

An Investigation into Formative Assessment Practices of Teachers in Selected Schools in Fort Beaufort in South Africa

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ABSTRACT This study sought to investigate how teachers implemented Formative Assessment (FA) practices in Grade 9 Technology classrooms in the Fort Beaufort district. One Grade 9 learner class was purposively chosen because of the time they had spent on the programme. A sample of 5 teachers and 25 learners were selected from the 5 schools used in this study. The investigated learning area was Technology. Data were collected from the participants using in-depth interviews, observations and documents on assessment. Data were analysed using themes and descriptive statistics in this study. These themes were decoded into smaller sub-themes under each main theme. The study found that teachers in this study had no knowledge of how to implement Formative Assessment in their classrooms and had a negative attitude towards it. Practitioners need to be re-trained on how to implement the Formative Assessment policy in schools.

INTRODUCTION

All assessments are created to serve some purpose, whether to diagnose a learning disability, to identify a learner who needs remediation, or to determine whether a school has met its achievement goals (Burns 2005). However, no one assessment serves all of these purposes well. Summative Assessments and high-stake tests, are designed to provide information on the learners' progression to the next grade and teachers have tended to rely on these tests and examinations at the end of the year in their assessment of learners (DoE 1997). The results of these tests and examinations might tell teachers which learners in their classes have failed and which have not, but they do not tell us the kind of instruction the learners need to master the outcomes or what errors in thinking led to the incorrect answers in the tests (Burns 2005). In order to get that kind of information, teachers need the results provided by the consistent use of classroom-based Formative Assessment (FA).

Although Formative Assessment is included

in government policy documents, there has been "little classroom-based research to document what teachers do when they undertake formative assessment" (Loughran 1999:199). Assessment can be one of the most difficult aspects of teaching and judging the work of a learner can weigh heavily on the mind of the teacher. In spite of the anxiety assessment poses, knowing how to assess learners in order to improve instruction is a core principle of effective teaching.

Formative Assessment, also known as assessment for learning (Angelo 2003), takes place anytime during a lesson. It identifies strengths and weaknesses of the learner and is intended to enhance the learner's final performance. This means that it is not only used to support learning, but also teaching. 'Assessment for learning' (Angelo 2003:5) is stressed as a way to improve teaching and the learning of learners and also as an 'integral part of the learning, teaching and assessment cycle.'

The study is of value because FA is "central to everyday classroom practice as it involves both teachers and learners in reflection, dialogue and decision making" (Angelo and Cross 1993: 5). The teacher obtains and uses information about learners' progress towards the learning goals. A learner's needs to know where s/he is and understand not only where s/he wants to be, but also know how to 'fill the gap' (Black and Wiliam 1998: 140) between his/her current knowledge

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and understanding and desired level. Black and Wiliam (1998) further argue that Formative Assessment does not only serve as an effective classroom assessment tool, but as a 'high-quality instructional feedback tool' that is timely, useful and appropriate. Timely feedback, which is given as soon as possible after the assessment occurs, "can influence the next steps in the learning process" (Guskey 2005: 6). Guskey (2005) terms this as 'useful assessment', that is both diagnostic and prescriptive' in reinforcing precisely what learners were expected to learn, identifies what was learned well, and describes what needs to be learned better (Guskey 2005: 6).

Defining Formative Assessment: Black and Wiliam (1998) state that assessment becomes formative when the information is used to adapt teaching and learning to meet student needs. In a similar vein, Qualters (2000:8) defines FA as "those activities that are used to improve student learning. These activities may be graded or ungraded, but they provide learners with information that allows them to learn something about their own knowledge or skills, make a change, and ultimately improve their learning" (Qualters 2000: 8).

Boston (2002) argues that feedback given as part of FA helps learners become aware of any gaps that exist between their desired goal and their current knowledge, understanding, or skill and guides them through actions necessary to obtain the goal. Black et al. (2003) state that formative assessment can occur many times in every lesson. It can involve several different methods for encouraging students to express what they are thinking and several different ways of acting on such evidence. It has to be within the control of the individual teacher and, for this reason, change in FA practice is an integral and intimate part of a teacher's daily work.

