sounded unsure at first as to why he was chosen to teach EMS. With some thought he considered that his experience (background – 26 years) of teaching accounting and economics made him a suitable candidate for being chosen to teach EMS. In addition, he noted that EMS is a learning area which was classified in the Commerce Department. This made it is acceptable for him to teach EMS.

After probing why Mary requested to teach EMS, it was revealed that:

Mary: I was curious to teach EMS as I love Economics, I thought that EMS will be similar to Eco...and Economics was my major so I wanted to try teaching EMS as I thought it included aspects similar to Economics...

Mary indicated that it was her interest to teach EMS. She considered that EMS will be similar to Economics. It was disclosed that her passion for Economics made her choose to teach EMS. Because Economics was her specialization (major) she decided to attempt to teach EMS. She considered it to comprise comparable aspects.

It was revealed from the transcripts of teacher responses that all three teachers declared that the Economic Management Sciences was not a specialization subject. However, it was apparent that Jenna and Mike were not given an option to teach EMS as it was

imposed upon them. Mary on the other hand requested to teach EMS as she considered that EMS shared similar aspects with Economics which she had a passion for. The above responses indicated that all three teachers were not trained to teach EMS but simply shared a background of teaching subjects which were common in the Commerce field.

The three teachers involved in this study understood assessment by firstly outlining their thoughts and feelings of the curriculum as it related to assessment. There was a strong connection of their teacher training and background which influenced their understanding of the assessment.

4.3.2 TEACHERS' SENTIMENTS OF ASSESSMENT

Teachers were asked if they enjoyed assessment in EMS and if they felt confident when assessing learners in EMS.

Their responses are captured below:

Jenna: ...don't enjoy assessment...too demanding... it's only 2 ½ years I'm teaching EMS...It's demanding...I was a Business Economics teacher...assessing learners in EMS is a different ballgame... if I had some type of background...be better in assessing learners EMS... I have to cope with learning what is be taught in EMS...how to assess learners...separate thing altogether.I'd feel confident ...if I had some kind of guidelines...

Mike: I don't really...there's too much of work... lots of admin in assessment of EMS. Learner portfolios,CASS sheets,marking of CTA's puts a cherry on the top...I am confident about assessment in EMS, but doing all of this work; admin... makes me feel overloaded... makes me lose my confidence.

Mary: I enjoy assessment in EMS...the different methods of assessment make me enjoy assessment...sometimes it's burdensome to plan...I feel confident when it comes to marking of assessment in EMS but as far as designing and planning of assessment... I don't feel that much confident.

Jenna stated uneasily that she did not enjoy assessment in EMS as she felt it was too demanding. After probing, it was revealed that Jenna felt this way as she had taught EMS for a short period and she did not have many years of teaching experience in EMS. It was noted that Jenna felt anxious about assessment in EMS. She indicated that assessing learners in EMS as compared to Business Economics was a different 'ballgame'. She indicated that assessment in EMS was drastically disparate. She believed that if she had

previous experience or training, she would have considered herself to be more proficient in assessing learners in EMS. Jenna felt that she has to deal with learning the content in EMS and how to assess learners. By Jenna stating that she had to 'cope' indicated that she was stressed and felt uneasy by the demands of understanding and practising assessment in EMS. She described what was being taught in EMS and how to assess learners in EMS as separate entities.

Jenna expressed her lack of confidence when assessing learners in EMS. She felt this way because she needed prescribed guidelines which could have provided her with details when assessing learners. These guidelines would have made her familiar to the aims in streamlining particular processes which were important in assessing learners. In turn, this might have made her feel confident when assessing learners in EMS.

Mike experienced a strong feeling of aversion towards assessment in EMS. He emphatically stated that there was an intensive amount of work assigned, particularly with regard to administration. Some of the mentioned tasks which contributed to Mike's intensive workload of assessment were learner portfolios, CASS sheets and CTA's. Mike's description of marking of CTA' as a 'cherry on the top' was intended to allow the reader to grasp the irony of the CTA'S being a negative aspect in the assessment policy. He described marking of CTA' as a 'cherry on the top' in a negative light as it intensified his workload. Mike felt confident about assessment in EMS but reiterated that demands of administration made him feel burdened; consequently this had an effect on him in maintaining his confidence of assessment in EMS.

Mary indicated that she enjoyed assessment in EMS. The diverse techniques of assessing made it possible for her to enjoy assessment in EMS. She admitted that the planning of assessment was onerous. Mary felt confident in the actual scoring of the assessment tasks but felt uncertain of the process involving the creation and preparation of assessments in EMS. It appeared as if Mary was capable of administering and marking assessment tasks, yet she declared that the designing and planning of assessment tasks was a challenge which did not allow her to come to believe that she was confident.

All three participants revealed their lack of confidence of assessment. It was disclosed that insufficient guidelines, designing and planning of assessment were challenging and the administration workload were cognitive factors which determined their degree of confidence.

Each of the three participants were asked questions on their biographical details about EMS and assessment in EMS. They were then asked to reflect on their feelings about the new curriculum as it related to EMS assessment. These responses about their feelings towards the curriculum as it related to EMS assessment provided me with an insight into their thoughts and feelings; in turn this allowed me to understand what influenced and shaped their understandings and practices of assessment.

