

# An Investigation of the Challenges Affecting Teachers' Classroom Assessment Practices

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by

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**DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

Student number: 49129708

I declare that “**An Investigation of the Challenges affecting Teachers’ Classroom Assessment Practices**” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIGNATURE

(Mrs MJ Sethusha)

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DATE



## **DEDICATION**

**I dedicate this thesis to**

**my husband Sello Lucas**

*for your fountain of love, understanding, generosity and motivation that helped me to rise above the times when the tides were too strong for me alone. Thank you for giving my academic life so much meaning.*

**my daughters Kegaugetswe and Galaletsang**

*for allowing me to sacrifice the valuable time that I should have spent with you, for always believing in me and providing me with the remote motivation that kept me going.*

**my dear mother Florence Mokgethoa Banda**

*who inspired me to undertake a transformational journey in my lifetime and for constantly reminding me to take a break.*

**and to the loving memory of my father Morake Saul Banda**

*who did not live to see a doctor in his family and whose spirit served as a source of inspiration and determination towards the completion of this study*

*I will always love you*

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*Jeremiah 29:11*

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| AfL:   | Assessment for Learning                     |
| AS:    | Assessment standard                         |
| C2005: | Curriculum 2005                             |
| CAPS:  | Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement  |
| CASS:  | Continuous Assessment                       |
| DHET   | Department of Higher Education and Training |
| DoE:   | Department of Education                     |
| GET:   | General Education and Training              |
| HoD:   | Head of Department                          |
| IQMS:  | Integrated Quality Management Systems       |
| LO:    | Learning Outcome                            |
| LOLT:  | Language of Learning and Teaching           |
| LTSM:  | Learner Teacher Support Material            |
| NCS:   | National Curriculum Statement               |
| NPA:   | National Protocol for Assessment            |
| NW:    | North West                                  |
| OBA:   | Outcomes-Based Assessment                   |
| OBE:   | Outcomes-Based Education                    |
| PoA:   | Programme of Assessment                     |
| SBAT:  | School Based Assessment Team                |
| SGB:   | School Governing Body                       |
| SMT:   | School Management Team                      |

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices and to explore how these challenges influence effective teaching and learning. The study was qualitative in nature and employed an instrumental case study approach. Semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analyses were used in the investigation. The study utilized the conceptual framework based on the model suggested by Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt (2002). The model comprised four perspectives – technological, cultural, political and postmodern, with the intention of accounting for teachers' assessment practices. Teachers from four different schools in North West Province were interviewed and observed. The data collected through the observations and interviews allowed me to map out the different challenges encountered by teachers in their classroom assessment practices. I also analysed documents that teachers used in conducting assessment. Document analysis was used to triangulate the information collected through observations and interviews. Textual data was analysed using content analysis. The teachers' narratives varied according to their teaching experience and background within the diverse contexts of their particular school environments. Major challenges that emanated from this study were policy interpretation, overcrowding, support, parental involvement, moderation mechanisms (internal and external), assessment planning, implementation and communication as well as lack of resources. In order to address these challenges, teachers relied on cluster meetings, their colleagues and mostly their personal experiences. The study also revealed that teachers' understanding and practices of classroom assessment are influenced by their social and educational context.

**Key words:** Classroom assessment, Classroom practice, Assessment methods, Assessment techniques, Assessment practices, Assessment for learning

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# CHAPTER ONE

## ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

---

### **1.1 Introduction and background context**

There is substantial evidence that assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning and of education as a whole. It covers the learning process, often referred to as summative assessment, and generates meaningful feedback to the learning process, often referred to as formative assessment. Assessment therefore guides the entire process of teaching and learning by providing mutual feedback to learners and teachers in order to improve in their respective tasks. Assessment methods, tools and techniques used by teachers thus depend on the curriculum model being implemented, but all types of assessment place demanding requirements and challenges on teachers.

While various researchers (McMillan, 2003; Hamidi, 2010; Alkharusi, 2007) argue that there is a variety of essential assessment concepts, principles, techniques, tools, strategies and procedures that teachers need to understand and know about, there still continues to be relatively little emphasis on challenges or factors which influence teachers' classroom assessment practices. Teacher assessment practices are important elements of classroom reform. Kotze (2002) points out that during the process of educational reform in South Africa substantial emphasis was placed on issues and less on causes. Assessment needs to be seen as both an instrument as well as an agent for reform. The foregoing argument implies that assessment as an agent for reform is affected by the specific pressures and demands of real life as well as by the existing changeable South African context (Kotze, 2002).