Formative Assessment, at times called 'classroom-based formative assessment' or 'assessment for learning' is defined as 'those activities that are used to improve student learning' (Qualters 2008: 8). This implies that FA is essential as an 'agent' of feedback to learners on their performance, as well as a means of 'guiding' learners on what they need to do to remedy weaknesses by making relevant changes and determining how learners can be helped further (Kotzé 1999). The primary goal of FA is, therefore, to improve the quality of the learner being developed in order to achieve the outcomes. This

is also obvious that information resulting from FA serves as feedback for improvement rather than for purposes of grading. Young (2005: 4) stresses that successful FA 'depends on different factors amongst which learners need to believe that 'improvements in their learning are more likely to occur through their efforts than through their ability'. This implies the belief that improvement is possible for everyone, regardless of ability, should underpin every activity designed to harness classroom assessment to raise standards. Teachers have another important role added to their teaching, that learners' attention should be shifted from how clever they are to the effort they are willing to put in (Young 2005). Likewise, Black and Wiliam (1998:140) argue that the 'active involvement of learners in their own learning is another essential that yields successful results' in FA. This implies that for teachers making the purpose of teaching for improving the use of formative assessment real is to give their learners the capacity to assess themselves more often and effectively. Whilst FA provides a teacher with a 'bridge between assessment and teaching, it is essentially also a way of creating independent, reflective learners who can play and assess their own progress' (Young 2005: 5). It is against this background that this study sought to investigate how FA is implemented by teachers and how this practice can be salvaged in schools. The study sought to answer the following research questions: (a) What are secondary school teachers' perceptions of FA ?; (b) How do secondary school teachers implement FA in their classrooms?; (c) Are secondary school teachers trained in implementing FA in their classrooms?; (d) What is the impact of teachers' current assessment practices on learners?; and (e) What factors inhibit the implementation of assessment practices in the classroom?

METHOD

This study was guided by the interpretive qualitative inquiry approach which is concerned with understanding the meaning that participants make of a situation or phenomenon and stress the way that people shape society (Merriam 2002).

Participants: A purposive sample of 5 schools was selected from the 46 schools in Fort Beaufort District because of the diversity of the schools. One Grade 9 learner class was purpo-

sively chosen because of the time they have spent on the programme. Five teachers and 25 learners were selected from the 5 schools sampled in this study. The investigated learning area was Technology.

Instruments: Interviews, observations, documents and artifacts were used to collect data in this study. Observations were used in this study to beef up the data collected through other means. In this study, document analyses included newspaper articles, historical archives, school minutes, and government published documents. Government published assessment policy documents were analysed in order to bring the actual meaning of the study at hand to light. The researchers also made use of physical evidence of formative assessment by looking at physical artifacts such as work done in class. These artifacts were found in the learners' workbooks together with the teachers' planning schemes; the assessment outcomes; the educators' memoranda and mark schedules.

Data Collection: In this study, data were collected during the first school term of 2009 by the researchers. Unstructured interviews were also used to collect data because these allow room to explore interested targets as they developed. Observation recordings were reviewed and the observed data was triangulated with other data types at hand. Assessment documents were analysed in the schools used in this study.

Data Analysis: Data were analysed using themes and descriptive statistics in this study. These themes were decoded into smaller sub-themes under each main theme.

Ethical Issues: Permission to carry out this study was granted by the Department of Education. Individual letters were also sent to the sites seeking permission to conduct the study. Since learners were minors, permission for their participation in this study was sought from their parents and this was granted. All respondents were assured that the data collected will be kept confidential and used for purposes of this study only.

RESULTS

Demographic Data of Respondents

The Location of Schools

The majority of schools 4 (80 %) used in this study are located in the rural areas of the Fort Beaufort District and only one of the schools is located in the urban area.

Gender of Senior Management Team Members

Five School Management Team (SMT) members (3 females and 2 males) were interviewed in this study.

Gender of Teachers

The majority of teachers 3 (60 %) who responded to the interview schedule were males and the rest were 2 (40 %) were females.

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents 17 (68 %) were females and the remainder 8 (32%) were males.

Age Ranges of SMT Members

The majority of SMT members 4 (80 %) used in this study were below 50 years and only 1 (20 %) was aged over 50.

Age Ranges of Teachers

The majority of teachers 3 (60 %) from the selected schools who participated in the interviews were aged between 35 – 39 years and the remainder (40 %) were aged between 30 – 34 years.

Age Ranges of Learners

Of the 25 learners interviewed, the majority of learners 14 (56 %) were aged between 15–19

Table 1: Gender of learners per school

Schools Learners	A		B		C		D		E		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	3	12	4	16	4	16	3	12	3	12	17	68
Male	2	8	1	4	1	4	2	8	2	8	8	32
Total	5	20	5	20	5	20	5	20	5	20	25	100

years and the remainder (44 %) were aged 10–14 years.