4.3.3 FRUSTRATION AND ANXIETY

Teachers were asked how they felt about assessment in the new curriculum. Several responses indicated that teachers were anxious and at the same time frustrated and stressed about assessment in the new curriculum.

Extracts from interview responses revealed:

Jenna: This change of curriculum makes no sense to me, I don't want to get into it right now...this whole thing about curriculum relating to assessment is just some copycat, which we don't want! I'm never going to understand...it's a waste of time...

Mike: I feel that assessment in the new curriculum definitely lacks direction at the moment ... there is variation from school to school...we need is some sort of standardization...The best way to test learners is the way we were tested...test, and exams...

Mary: There is a good and bad side to the new curriculum...The good side is that the new curriculum makes assessment sound interesting and exciting... role plays, peer assessment which is continuous...bad side is that there's a lot of challenges that come with it which makes it difficult and there is no time to be creative...therefore lots cannot be achieved...

Jenna indicated that the change of curriculum made no logic and found that the

curriculum was uncertain to her. She did not want to talk about it as she was frustrated about the change of curriculum as it related to assessment in EMS. She expressed infuriation and annoyance about the change of curriculum and its relation to EMS assessment. It can be interpreted that she felt that the curriculum lacked originality as it was copied from other countries and was implemented without much thought. She insistently asserted and generalized by using the words 'we don't want', this implied that this was a general feeling amongst her and her colleagues that they did not want to be any element of the change in the curriculum. It appeared that Jenna was upset and frustrated and she did not favour the change of curriculum as it related to assessment. She determinedly believed that there was no hope of her understanding the curriculum change as it related to assessment. She reflected that it was not worth the effort as she felt that the curriculum change was of no significance and value to her.

Mike's response revealed that he was discontented with the curriculum change as it related to assessment. Undoubtedly, he felt that the curriculum could not make clear what he must achieve presently. It could be presupposed that the curriculum lacked direction for Mike as it was unclear in terms of management, guidance, supervision. Mike used the word 'we', it can be interpreted that he was speaking about himself and others (colleagues). He felt that he required more explicit and definite guidance so that there could be what he referred to as 'standardization' of assessment. Mike considered that assessment forms like tests and exams were used in the past were the best means of assessing learners.

Mary appeared to have an inclination to have favoured the new curriculum, although she admitted that the curriculum included objectionable aspects. It was apparent that Mary easily recognized several methods of assessing learners. This indicated Mary's familiarity with assessment. She sounded enthusiastic and seemed to have the ability to draw a fine distinction about the new curriculum as it related to assessment. Mary indicated that several challenges of the curriculum existed which made assessment difficult and this made her feel distressed. Time was a constrictive factor. Fixed time frames made it difficult for to practise her creativity in the completion of assessment tasks.

All three teachers expressed a sense of frustration about the new curriculum as it related to assessment. A general feeling which surfaced was that they could not understand the objectives about the change of curriculum as it related to EMS as discussed above. Jenna's and Mike's personal belief had influenced their understanding of the curriculum as it related to assessment. Mary felt that the constraint of time did not allow her to practise assessment. It is noticeable that these teachers' understanding of the curriculum as it related to assessment was influenced by several factors which made teachers feel full of anxiety and disquietedness.

4.4 INADEQUATE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

Teachers were asked if they had attended any workshops or professional development training in EMS and if they were of any assistance to regarding their understanding and practices of assessment.

Responses extracted from interview read:

Mike: Yes, I have been for two workshops... about four years ago, it was informative... several policies were discussed...don't feel competent in the classroom when it comes putting theory into practice... assessment policies must be easy to apply...these workshops must take place often so that I can have a clearer picture as to assessment must be done...

Mary: No, I have not attended any workshops, no such professional development training in EMS assessment...if I attended any of these, I would consider myself qualified in...err with this whole assessment thing...OBE approach...

Jenna: No...I can't remember attending any of these workshops...I have been to other learning area workshops...workshops are just a "quick fix" in making us feel good about assessment in EMS... for me it does not help in the classroom at all...The Department of Education needs to realize that one or two workshops are not going to make change in EMS happen overnight.

Mike stated that he had attended only two workshops which had taken place four years ago. He acknowledged that these workshops were enlightening. Mike continued to feel incompetent when it had come to applying knowledge of assessment into the classroom. He felt that the current policies in particular assessment policies must be made accessible

and simple enough to be applied to a classroom context. Mike suggested that these workshops should take place frequently, as they workshops will assist him to improve and develop his knowledge of how assessment should be administered and conducted. He suggested that these workshops should be developmental and structured in a way that will assist and facilitate teacher learning.

Mary admitted that she did not attend any workshops or professional development training. She strongly believed that if she had attended any of these workshops or professional development training, she would regard herself as being more competent in her assessment practices. She felt that the lack of professional development has disadvantaged her. She felt inadequate in term of both EMS and assessment in EMS.

Jenna admitted that she did not attend any of the EMS workshops. However, Jenna has reflected on her previous experience of attending other workshops in other learning areas. She described that workshops were a temporary solution of making teachers feel ‘good’ about teaching. She revealed that workshops did not assist her. She felt that workshops had to be carefully planned so as to sustain learning. They should not be intermittent occurrences.