Various scholars (Gatullo, 2000; Chen, 2003; Edelenbos and Kubanek-German, 2004; Hsu, 2005) reveal that demographics, teacher beliefs, teacher training, class size and teacher experience in actual classroom teaching may influence teacher assessment practices. Additionally, these empirical studies reveal that teacher understanding, beliefs, opinions and perceptions are closely related to their assessment practices. These are teachers' beliefs about the educational advantages of classroom assessment and about the pedagogical benefits of implementing

classroom assessment. Furthermore, these studies emphasize teacher training in classroom management as a crucial element that may affect teacher assessment practices. Similarly, Brown (2002) highlights classroom assessment as one of the most crucial teacher professional development needs. Consequently, understanding teachers' ideas, views, perceptions and beliefs about assessment as well as the challenges associated with classroom assessment practices is absolutely essential in planning and implementing appropriate teacher professional development.

Teachers work in an intricate profession in which they are compelled to alter or preserve their evolving practice in relation to a wide range of factors. They often deal with external and internal contextual factors, such as student characteristics; how well they do this mediates the effect of their actions (Adams, 2001). The understanding portrayed here assumes that teachers, irrespective of their level of experience and competence, make what seem to them rational choices and decisions that reflect their attempts to promote student learning (Adams, 2001).

According to Mertler (2003), a large share of classroom time is allocated to assessment-related activities; hence identifying factors affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices becomes critical. The current research project attempts to address this issue by exploring various factors that influence teachers' practices and how teachers cope with these challenges. Assessment practices are contextually bound and complex, so understanding and producing insight into these practices require approaches that explore, in depth, teachers' opinions and reasoning about teaching, learning and assessment based on specific educational contexts and accounts of experiences within them (Akyeampong, Pryor and Ampiah, 2006).

The philosophy of Outcomes-Based Education remains the foundation of the South African curriculum. Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) and Curriculum 2005 (C2005) were launched in 1997. In 2007 the Department of Education (DoE) published the National Policy on Assessment (NPA) and Qualifications for Schools in the General Education and Training (GET) Band (DoE, 2007:3). This policy provided a framework for assessment and qualifications for all private as well as public schools and community-based sites with learners registered in the GET band and amalgamated assessment provisions contained in the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-

9 (Schools) (NCS). To improve its implementation, the NCS was then amended, with the amendments coming into effect in 2011. This amendment of the NCS stipulates policy on curriculum and assessment in the schooling sector. A single comprehensive Curriculum and Assessment was developed for each subject to replace the old Subject Statements, Learning programme Guidelines and Subject Assessment Guidelines in Grade R-12. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) forms the basis for the Ministry of Education to determine minimum outcomes and standards, as well as processes and procedures for the assessment of learner achievement applicable to public and independent schools (DoE, 2010:6)

The CAPS and the NCS require teachers to alter their assessment practices in profound and significant ways. Teachers are expected to use both formal and informal assessments to ensure that assessment is accurate, objective and fair; to use clearly defined learning outcomes and assessment standards; to plan for formal assessment tasks; and to use a variety of appropriate assessment strategies. Furthermore, teachers are required to use continuous assessment and to identify, assess and provide learning support to learners who might experience barriers to learning and development. Continuous assessment also allows teachers to identify such learners early in the year. This assessment policy departed radically from the previous assessment regime that emphasized and relied heavily on summative tests and examinations as a final judgment of learner performance. Accordingly, this study asks: *what kind of challenges affect or influence primary teachers' classroom assessment practices in South Africa?*

In this opening chapter of the study I present the introduction to the study, including, *inter alia*, the background, statement of the problem, rationale of the study, research questions, research design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, research assumptions, quality criteria for the study, ethical considerations and limitations.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) emphasises assessment as a major tool that teachers have to use as a vehicle for improving the quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms. The CAPS focuses on the content to be handled per term and the required



assessment tasks for each term. A critical question then is the way teachers align their classroom assessment practices to fit in with the demands made by the CAPS and also how they deal with classroom assessment-related challenges. Mbelani (2008) argues that since the introduction of OBE in South Africa teachers have been exposed to current trends in assessment through workshops, in-service training and an abundant supply of curriculum documents, all in the quest for fast-tracking transformation and the improvement of quality teaching and learning. However, in my experience, little has improved inside the classroom due to the challenges or some contextual factors experienced by teachers in their everyday assessment-related tasks. One of the challenges highlighted by Susuwele-Banda (2005) was teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment. His study revealed that teachers perceived classroom assessment as tests that were given at scheduled time periods and that their perceptions were influenced by their experiences and qualifications. Frey and Schmidt (2007) revealed in their study that teachers were challenged by authenticity of their assessments, and how assessment could be used as formative feedback for improvement of teaching and learning. It therefore remains important to understand the challenges experienced by educators in their classroom assessment practices and how they deal with these challenges to ensure improved quality teaching and learning. This study was designed to investigate the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices in primary schools and to explore further how these challenges influence teaching and learning.