Table 2 shows that all SMT members have basic teaching qualification and had studied up to Honours degree level in their education qualifications with the exception of only one SMT member who had not achieved any Honours degree in his education.

Table 2: Professional qualifications and experience of SMT members

<i>School</i>	<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Experience (in years)</i>
A	B.Sc. UED, B. Ed	28
B	B. PEd. B. Ed	16
C	B.Sc., HDE, B.Sc. (Hons)	20
D	B.A. HDE, B. Ed.	22
E	STD, B. A., ACE (Man)	20

Table 3 shows that all teachers have a basic teaching qualification and have more than 5 years teaching experience.

Table 3: Professional qualifications and experience of teachers

<i>School</i>	<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Experience</i>
A	B.Sc. HDE	15
B	B. PEd, B. Ed	12
C	B.Sc. HDE	13
D	B.A. HDE, DPAL	06
E	B.Sc. HDE	09

Table 4: Teachers specializing in technology

<i>Technology specialization</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N %</i>
Core	0	0
Major	0	0
Minor	2	40
Other	3	60
Total	5	100

Of the 5 teachers interviewed, 40 % of teachers took Technology as a minor subject at their institutions of study and 60 % of teachers specialized in other subjects. It is recognized that one of the key factors influencing quality curriculum implementation in schools is the qualification of teachers in their specialized area (Table 4).

ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Content analysis was used as a data analysis strategy. This strategy is used for the categoriza-

tion of verbal data, for the purpose of classification, summarizing and tabulation. The content was analyzed on two levels, namely, the descriptive and the interpretative level. Descriptive analysis is where data is described and the interpretative data analysis is about what was meant by the respondents, inferred or implied.

Teacher and Learner Perceptions of Formative Assessment

Data were presented and analyzed according to research questions of the study. The respondents were coded and the SMT of all schools had been coded as:

- SIR = SMT Interview Responses of School
- TIR = Teacher Interview Responses of School
- LIR = Learner Interview Responses of School

When the SMT and teachers were asked what their understanding about FA was and learners about feedback, the responses showed that teachers and learners in this study had the perception that FA or feedback was:

- SIR A (urban) *the assessment that assists the learner to focus on their studies in the classroom.*
- SIR C (rural) *the work that is supposed to be done by the learner and controlled by the teacher and further states that the tasks given should be marked and feedback given immediately.*
- SIR D (rural) *the school-based assessment and constitutes collection of marks for progression.*
- TIR B (rural) *a way of assessing learners if they are ready to proceed to the next grade*
- TIR E (rural) *about testing learners' understanding in the class.*
- LIR A (urban) *what teachers give us back when we have done a task in the classroom.*
- LIR B (rural) *when you do corrections and do the right answers when you are ...wrong.*
- LIR C (rural) *to show that you make poor in the class.*

The above findings show that although SMT members claimed to know what FA is, their perception of it implied something else. However, SMT members from school A (urban), school C (rural) and learners from school A (urban) gave convincing responses but were not certain about their perceptions of the phenomenon under study. Perceptions of SMT members, teachers and

learners from the rest of the schools were definitely not aware and sure what Formative Assessment is and what it entails.

Implementation of Formative Assessment or Feedback in the Classroom

The research respondents, SMTs, teachers and learners, understand FA to be implemented in the following manner in the classroom:

- SIR A (urban) *they teach and afterwards give the learners a task to do. This task shall be marked before the end of the lesson.*
- SIR C (rural) *after they had given learners a task, they have to mark it and give feedback.*
- SIR E (rural) *they give these tasks individually, in pairs and in groups.*
- TIR A (urban) *when I teach, the learners sometimes forget the previous lesson and I would constantly remind them about it during my lesson.*
- TIR B (rural) *by supervising the tests you do in the class, and by doing it with them; you have to tell them in which section you are testing them.*
- TIR E (rural) *I teach a lesson and set a test afterwards.*
- LIR A (urban) *the teachers give us our books and explain where we were wrong.*
- LIR C (rural) *they let us sometimes exchange books to mark our work and when giving corrections, they will teach the lesson over again.*
- LIR E (rural) *the class rep brings corrections and sometimes other teachers bring the corrections and write them on the board and we write in our books*

The responses from the interviewed SMTs, teachers and learners were different though all were responding to the same research questions. The assumption is that there seems to be much understanding of the policy and what it entails from the urban school (SIR A, TIR A and LIR A) and one rural school (SIR C, TIR C and LIR C). The results showed that a big percentage of the respondents from the rural schools were not aware of what this policy entails and how this policy should actually be implemented in their classrooms for the benefit of the learner.