A common feeling that surfaced was that the three teachers did not receive adequate professional development and in some instance did not attend any workshops. Teachers’ responses revealed that inadequate professional development and support influenced their understanding of EMS assessment which in turn influenced their understanding and practices of EMS assessment. It was indicated that more than a few workshops were required to assist teachers’ to understand and implement new concepts of assessment practices.

4.5 DIFFICULTY IN INTERPRETING ASSESSMENT POLICY

Teachers’ were asked if they were familiar with the assessment policy and if they felt that the assessment policy had improved their assessment practice/s. If they agreed or disagreed they were asked to resonate how and why the assessment policy shaped had not shaped their assessment practices in EMS.

All three teachers had identified with the EMS policy as being existent. The three they described the policy as being challenging to apply.

The following extracts read:

JENNA: ...putting policy into practice is challenging...the challenges are created... not having the recommended or appropriate learning and teaching resources...interpretation of policy into the planning of assessments becomes complicated... I need some kind of support to change in my feelings towards these policies...

Mary:... difficult in structuring my assessments according to policy guidelines ...factors... classroom sizes and lack of resources... the subject assessment guidelines assisted me in being more focused on the assessment standards and learning outcomes when planning my own, other than school's assessments...

MIKE: Teachers were not consulted when the EMS assessment policy like the RNCS and other polices was being made...There are many challenges that I face...make sense of the terminologies...trying to interpret the policy and integrating it into the structuring of assessments.

Mary and Jenna indicated that the assessment policy was not easy to apply because of the limited access of the resources. Jenna and Mary shared similar thoughts. The limitation of resources had lead them to experience difficulty in the application of the assessment policy in EMS. Jenna was almost pleading for support for her to change her attitude towards the assessment policy.

Although Mary indicated her difficulty in application of the assessment policy, she believed that the assessment policy had positively assisted her practice of assessment. It allowed her to focus on assessment standards and learner outcomes whilst planning assessments individually which was not part of the of the school's assessment policy.

Mike revealed that he was not given sufficient opportunity to engage in the planning of the assessment policy. He felt despondent that he had to implement a prescribed policy into the planning of EMS assessments. He stated that his challenge was the interpretation of terminologies from the assessment policy. Mike was of the impression that the language in the policy was far too complex to interpret. This did not allow him to translate terminologies in which he had to integrate into the structuring of his assessments.

It was divulged from teachers' responses that the assessment policy did not influence teachers' understanding and practise of assessment. It was disclosed that teachers' experienced difficulties in the application of the assessment policy. The limitation of resources, classroom space and the interpretation of terminologies played an imperative role in the way teachers conceptualized the assessment policy. The assessment policy did not reorientate teachers' understanding and practices of assessment but had placed them in turmoil.

4.6 INTERNAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS INFLUENCE TEACHERS' PRACTICES OF ASSESSMENT

It was imperative to find out if teachers' understanding of learner outcomes and assessment standards influenced their understanding and practice of assessment. Teachers' were asked this question as it was noted in the literature that assessment understanding and practices are fundamental in achieving learner outcomes and assessment standards. Teachers were asked if they were familiar with learner outcomes and assessment standards. If they were, they were asked to discuss and explain the importance and integration of learner outcomes and assessment standards and assessment practices as it relation to EMS.

When teachers' were asked if learner outcomes and assessment standards contributed to their assessment practice, it was revealed that the three teachers' acknowledged that the school's contextual factors did not allow them to apply the learner outcomes and assessment standards in their practice of assessment. Thus, learner outcomes and assessment standards did not contribute to teachers' assessment practices.

Extracts from interviews read:

Jenna: ...It's difficult to apply outcomes and assessment standards in the classroom...

Mike: ...assessment standards and outcomes...are relevant...very challenging to be achieved... as our school context makes it difficult.

Mary: Assessment standards and learner outcomes sounds really good and fancy... fit in with the EMS learning area very well... It's a complex task...

All three teachers concurred that the application of the assessment standards and made learner outcomes was a multifaceted task to achieve in the practice of assessment in their classroom/school. Jenna, Mary and Mike revealed that the school's resource context did not allow them to focus on the assessment standards and learner outcomes when practicing assessment in EMS.

Jenna: ...difficult to achieve...large class numbers, average 40 per class... textbooks not revised... not enough textbooks...accessible...large number we have in classrooms. The outcomes and assessment standards seem too demanding...learners need...tested and assessed...various methods...resources are limited.

Mike: ...difficult to implement groupwork ...testing programme...take most of my time... I find it hard to concentrate on learner outcomes and assessment standard...it's not pertinent to implement in every school...pointless trying to use these...curriculum is much more doable for much more resourceful schools...

Mary: ...to integrate into lessons... space and teaching aids are the issues...discipline... an issue...large numbers of learners...engage in groupwork...learning outcomes and assessment standards must be reviewed and schools situation must be considered ...

Jenna stated that the large numbers of learners, old textbooks (not revised) and the shortage of textbooks prohibited the achievement of assessment standards and learner outcomes a complex task. She indicated that the learner outcomes and assessment standards were demanding as there were several methods of assessing learners and resources were limited.