### **1.3 Rationale of the study**

Classroom assessment is aimed at measuring the attainment of certain skills. However, when classroom assessment does not truly measure what it is expected to measure, then the outcomes cannot be recognized to be trustworthy. According to Hamidi (2010), the aim of assessment is to support (not affect) teaching and learning; provide information about (not for) students, teachers, school and other stakeholders; serve as both student selection and certification based on criteria (not on norms); act as accountability (not an impact) tool; and integrate curriculum and instruction for assurance. This shift from a product-oriented approach to a process-oriented approach to assessment, as Hamidi (2010) posits, has placed considerably

greater demands on learners, teachers, parents, teacher trainers and developers, administrators, curriculum and material developers, communities and on all those in the districts and school levels.

Classroom assessment is a continual activity for teachers to improve the quality of instruction and motivate learners to learn (Gronlund, 2006). An aspect of crucial importance is how teachers can fast-track change in their classrooms in order to offer the high quality of education that is envisaged in the CAPS. Assessment is also considered to be one of the key processes in the teaching and learning cycle as it provides important decision-making information to teachers in the classroom. Information obtained from assessment can be used to evaluate and improve learning and instruction. Much of the classroom assessment literature is about teachers' conceptions and perceptions, what teachers do, or what they should do, what kinds of information they should gather, and to what uses they should put the information (Kotze, 2002; Peterson and Irving, 2007; Brown and Hirschfeld, 2008; Harris and Brown, 2008). There is, however, limited research on the challenges teachers experience in their classroom assessment practices in the South African context and how they deal with these challenges. Furthermore, the question arises as to how such challenges influence teachers' classroom assessment practice. On the basis of assumptions that assessment-related challenges are dynamic, contextual, and best revealed through in-depth investigation (Brown, 2004), this study sought to answer these questions in the teachers' own voices, through interviews with teachers from different schools.

A significant amount of recent literature has focused on classroom assessment as an essential feature of effective teaching and learning (McMillan, 2003; Gronlund, 2006; Hamidi, 2010). Other empirical studies have focused on the various forms of assessment (Chetcuti, Murphy and Grima, 2006), the purpose of assessment (Smith and Gorard, 2005), assessment practices in science and mathematics (Meier, Rich and Cady, 2006), teachers' conceptions of and beliefs in assessment (Brown, 2004; Harris and Brown, 2008), and assessment systems in various countries (Raveaud, 2004). This study takes these issues further by exploring challenges facing South African teachers' classroom assessment practices and how these challenges might in

some way give an indication about how some teachers' classroom practices might be contributing to improving teaching and learning and improving trends in student performance.

Teachers may be contributing positively to educational improvements, but in ways not usually recognized as "good practice" (Akyeampong, Pryor and Ampiah, 2006). Others may be adopting unsatisfactory approaches that could be attributed to weaknesses in professional support, e.g. lack of continuous development opportunities (Kahn, 2000). Unless one interrogates difficulties facing teachers' classroom assessment practices from instances within their own context, and discovers these teachers' views on how to deal with those difficulties, one may only draw superficial conclusions about their competence and understand little about how to improve less effective teachers. Gaining a deeper understanding of challenges facing teachers' classroom assessment practices requires analysis based on reflections of specific encounters with teachers in teaching and learning scenarios.

As a former primary school teacher, I have been exposed to different challenges and demands made by different policies in the education system in South Africa. The CAPS clearly stipulates that assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning, where the teacher has to recognize and plan for inclusivity and diversity in the classroom. This is a challenge in the sense that, as designers of the curriculum, teachers are expected to understand policies so as to meet the needs of the learners. If teachers are required to understand learners' diverse needs, understanding their challenges about policy-related issues is equally important. Only then will they be able to engage in assessment practices that will improve the whole process of teaching and learning.

## **1.4 Research questions**

The inquiry was guided by the following research questions:

### **1.4.1 Main research question**

- What kinds of challenges affect teachers' classroom assessment practices?

#### 1.4.2 Sub-questions

- To what extent do such challenges influence effective teaching and learning?
- How do teachers address the challenges in their assessment practices?

## 1.5. Aims and objectives

The study pursued the following aims and objectives:

#### 1.5.1 Aim

- To identify the kinds of challenges that affect teachers' classroom assessment practices.

#### 1.5.2 Objectives

- To understand the extent to which the challenges influence effective teaching and learning.
- To explore the ways in which teachers address the challenges in their assessment practices.

## 1.6 Research methodology

### 1.6.1 The qualitative approach

Researching a complex and dynamic process such as teachers' assessment practices presented methodological challenges. In this regard I chose a qualitative design to explore the diversified underlying challenges, understanding and experiences of teachers in this study. In an effort to capture the different dynamics of teacher practice in relation to classroom assessment, I used qualitative methods as these enabled me to uncover teachers' classroom assessment practices and to reveal the challenges they encounter in classroom assessment. Further elaboration is provided in Chapter Four.