Our observations revealed that some of the teachers had a clue of the policy implementation and as such had an impact on the researcher. This had been evident when TIR A (urban) and TIR C

(rural), whilst in the middle of their lessons, noticed a break in the flow of their lessons. These teachers *recognized* their learners had an unacceptable view of a part in the lesson or had a knowledge gap; and summarily *responded* positively and corrected the unacceptable view or knowledge gap. Other teachers did something quite different from what the researcher thought to be about classroom implementation of FA.

Training Undergone by Teachers in the Implementation of Formative Assessment

Questions pertaining to the training of FA implementation theme were not posed to learners as they would not know whether their teachers were trained in the implementation of this policy or not. However, when faced with questions under this theme, the respondents said:

- SIR A (urban) *yes a few of us went to training.*
- SIR B (rural) *I am not aware whether they went for training.*
- SIR C (rural) *I am not sure.*
- TIR A (urban) *I was not trained.*
- TIR B (rural) *Yes, but I wish to emphasize the training was not enough, we need another training, but the little we got helped us a lot.*
- TIR D (rural) *I am not sure but I have not been trained yet.*

Although the SMT from School A and a teacher from School B claim they were trained, this makes no difference as they wish to attend more training. Most of the SMTs and teachers from other schools claim they were never trained or are not aware whether other teacher members were trained. Training workshops held for teachers were superficial, not supported with good quality materials, and the approach used by many trainers was not aligned to the principles of Curriculum 2005 (C2005) (Chisholm 1999). There was virtually no ongoing support and development when teachers were back in their classrooms, and teachers felt that officials did not value their efforts.

The Impact of Teachers' Current Assessment Practices on Learners

All respondents were asked to comment about the impact teachers' current assessment practices have on their learners. Learners were also granted this opportunity to say how their teachers'

current assessment practices – other than FA – impact on them. These were the responses:

- SIR A (urban) *they must impact negatively*
- SIR B (rural) *of course, learners won't understand. They are struggling to make out what their teachers do in class. They impact negatively on them.*
- TIR B (rural) *it impacts on a positive way because you find those learners who are active, they do not want to have lower marks than the other learners. So there is a competition between them; this means they study more and can improve.*
- TIR D (rural) *it must be having a positive impact because they always attain all their outcomes.*
- LIR A (urban) *their practices impact good on us, we like the way they assess us. We know after each lesson we are getting a task to do and mark it and the teacher keeps all marks and we file our mark tasks after feedback.*
- LIR D (rural) *we don't like the way they do it.*
- LIR E (rural) *we want to know when they are giving us a test but they don't tell us and we always fail their tests.*

The assumptions from the responses are that teachers' current assessment practices impact negatively on learners. The reason why a small percentage of the teachers claim their current assessment practices impact positively on learners is that they use the teacher-centered approach on learners. The learner response from the urban school might have misunderstood the question and as such gave a positive response to the question and might have been referring to FA.

Factors Inhibiting Formative Assessment or Feedback Implementation

There were certain factors that impeded the implementation of FA in the classroom. The following are some of the factors mentioned by the respondents.

- SIR A (urban) *lack of knowledge from the teachers' side; lack of training and resources; willingness of learners to study their books; and many more*
- SIR B (rural) *traditional ways of teaching, no cooperation by teachers, teachers don't want to accept change*

- TIR B (rural) *lack of teacher training and implementation.*
- TIR E (rural) *the absence of learners from school and sometimes the absence of teachers that are attending teacher union meetings during tuition time*
- LIR A (urban) *shortage of textbooks and practical resources like tools and materials*
- LIR B (rural) *shortages of resources*
- LIR C (rural) *shortages of computers to learn and create computer lessons and diagrams of shapes in structure lessons*

The above findings show that school heads, teachers and learners hold various reasons on non-implementation of the policy. From these various responses, the reasons include among others, lack of knowledge, non-implementation of the policy and lack of training. The assumption is that these teachers must have found it difficult understanding the policy, hence, leading them not to implement the policy in their classrooms.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of findings is mainly centred on the five themes that formed the cornerstone of the study, namely: teachers' and learners' perceptions about FA and or Feedback, the classroom implementation of this policy, training undergone by the implementers, the impact of the policy on learners and factors that inhibit the policy implementation.