Mike experienced difficulty in accomplishing learner outcomes and assessment standards. He disclosed that it was difficult for him to implement groupwork as the school's assessment policy was time consuming which took away most of his time. It appeared that Mike was of the impression that groupwork was the only means of

achieving assessment standards and learner outcomes. He actually saw the internal testing programme that was prescribed by his school as ‘outside’ of the assessment standards and learner outcomes. Mike felt strongly that the implementation of assessment standards and learner outcomes were not relevant to his school assessment practices. It can be understood that Mike felt that the assessment standards and learner outcomes can only be achieved if there were resources available as he was the opinion that assessment standards and learner outcomes can only be implemented in schools where resources were available.

Mary found that the incorporation of assessment standards and learner outcomes for her assessment was a difficult mission. Mary stated that class size and teacher resources were the concerns which did not enable her to incorporate assessment standards and learner outcomes in her assessment practices. Discipline was another concern to Mary when she had implemented groupwork. This suggested that Mary was sufficiently competent to plan groupwork but found it difficult to monitor discipline. She felt that all the components with regard to assessment standards and learning outcomes had to be evaluated and the school’s physical condition must be thought about carefully.

The class size was not the only a barrier to teachers’ implementing assessment standards and learner outcomes when practising assessment. Resource limitation, school’s assessment policy and discipline impeded their practise of incorporating assessment standard’s and learners outcomes to their assessment practice.

4.7 TEACHERS’ UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF ASSESSMENT: ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING

Teachers’ were given a case study (see appendix- interview schedule) and they had to respond to several questions which were based on it. These questions pointed towards their understandings and practices of assessment in relation to the EMS learning area. Teachers’ were asked about their understanding of assessment, the reasons/purpose of why they assess, they were asked to discuss goals of assessment and the role of being an assessor.

Extract from interviews read:

Jenna: Assessment is about testing what learners have learnt... to find out what they understand and what they don't, their exams and test results show this... assessment helps learners pass their term tests.

Mary: ...it's a two way process, indicates learners progress... what remedial work I have to do...find out knowledge learners have been taught... identify how to improve teaching ... will indicate to learners if they can pass or fail ...teachers can realize if they have taught content properly.

Mike: Assessment is when learners' progress from one grade to the next.... assessment is to help the learners identify with what is difficult... with this they can improve in the next tests and exams...to determine if learners have understood what is being taught, their marks from their term tests will show if they have understood what was taught.

Teachers' understanding of assessment pointed towards the purpose of 'assessment of learning'. Jenna's, Mike's and Mary's responses revealed that their practice of assessment were summative in nature, as tests and exams were mentioned as a common understanding and practice of assessment. Jenna's and Mike's understanding of assessment were rooted in the domains of testing. Mary indicated that assessment provided her with feedback to scaffold next steps to improve her teaching. The three teachers' indicated the aim of assessment was used to confirm what content knowledge learners have grasped. Assessment of learning was used a tool to indicate learners grades. Jenna, Mike and Mary revealed that assessment was used to demonstrate whether or not learners have met the requirements of passing or failing the grade.

Teachers used 'assessment of learning' as they used assessment to provide statements of proficiency for learners. Teachers' understanding and practise of assessment were summative (see chapter 2) as it intended to certify learners performance, this informed learners' scores which indicated if they are promoted.

Assessment was completed once content had been taught, yet again teachers understanding of assessment promoted 'assessment of learning'. In assessment of learning, the result of learners are expressed symbolically generally as marks on letter grades and summarised as averages of marks across several content areas.

Extract from interviews read:

Jenna: ... my role as an assessor is to be able to set tests and exams...this is important as it determines learners' term marks...

Mike: I fulfill being an assessor by measuring learner's progress through a variety of methods such as controlled tests and exams, these marks help learners to pass the year...

Mary... I see my responsibility as an assessor by using learners' results as a means of feedback...

Jenna's understanding of the role of being an assessor was based on the ability to administrate summative forms of assessment (see chapter 2). Mike perceived the role of being an assessor by being able to evaluate learners' performance by several assessment strategies. Mary expressed that the role of an assessor was to have the ability to use learners' scores as an indication of feedback. Teachers' articulated their role of assessment by creating tests, marking of tests and exams. Teachers' role of being assessors indicated the purpose of 'assessment of learning'.

Extract from interviews revealed teachers' practices of assessment:

Jenna: ...tests and exams are the most important means of assessment...their tests marks provides me with an insight of learners' development.

Mary: I practice assessment in many ways informal and formal ways... class tests, controlled exams, homework is assessed.

Mike: assessment is practiced at the end of the term...most of assessments are tests and exams... I can't really focus on other types of assessment as I'm always in caught up in a race to finish content....

Jenna revealed that formal testing was fundamental method of assessment, as it assisted by assessing the accuracy of the learners' performance. Mary revealed that her practice of assessment varied by formal, informal means of assessing. Mike's practise of assessment relied on formal methods of assessing. He felt that he could not have implemented other strategies of assessment as he was pressured to complete content coverage.

Teachers' revealed that summative assessment was a popular means of their assessment practices in EMS. It can be noted that the bulk of teacher practices of assessment were taken up marking and grading tests which signaled the purpose of assessment as

‘assessment of learning’. There was a strong emphasis of summative assessment on comparing learners’ progress; and feedback to learners comes in the form of marks or grades, with little advice for improvement.