Demographic Data of the Respondents

Location of Selected Schools

The location of the selected schools plays a noticeable role pertaining to the geography and school infrastructure, general management and administration of the school, community involvement, and the distribution of the required resources. The schools used in this study are located in the Fort Beaufort Education District. In each department, the curriculum played a powerful role in reinforcing inequality (Kotzé 2002). Four of the schools used in this study were similar and only one was diverse. Another discriminatory and indifferent factor was the type of management and administration these schools had. For example, the urban school had ample chances to train and give adequate skills to the leadership of this school.

Qualifications and Experiences of Teachers

The interview schedules revealed that most of these teachers did not study Technology as a subject during their training sessions but did Technology in the work field. Since these teachers desperately wanted to work, they promised to teach any subject they are requested to teach, irrespective of whether they were trained for that subject or not. It is clear from the responses that whenever these teachers teach the subject in class, they literally made use of the old teacher-centered method of teaching. Some of these newly qualified teachers are not aware of the learner-centered and National Curriculum Statement (NCS) methods of teaching. This is precisely where they failed implementing FA that requests learner's progress be "based on on-going formative assessment associated with helpful skills on how a learner tackles various learning tasks rather than results of a single end-of-session test or examination" (Nakabugo and Siebörger 1999: 288). These two authors go on to describe FA as not a description of a mode of assessment but rather a "description of a use to which assessment is put, to inform educators and their learners about a learner's progress in order to improve learning" (Nakabugo and Siebörger 1999: 288). This implies that assessment forms part of the normal course of teaching and learning, and that "...learners are assessed while they are engaged in the teaching and learning task rather than at the end of it" (p. 288). Newly appointed teachers are faced with this problem in their classrooms and hence they are not able to deliver as expected of them by the Department of Education (Nakabugo and Sieborger 1999).

Teacher and Learner Perceptions of Formative Assessment

The responses are from rural-based SMT members, teachers and their learners were clear in their responses that they did not understand what this policy meant, hence it could not be implemented adequately in their classrooms. Stating the policy as to 'assess learner progression' or 'test learners' understanding in the class' showed that teachers were not comfortable with assessing their learners. It becomes a disaster when the SMT will respond as to say FA is mainly used to collect progression marks. If this is the perception of a manager, how broad do we expect the teachers' perceptions should be?

The diversity and complexity of the school landscape in South Africa, also played a role about the teachers' understanding of the policy as well as their commitment to implementing principles, not only of the phenomenon under study but, of policies in general. For example, in his study on how teachers perceive formative assessment for classroom implementation, MacLaughlin (2002) found two possible teacher responses concerning curriculum innovation, namely, 'non-implementation and co-optation'. The first is self-explanatory because teachers are simply not implementing formative assessment in their classrooms.

When the researchers were observing teachers in their classrooms, they noticed that they did the opposite of what they actually said FA was by giving other learners their feedback to write on the blackboard, a move that is totally unacceptable as the learners writing on the board are themselves poor in the subject matter. Wilmot (2005), earlier also stated that formative assessment is viewed as "occurring within the interaction between the teacher and student(s) and so (it) is at the intersection of teaching and learning" (p. 53). The importance of FA cannot be emphasized more than it had been done. Wilmot (2005) further says learning is informed through constantly engaging learners with assessment tasks. Feedback to these tasks should be provided immediately after learners had submitted their tasks for marking. Constant feedback, therefore, informs learning whereas delayed feedback delays learner learning. The teachers do give learners their feedback but, this feedback is delayed at times and learners tend to forget the task done earlier when feedback is delayed.

Some of the responses show some understanding what FA is meant to be. These responses suffice the perception about the phenomenon under study and as such convinced the researchers that the respondents knew what the policy entails. If the respondents know what the policy entails, the researchers assume they ought to know how the policy should be implemented in their classrooms. The document on Grade 9 Assessment Guidelines states that FA 'monitors and supports the process of learning and teaching. It is used to inform teachers and learners about their progress so as to improve teaching and learning' (DoE 2005: 5). Learning is informed through constantly engaging learners with assessment tasks. Feedback to these tasks should

be provided immediately after learners had submitted their tasks for marking. Constant feedback, therefore, informs learning whereas delayed feedback delays learner learning (Wilmot 2005). As in the case of the responses, respondents do not explain further that these tasks have not to be delayed as delays in feedback may also delay learner learning.

Teachers' and Learners' Responses on the Implementation of Formative Assessment in their Classrooms

Although FA is included in government policy documents, its implementation in the classroom appears not to have been adequately documented. What teachers do when dealing with formative assessment in their classrooms is still a mystery and still needs to be unfolded. Participants' responses clearly indicate that the teachers and their SMT members are not really sure what is being done when implementing FA in class. Bell and Cowie (2001) state clearly that teachers ought to plan their learners' assessment activity from which they would draw their learners' reactions. The teachers, after assessing their learners, would interpret the results from the assessment activity, act upon them and respond accordingly. The learners will be assigned with an assessment activity they would brainstorm on; the teacher will interpret what the learners had brought forward after they had brainstormed according to the planned lesson. After the teacher had interpreted what the learners had brainstormed, s/he would be required to act on the assessment information brought forward by the learners. This would then fulfil the teacher's lesson objectives or outcomes.

It is clear from the teachers' responses that the teachers are not actually implementing the policy as it should be implemented in their classrooms. For example, during observations, the researchers found out that although teachers are teaching the learners and some learners are actively involved in the lesson, teachers are not aware of the fact that some of them are actually implementing FA in the correct manner. *TIR A* (urban) planned his lesson on Levers. He *drew* (elicit) from his planning and *interpreted* his planning (teaching) to the learners who *acted* positively (actively involved) for the *purpose* of learning. According to Bell and Cowie (2001), the Planned Formative Assessment (PFA) model is what the teacher was employing when teach-

ing learners on levers. At the end of the lesson, he gave them a task to perform but the learners seemed to have forgotten the formula for calculations. The teacher, as he knows his learners better, *noticed* the learners had a problem. He *recognized* through body language what their problem was and *responded* (taught the learners) positively for the *purpose* (of learning) of reminding the learners about the formula.

Likewise, *TIR C* (rural) taught the learners a lesson on "Gears", their ratios and torque the previous day. She distributed the sheets of paper she had in her hand and made sure no learner receives his/her own script. Bell and Cowie (2001) suggest that other than building learners' 'learning to learn' skills by emphasizing the process of teaching and learning, FA also builds learners' skills at peer-assessment and self-assessment, and helps them develop a range of effective learning strategies. This rural teacher was implementing FA in the form of peer-assessment (Bell and Cowie 2001).

The learners knew immediately that they were going to embark on peer-assessment because they all took out their red pens and pencils and waited patiently for their teacher. The teacher came to mark a task the learners did the previous day. The teacher audibly and with emphasis read out the first question of the task and learners raised their hands. During this marking process the teacher *noticed* that some of the learners had different views from those requested in the task. The teacher *recognized* from their answers and *responded* positively by teaching the part from the previous day's lesson the learners had a problem with.

The study found that only two teachers could actually present in a lesson what FA entails in reality. In fact, even they themselves were not aware they were implementing this policy in their classrooms. The other teachers could not convince the researchers first, about their understanding or perception about FA and secondly, by implementing the policy in their classrooms. Whereas the assessment policy document (DoE 1998) sets out the broad principles of assessment, the assessment guideline documents prescribes, in a rigid way, exactly how the policy is to be carried out in classrooms. The model's outcomes-based orientation places assessment at the heart of teaching and learning. Teachers are told to "design down", that is, to start with the outcomes to be assessed before selecting the assessment

type and activity. They must have “clarity of focus”, meaning a clear picture of what is wanted at the end, and must be able to share this with the learners (DoE 2001). The implementation of the phenomenon under study really needs more attention for proper utilization in the classroom.

Training Undergone by the Implementers

Training is necessary in a community in order to experience “well-being”, and it gives people knowledge and skills and is the key to a productive economy because it produces skilled workers. It creates space within which people can develop their potential and be responsible citizens (Lubbe and Smith 2008). Many countries are actually in the transition period between the old and the new system. The authors insist that the transition is, in essence, moving away from a problem centred approach to a development directed approach, from needs to strengths and assets, from welfare relief to sustainable development, from dehumanisation to human welfare (*well-being*) (Lubbe and Smith 2008). This transition phase requires a change in behaviour of people, companies, institutions and communities. For individuals this means, in essence, the development of potential mainly through education. For companies it means transparency and social responsibility. For training institutions it means centers of excellence through research, social involvement and partnerships with the workplaces.

In this study, four of the respondents claimed that they were not trained on how to implement Formative Assessment in their classes and only one rural teacher claims that he was trained on how to implement the policy. When observed in the class, this teacher did the opposite of what FA is understood to mean. This implies that although these teachers were taught about assessment, they appear to resist change and this means that there should be a difference between those trained and those untrained teachers in schools. Some teachers could be having a negative attitude towards assessment or might have received inadequate training from the assessment workshops.