The observation analysis of learners’ portfolios’ indicated that teachers’ understanding of assessment (‘assessment for learning’) influenced their practise of assessment in relation to the EMS learning area. All learners’ portfolios’ indicated that several tests and exams were used as a key method of feedback to learners which was presented in the form of marks.

4.8 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Teachers’ teachers training and background influenced their understanding of the curriculum as it related to assessment. They were reluctant to accept and understand and practice assessment. Teachers had undertaken their pre-service teacher education training during the apartheid era, this prepared them to teach a content based curriculum and a written examination was a key mode of assessing learners. Teachers were familiar with the pre-OBE understanding and practices of assessment. This was valuable to them, thus their understanding and practices of assessment were inclined towards the pre-OBE approach of assessment.

Management structures at participants’ schools were controlling with regard to assessment practices as a schools assessment policy was the most important method of assessing learners. Formal tests helped learners in the final promotion score. As a result, teachers understanding of assessment practices were subject to bureaucratic practices that directed their understanding and practice of assessment.

These teachers’ did not feel confident in assessment of EMS and they considered that workshops played significant role in their understanding of assessment and in their classroom practice. In a way the curriculum has allowed these teachers’ feeling incompetent. As a result teachers’ felt anxious and frustrated with the curriculum as it

related to assessment. Teachers' did receive adequate support and professional development which created added pressure for the teacher to interpret assessment policies and applying learner outcomes and assessment standards.

Contextual factors influenced teachers' understanding and practise of assessment. Due to the issues of discipline, groupwork, and the lack of resources and time these teachers were anxious and frustrated in understanding assessment. The class sizes were too large, resources are limited and the space of the classrooms was difficult to manage other forms of assessment. The availability of varied and relevant tools for the effective application of classroom assessment was critical in supporting teachers to address the specific needs.

Teachers understand and practise assessment within the framework of 'assessment of learning' seeing that their understanding and practise of assessment revealed to be summative in nature and feedback was provided to learners in the form of marks or grades, with little advice for improvement.

It can be derived that teachers' continue to hold onto what is familiar to them, what they understand, what they have previous knowledge of which influenced their understanding and practise of assessment.

4.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on the analysis of data gathered on grade 9 EMS teachers understandings and practices if assessment. The chapter that follows will present the finding s and recommendations to the study.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION OF CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter first gives a brief overview of the research findings, then discusses grade 9 teachers' understanding assessment in relation to the EMS learning area it then explores how these teachers' understanding of assessment influences their practice/s of classroom assessment in the context of the EMS learning area. In my discussion, I link findings to the guiding research questions and to the literature reviewed in chapter 2. The discussion attempts to illuminate classroom teachers' understanding and practice of assessment relation to the EMS learning area. The interview process was successful as teachers understanding of assessment was made explicit and appeared to be consistent with their practices. The analysis of learner portfolios also provided an insight as to how teacher understanding of assessment informed their practices. Even though, the sample in this exploratory research was small, the findings were interesting providing broad implications.

5.2 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

A key intention of this study was to explore grade 9 teachers' understanding of assessment and to determine how their understandings of assessment influenced their practise of classroom assessment in relation to the EMS learning area.

THE FOCUS OF THIS STUDY WAS DIRECTED BY THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

What are grade 9 teachers' understanding of assessment as it relates to the EMS learning area?

How do grade 9 teachers' understanding of assessment influenced their practise/s of classroom assessment as it relates to the EMS learning area?

Teachers' training and background influenced their understanding of assessment as it influenced their reluctance to accept and understand the new curriculum as it relates to assessment. There is strong indication that teachers' beliefs influence the decisions they make when planning, teaching and assessing (Bennett 1997; Putnam and Borko 2000). Teachers' practices of assessment reflect teachers' beliefs which, in turn, reflect their prior experiences and backgrounds. It appears as if teachers need time to accommodate new information, accept and reject ideas, modify existing belief systems and adopt new beliefs (Pajares 1993).

Teachers' understanding and practices of assessment directed the little opportunities of teacher training. McMillan (2001) maintains that teachers require specific assessment skills to enable them to effectively apply or develop appropriate assessment tools, to use assessment results, to make decisions about individual learners and to improve learning. It appeared that these teachers do not feel confident in assessment of EMS and they considered that workshops play a significant role in their understanding of assessment and in classroom practice. In a way this curriculum has made these teachers feeling competent. The Government seems to be in control over the curriculum; in turn this is making teachers felt incompetent in assessment understanding and practices. Teachers felt incompetent as the curriculum raises challenges around teacher autonomy in the understanding and practise of assessment.

The problem is that many teachers either lack the knowledge and skills to change their teaching practices or perceive that they have not been provided with the external assistance they need to make changes (Sukhraj, Mkhize & Govender, 2004, p.1). To a great extent teachers' knowledge of assessment had influenced their assessment practice.

Contextual factors influenced teachers' understanding and practise of assessment. Due to the issues of discipline, groupwork, and the lack of resources and time, teachers were anxious and frustrated in understanding assessment which in turn influenced their practise of assessment. As a result, teachers' may possibly avoid using a variety of assessment strategies. The facilitation of assessments became tiresome and complex. The class sizes are too large, resources are limited, space of the classrooms is challenging. The availability of varied and relevant tools for the effective application of classroom assessment is critical in supporting teachers to address the specific needs of their learners (National Research Council, 2003). Included in their literature of assessment practices in Africa, Kellaghan and Greaney (2005) found that the poor quality of classroom assessment can be attributed to the shortage of learning and teaching materials. To deal with this challenge, Machona and Kapambwe (2003) argue that it is the responsibility of the education authorities to provide appropriate materials and support to teachers.