In her case study analysis of Outcomes-based Assessment policy implementation, Wilmot (2005) stated the Review Committee took issue with the duration and quality of the training given to teachers to prepare them for the implementa-

tion of C2005. This author claims that the Review Committee was in reality concerned with the quality of training manuals and the actual duration taken to train the teachers, knowing well the trainers themselves may have been ill prepared. The short interventions made by the DoE and provincial departments, usually 1-to 3-day workshops, which some termed as ‘orientation workshops’, were seen as inadequate, as was the ‘cascade model’ of teacher training which focused on ‘thin’ or procedural knowledge, that is, ‘how to do’ knowledge, at the expense of developing teachers’ declarative knowledge, their understanding of the ‘why’ (Wilmot 2005). From the responses, 80 % of the teachers, and all the SMT members (100 %) claimed that they were neither trained nor do they remember such training. Whereas 60 % of the teachers claimed the documents they saw when they started with the learning area, Technology, were neither user-friendly nor were they readily available for utilization at their schools. Finally, 80 % of teachers and 100 % of the SMT members state they remember overhearing other teachers who were apparently trained that the training workshops or ‘orientation workshops’ took five days in total and that even the trainers were also ‘ill-prepared’ for conducting these workshops.

The Impact of Teachers’ Current Assessment Practices on Learners

When learners fail an assessment task, some teachers internalize the task results into feelings of guilt or shame (Nakabugo and Siebörger 1999). These feelings are often based on a belief that they have failed to appropriately or adequately prepare their learners for the assessment task (Burger and Krueger 2003). This is why some teachers start questioning the usefulness of these assessment tasks. When learners pick these views up, they start developing feelings of anxiety. This situation may keep on repeating itself and simply, the fact is that both groups may be affected by FA task achievements. Learners develop an association between high-stakes achievements and decisions made about their lives. When this is coupled with scepticism about the testing process, high-stakes achievement test may contribute to barriers to school completion for some learners (Burger and Krueger 2003). If learners believe teachers are using these high-stake tests to judge or label them as incompe-

tent, and that these high-stake tests are not accurately representing their abilities; they may simply drop out of the education system. Contrary to this uncertainty, there are motivated learners who may have developed the use of these high-stakes tests, using them flexibly to enhance their own practice. Learners felt more engaged in their own learning and more motivated that this was having an impact on their behaviors (Webb and Williams 2004).

The following, according to DoE (1997: 4), are but a few of the negative factors that are associated with teachers' current assessment practices.

- As a result of the current policy having promotion requirements, for particular subjects, at every grade, many learners are repeating the whole year, even when they have mastered other subjects. This has given rise to a high repetition rate.
- Many learners who find themselves having difficulty in fulfilling the requirements for promotion and thus having to repeat grades a number of times, are dropping out of the system.
- Due to the fact that current policy stipulates requirements for promotion and progression at the end of every grade, teachers have tended to rely on written tests and examinations at the end of the year in their assessment of learners.
- The teaching and learning strategies currently operating in most of our learning centers are teacher-driven and traditional, and they do not lend themselves to progressive forms of assessment.
- The high rate of failure in the Senior Certificate examination. Since 1997 and the ensuing years, only 47.4% of the learners who wrote the examination passed.
- In most of the provinces, for some of the subjects the overall assessment of a learner in the Senior Certificate was based on the examination marks only.
- Although continuous assessment had been introduced as part of the public schools' policy, its implementation had proved to be problematic, as a result of varied interpretations of continuous assessment.
- The high rate of unemployment of out of school youth had been viewed as one of the inefficiencies associated with current assessment practices.
- The mismatch between formal qualifications and the skills possessed by learners, who leave the education system.
- The high exclusion of learners with special educational needs within the system, as a result of inaccurate assessments.
- The flow of learners within the system had been hampered by the high repeater rate.
- The lack of transparency and accountability in the system of assessment had resulted in learners not being clear about what was required in the assessments, and who was accountable for their failure to fulfill the requirements.