It can be deduced that teachers' 'continue to hold on to what is familiar to them, what they understand and what they have previous knowledge of which influenced their understanding and practices off assessment. For instance, teachers understand their role of an assessor to be very teacher centred and summative as in the pre-OBE times.

Although the school assessment policy contest seems to confine them in their practices of assessment, their understanding of assessment were summative due to their backgrounds. It can be deduced that teachers understanding and practice assessment signaled the notion of '**assessment of learning**'.

Vandeyar and Killen (2007) illustrate how teachers still held very strong teacher-centred conceptions of assessment which conflicted fundamentally with an outcome based approach to assessment, at the same time Sokopo (2004) maintains that teachers interpreted the implementation of classroom assessment as merely serving the purpose of accumulation of marks rather than for use in improving learning and teaching.

The demands of the school assessment policy influenced practices of assessment. Additionally, the purpose of grade nine moderation, provincial departments CASS and CTA marks created added demands to both the teacher and to the schools internal testing programme. In turn, this becomes an intensified duty for teachers in this school as they are faced with demand made from the school and the DoE. It was clear that the teachers' role as assessors was to just support learners in passing grades and this is determined by summative forms of assessment. Teachers' concept of the **assessment of learning** (see chapter two) encouraged them to focus on learner assessment performance rather than formative assessment.

Assessment planning was teacher centred and was in control of the assessment design, planning and implementation. It is clear that the traditional methods of providing feedback to learners ensue. Learners' marks can provide an immediate feedback to both the learner and teacher. Inconsiderable attention is provided to learners and there is little chance for constructive feedback.

Teacher understanding and practices of assessment were prompted by several assessment policies related to the EMS learning area. The assessment policy document (DoE, 1998) outlines broad principles of OBE assessment, the assessment guideline documents (DoE, 2002) was prescribed in a very rigid way and teachers were expected to implement these assessment guidelines in their classrooms. However, teachers were not provided the opportunity in contributing to policy making but are required to implement these readymade policies. Consequently, policies such as the subject assessment policies and the NCS policies that cover aspects regarding assessment undermine teacher autonomy.

The assumption that teachers' conceptions will change simply because policies and school contexts have changed is naïve, nevertheless this seems to be the Department of Education expectation: "... teachers will show a broad understanding of ... the concepts of outcomes-based education and its implications for teaching and learning" (Department of Education, 1997, p 2).

An analysis of portfolios provided a detailed insight of teachers' practices of assessment and confirmed teachers' practices of assessment. Learner portfolios indicated that tests and exams papers were the only means of assessment collected. This clearly indicated teachers' understanding of assessments as learner portfolios included several cyclical term tests, exams which were summative in nature. Summative assessment can have a harmful effect as well as a very limited measure of learners learning (Black & William, 1998) and be a very limited value of guiding learners learning (Clark, 2006). In order for classroom assessment to be effectively applied, teachers must possess appropriate knowledge of their subject area, possess relevant assessment skills and have access to high quality teaching resources (Gipps, 1994; McMillan, 2001; National Research Council, 2003; Popham, 2003).

It appeared that the impression which all participants in this study have articulated was an uncertain understanding of assessment. Overall, many of the perceptions of the participants in this present study gave an insight into the kind of problems they faced in their professional practice.

5. 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings and analysis of this study and the literature reviewed on teachers' understanding and practices of assessment, I believe that the following recommendations are pertinent.

Based on my study, I offer the following recommendations as strategies to improve teacher understandings and practices of assessment as it relates to EMS.

Recommendation 1: This study shows a lack of alignment between curriculum and assessment policy and a lack of clarity regarding assessment policy and practice. The DoE must reorganize policies in making it easier for teacher to interpret and identify with its implementation.

Recommendation 2: The DoE needs to provide more guidelines, practical demonstrations and workshops are required to assist teachers to understand and implement new concepts of assessment practices, especially teachers who were trained prior to OBE implementation and teachers with limited expertise and experience.

Recommendation 3: Reduce the number of learners in the classes as large classes seem to get in the way of assessment practices.

Recommendation 4: Reduce stipulated assessment requirements, this will allow for teacher creativity. Also, reduce recording and reporting of assessments as these tasks causes intensification.

Recommendation 5: Provide schools and teachers with the necessary and appropriate resources so that learning and teaching is enhanced and their assessment practices can be implemented successfully so that learning-teaching is not jeopardised due to limited resources.

Recommendation 6: Schools must be given necessary technology and infrastructure to effectively use resources provided.

Recommendation 7: Adequate professional development courses are to be available for teachers, head of department and principals will support them to accept change and remove feelings of reluctance.