The above list of factors are some of the few found in the system. There are many more that can be brought forward but that will have to wait for the second round again. The implication of the above pertaining to the implementation of FA in the classroom leaves much to desire, and failing to adequately developing teachers in the implementation of this policy resulted into what Burger and Krueger (2003) called a belief that (teachers) have failed to appropriately or adequately prepare their learners for the assessment task(s) and rather start questioning the usefulness of assessment tasks. Furthermore, the resultant of learner dropouts is the belief that teachers take serious decisions about their classroom achievements. When this is coupled with high-stake achievements and scepticism about the testing process, high-stakes achievement test may contribute to barriers to school completion for some learners (Burger and Krueger 2003). If learners believe teachers are using these high-stake tests to judge or label them as incompetent, and that these high-stake tests are not accurately representing their abilities; they may simply drop out of the education system. On the contrary to the above-mentioned factors, FA produces motivated learners who may have developed the use of these high-stakes tests, using them flexibly to enhance their own practice. Webb and Williams (2004) state that such learners may feel more engaged in their own learning and more motivated than this was having an impact on their behaviors.

Factors that Inhibit the Policy Implementation

This study has revealed that of the teachers sampled, a great deal of them "lack a good track

record as curriculum developers and assessors” (Malcolm 1997). This is perhaps the reason why teachers find it very difficult to implement the sophisticated Continuous Assessment (CASS) component of assessment in Grade 9 in a meaningful way. This factor raises questions about the validity and reliability of school-based teacher assessment, which calls for more externally controlled standardized assessment at the expense of CASS. The present Grade 9 assessment model is based on a system of internal marking, that is, teachers set and mark their own assessment tasks for CASS, and they mark their learners’ responses to the externally set standardized CTA, which consists of two sections: A and B (DoE 1998). Assessing both sections and CASS, raises questions of objectivity and validity and suggests that the model places too much responsibility on teachers. In the same vein, a cluster moderation process whereby teachers monitor and regulate other teachers’ assessment tasks characterizes the Grade 9 assessment model. As these teachers were apparently not adequately trained in the actual assessment of their learners, it is supposed their success in the cluster-group moderation ultimately depend on how much assessment-training teachers receive.

Other studies have further identified a number of barriers, which affect learners’ acceptance, and use of formative assessment feedback (Bell and Cowie 2001; Black and William 1998). Some of the learners are not motivated to learn as much as they are supposed to. As a result, they become as insecure about their own potential as successful learners that they focus almost on trying to impress their teachers regardless of whether they understand or not (Mackrory 1996). Insecure learners always try to avoid risks of failure in any given task as a result this fear of failure inhibits their efforts, which leads to learners failing to recognize formative feedback as a helpful signal towards future learning (Sutton 1998).

Other hindrances facing formative assessment are the basic requirements of the extensive curriculum and the reporting requirements in the senior classes of the GET Band (DoE 1998). In most cases teachers prioritise what they are going to teach and not teach the syllabus as it is prescribed. The syllabi specify lesson outcomes and the method the teacher is supposed to be using to teach but, the teachers employ their old methods of teaching, teacher-centred as against learner-centred approaches. This is because one

school principal never granted teachers the opportunity to attend the orientation workshops since it was during the holidays. Certain schools never took these developmental workshops seriously and teachers remained at school with the excuse of covering syllabi. There are also schools principals who resist transformation and therefore did not see the need of monitoring their personnel in their training and development workshops.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the findings that the research questions answered or utilized in this study have helped to identify some factors which inhibit the proper implementation of Formative Assessment in the Grade 9 Technology classroom in the Fort Beaufort district area. Among others, the study found out that the Department of Education had not adequately circulated the information of these training workshops to all institutions and their personnel. The interviewees who attended the so-called orientation workshops stated they were not all given the relevant policy documents for referral at their respective schools.

Another major finding of this study was that a small percentile of teachers unknowingly and correctly implements FA in their classes. The bigger fraction of these teachers and their SMT members do not know what FA entails and, worse of all, how it should be implemented in the classroom. This clearly shows that although teachers seem to be willing to implement FA in the classroom, they lack knowledge of how FA should be implemented in the classroom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the broader policy issues, it is recommended that:

- the Department of Education should provide adequate funding for extended curriculum programmes for re-educating teachers in their areas of competency and subject matter. This should be done for those who cannot be re-educated through in-service-trainings or workshops;
- all teachers should be re-trained in the implementation of FA for all subjects and learning areas as teachers and not facilitators. Not as NCS requires them to be facilitators which, they are not;

- the Department of Education should make provision for the required infrastructure and resources for all schools equally to implement the Technology learning area effectively;
- schools should integrate FA into the curriculum across all subjects and learning areas; and
- teachers from the Technology learning area should cluster with neighbouring schools and/ or fellow teachers to support one another in implementing Technology in the school context.

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