5.4 SUGGESTED AREAS FOR FURTHER FUTURE RESEARCH

The analysis of the findings highlighted several areas for further research and development. Some of them are:

- The need to determine ways to develop teachers' assessment practices;
- Identify how South African teachers could change their traditional means of assessing in providing effective feedback for learners;
- How teachers can involve learners in the assessment process;
- Assist teachers to change their teaching to take account of the results of assessment;
- Explore opportunities to develop knowledge of theories of teachers learning and their relationship to theories and methods of assessment, including how assessment ought to be integrated into the learning and teaching process;
- Increasing teachers' pedagogical knowledge and understanding of contemporary theories of assessment for learning; this will provide them replenished self-belief to apply formative assessment in their classrooms and understand its potential in promoting and supporting teaching and learning.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Teachers' understanding and practices of assessment within this school were confined as the school's internal testing policy influenced their understanding and practices of assessment. Particularly, teachers were faced with a considerable demand to address the more transformational assessment for a learning approach that underpins the new

curriculum, demands that differ significantly from the traditional assessment of learning that had been a pillar of the old education system (Grosser and Lombard, 2003). Only one participant (Mary) seemed keen towards the new assessment practices.

For most of the EMS teachers assessment in OBE is a new complex process due to several structural constraints. The contest to produce marks and make learners pass tests and exams and ultimately pass respective grades is the main concern. Assessment practices were mostly summative in nature with little consideration of formative assessments. It is clear, that these teachers recognize that summative assessments assist in developing learners and provides supportive feedback. Due to the school's assessment policy, teachers are viewed as being helpless to implement several strategies of assessment. With this kind of assessment practices learners had little power and authority over learning and assessment (Shepard, 1995). In spite of teachers' inherent skill and quality of assessing, they continue to practice assessment the way they do. However, it could be seen from the research findings that formative assessment could be a predicament for participants as their school internal assessment policy seems to confine them to their assessment understanding and practices. This made teachers have little control over their assessment practices.

Participants pointed out a number of constraints that restricted the use of alternative classroom assessment. Most particularly, teachers' responses revealed inadequate resources, time, policy interpretation and large number of learners' classes as the major limitation of teacher's assessment practices. The structure of the school assessment system was also a further compelling factor that dictated teachers' assessment practices. Curriculum overcrowding is intensified where these teachers are expected to work in the EMS learning area without the necessary resources. The preparation of the programme of assessment and complication of learner portfolios are contributing to teachers' workload.

It was deduced that teachers' did not want to risk losing valuable time for content and syllabus coverage by making an effort to implement various types and strategies of assessment. The picture created by these teachers is that they would not want to

compromise the progress of their learners' results in the final examination. Teachers' classroom practices are informed by their conceptions and understanding of teaching, learning and assessment and of the context within which these have developed, workload amongst several things has increased. Teachers' disclosures about their understanding and practice of assessment provided a preview on the types of challenges they face during their assessment practices.

Lastly, assessment policy that requires teachers to practice assessments to enhance learning must be an adjunct to sufficient resources and support for EMS teachers. In turn, this will support teachers in the successful implementation of assessment. The teacher must be seen as a 'mediator' of change and not just an implementer. Sufficient professional development courses and workshops for teachers, head of department and principals will support them to accept change and remove feelings of reluctance of assessment.

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Appendix A



05 December 2009

Ms T Cassim
 c/o Faculty of Education
 EDGEWOOD CAMPUS

Dear Ms Cassim

PROTOCOL: An exploration of grade 9 teachers understanding and practice of assessment as it relates to the Economic Management Sciences learning area.

ETHICAL APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0872/2009: Faculty of Education

In response to your application dated 05 November 2009, Student Number: **203515680** the Humanities & Social Sciences Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been given **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Steve Collings (Chair)
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE

SC/sn

cc: Dr S Maistry
 cc: Ms Rishandhani Govender

Appendix B

11 Simla street
Shallcross
4093

22 June 2009

The Director
The Department of Education and Culture
EThekwini Region
Durban
4000

Dear sir/ Madam

Request to permission to conduct research

I am a Masters student in the University of KwaZulu- Natal, Edgewood Campus. I am currently conducting a research project aimed to explore “grade 9 teachers understanding and practice of assessment as it relates to the Economic Management Sciences learning area”. The supposed research is towards a Master of Education degree and is being carried out under the supervision of Dr S. Maistry.

The research will be conducted with the use of interviews and observation analysis of learner portfolios in one secondary school. These data generating methods will be completed during times which will not disturb teaching and learning.

I hereby wish to request for your permission to carry out the data generating methods in the chosen school during the months of August. I wish to ensure you of the confidentiality of collected data.

I will be thankful if the Department recognizes the importance of this research project.

My supervisor’s contact details are as follows:

Dr S.M. Maistry

Tel : 031 260 3457

Email: maistrys@ukzn.ac.za

Yours faithfully

Tohida Cassim

Appendix C

Tohida Cassim
Tel: 031 4094074
Cell: 078 6647 461
Email : tohida@telkomsa.net

The Principal

Sir,

Request to conduct research at your school

I am currently a school educator who is currently enrolled at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for a Masters in Education. I am conducting a research study as part of the fulfillment for this degree. The purpose of this study is to explore grade 9 teachers understanding and practice of assessment as it relates to the Economic Management Sciences learning area. I have chosen assessment as my topic for research as it is seen as a new paradigm to teachers in South Africa.

Your school has been identified as a valuable source of information for this study. The findings of this research will certainly be of value to you, the participating teachers, and your school and curriculum developers.

I humbly request your permission to conduct research at your school and assure you that the data will be used for research purposes only and neither the school nor the principal nor the teachers will be named. One aspect of the project is to collect data using several methods such as interviews with teachers and observation analysis of learners' portfolios.

You have my assurance that the research will not infringe on normal school programme or have any financial implication for you school.

I thank you for your time and I hope my requests meets you approval.

My supervisors contact details are as follows:

Dr S.M. Maistry
Tel : 031 260 3457
Email: maistrys@ukzn.ac.za

Yours faithfully

Tohida Cassim

Appendix D

Tel: 031 4094074
Cell: 078 6647 461
Email: tohida@telkomsa.net

To: _____

Participation in research study

I am currently a school educator who is currently enrolled at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for a Masters in Education. I am conducting a research study as part of the fulfillment for this degree. The purpose of this study is to explore grade 9 teachers understanding and practice of assessment as it relates to the Economic Management Sciences learning area. You have been identified as someone who could make a valuable contribution as a participant in this study; I humbly request your participation in this research project. The findings of this research will certainly be of value to you, your school and curriculum developers.

The research will take the form of interviews and the observation analysis of learner portfolios. During the interview I will ask questions and make some notes on your responses. With your permission I would like to tape the interview which will aid me in what was said during the course of the interview and I assure you that the recordings will be erased as soon as the interviews have been transcribed. After writing up the data I would like to discuss it with you to check that it accurately reflects your viewpoint. The interview data will be treated with strict confidentiality and will be used for research purposes only and neither the school nor the principal will be named.

You have my assurance that the research will not infringe on your normal school programme nor will it have any financial implication for you. Permission will also be sought from your principal, should you be will got participate in this study. You are free to withdraw from participation in the study at any time.

My supervisors contact details are as follows:

Dr S.M. Maistry
Tel: 031 260 3457
Email: maistrys@ukzn.ac.za

I thank you for your time and look forward to a mutually rewarding experience with you.

Yours faithfully

Tohida Cassim

Participation in research project: Explore grade 9 teachers understanding and practice of assessment as it relates to the Economic Management Sciences learning area.

Declaration of Consent:

I hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project, which is being conducted by: Ms Tohida Cassim.

I understand that all the information collected will be securely stored and will be destroyed on completion of the project. I am aware that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I desire.

Name and surname: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PREFACE: *The purpose of this tool is to explore how grade 9 teachers' understanding of assessment influence their practice/s of classroom assessment as it relates to the EMS learning area?*

A: BIOGRAPHICAL AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. How long have you been teaching for?
2. How many years have you been teaching EMS for?
3. Are you an EMS specialist? If not how did you have come about to teach EMS?
4. Is there any specific reason you have chosen to teach EMS?
5. Where did you receive your teacher training?
.... And what formal qualifications do you hold?
6. What is the roll of your EMS classes you teach?
7. How does assessment take place in you school?
....does your school have an assessment policy?
8. What are your thoughts/feelings about assessment in the new curriculum?
(How do you feel about it?)
9. Do you enjoy assessment in EMS? ... Are you confident when assessing learners in EMS?
10. Have you attended/ undergone any professional development training in EMS assessment other than these workshops? (at school, DoE)

.....If yes, what type of opportunities do you feel these professional developments training in EMS provided you with which has impacted on your assessment understanding and practice?

| |
|--|
| B: TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF ASSESSMENT |
|--|

Imagine a new teacher is employed at your school and this is the first time he/she will be teaching EMS, you are told by your head of department that you need to discuss and explain to the new teacher what assessment is as it relates to the EMS learning area. The following questions will elicit teachers understanding of assessment.

1. What is your understanding of assessment?
2. Explain the reasons/purpose of assessment...why do you assess?
3. Discuss the goals of assessment.
4. How would you describe the role of being an assessor to him/her?
5. Are you familiar with learner outcomes and assessment standards?
If yes...Discuss and explain the importance and integration of learner outcomes and assessment standards of assessment as it relates to EMS.
6. What is your understanding of CASS?
....what does CASS constitute? (Signals assessment practice)

| |
|--|
| C: TEACHERS' PRACTICE OF ASSESSMENT |
|--|

1. How do you practice assessment in EMS?

....What are some of the assessment strategies do you employ in EMS?
....What types/forms of assessment shape your assessment practice?
2. What informs your assessment practices?
3. Are you familiar with any assessment policy?

.....If yes, which assessment policy are you familiar with?
.....Do you feel that the EMS assessment policy has improved your practice?
.....If yes or no, why?
.....how does the policy shape your assessment practices in the classroom?
4. How do you collect evidence of learner achievement?

.....Do you make use of learner portfolios?

.....if yes, what is contained in these learner portfolios?

Appendix F

**Observation analysis of learners' portfolios
Economic Management Sciences**

PREFACE: *The purpose of this tool is to explore how grade 9 teachers' understanding of assessment influences their practice/s of classroom assessment as it relates to the EMS learning area?*

Name of Educator: _____

Date: _____

Existence of learners' portfolios

Do learners have portfolios? _____

What do these portfolios contain? _____

Nature of feedback: How are assessment tasks marked/scored _____

Nature of assessments: informal/formal _____

Types/forms of assessment _____