Qualitative research methods are a means to gain an understanding through the eyes of the participants, even though a number of studies have noted that qualitative research methods are too subjective, based on the alternatives (Hargreaves, 2000). Qualitative research methods allow for interrogation into the "how", "why", "what", "where" and "when" questions, the responses to which require the participants to share their practices, ideas, thoughts and beliefs.

### **1.6.2 Case study**

I chose a case study design within the qualitative approach to explore and provide a detailed description of teachers' understanding, experiences and practices of classroom assessment, and the challenges they encounter. A case study design is appropriate in this regard because the features of a group of people are being explored with their characteristics in terms of their real life situations, as well as their individual subjective experiences (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). This case study design has fostered a comprehensive investigation that considers the "wholeness" of each of the teachers under investigation, as well as their contexts, allowing the presentation of a comprehensive depiction of their stories. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), the three pertinent ideologies of qualitative research, namely telling, perceiving, and elucidating, are hinged and sustained by case-study design. These benefits agree with the interpretivist paradigm, and form the foundation upon which this study has been grounded. This has led to the generation of laudable comprehension, vivid description and knowledge vital for providing answers to the research questions (Creswell, 2003).

### **1.6.3 Sampling**

In conducting this study, the nature of schooling and the prevailing CAPS in South Africa were given consideration. In South Africa, there are four main phases of schooling, namely the Foundation Phase, from the reception year class (commonly known as Grade R) to Grade Three; the Intermediate Phase (from Grades Four to Seven); the Senior Phase (Grades Seven to Nine); and Grades Ten to Twelve, which fall under the Further Education Training (FET) Band (DoE, 2002:5). For the purpose of this study, I sampled four primary schools and particularly focused on the Intermediate Phase, which comprises Grades Four to Seven. The DoE is responsible for education across the country, while each of the nine provinces has its own education department. The central government provides a national framework for school policy, but administrative responsibility lies with the provinces. Each province is further divided into districts.

This study was conducted in schools in Bojanala District of the North West Department of Education. Four schools were purposively selected (see appendices 3, 4, 5 and 6): a township school, a school in town, a school situated in an informal settlement and an independent

school, because each of these schools has its own history, culture of learning and teaching, and its own climate. I was interested in understanding how context plays a role in teachers' classroom assessment practices, and believed that there was a likelihood of these narratives of teachers offering rich and rewarding exploration of the different challenges they experience. I had to get to know this small cohort of teachers well and of most importance was the element of trust that was established between them and me as researcher. This facilitated relevant discussion about challenges, experiences, feelings, thoughts and concerns, and by so doing I understood that I would not be able to generalize the results and findings of the study. This particular stance rested comfortably with me as this was not my intention; rather, it was to highlight and foreground the in-depth experiences of a particular group of teachers at a certain time. I do concede, however, that in providing thick and detailed descriptions of my research processes I offer the possibility of this study being transferable (Seale, 1999).

#### **1.6.4 Data collection methods**

This research investigated the challenges facing South African teachers' classroom assessment practices, with emphasis on how these challenges influence effective teaching and learning and how teachers deal with these challenges on a day-to-day basis. In-depth semi-structured interviews and observations were used, as well as the relevant documents that teachers use for assessment. A detailed elaboration on the research methods is provided in Chapter Four.

#### **1.6.5 Data analysis and interpretation**

In this study, content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002) was used to analyze the data, with communication and content (speech, written text, interviews, images) classified and categorized. From the definition of Ole Holsti (1969), "content analysis" is the engagement of reproducible and suitable procedures that enable the researcher to make particular deductions from transcripts to other situations, or is derivative of that source of transcript. Content analysis can be achieved in two categorical stages, inductive and deductive (Krippendorff, 2004), details of which are discussed in Chapter Four.

#### **1.6.6 Research assumptions**

This study is informed by the following basic implicit assumption, namely that teachers work in an complex profession in which they are pressured to alter or maintain their evolving practices

in relation to a wide range of factors. They experience challenges in their implementation of classroom assessment, and these challenges influence effective teaching and learning.

### **1.6.7 Quality criteria of the study**

Several measures were taken to ensure that participants were trustworthy and truthful in order to achieve credibility of research findings. These included purposive sampling of the study sites and participants, application of appropriate data-gathering strategies and research instruments, and upholding the required ethical standards for carrying out research with human beings. In line with Seale's (2004) approaches to enhancing qualitative research, I focused on the credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability of the study. The *credibility* of qualitative research is determined by the researcher providing a rich account of the research process and looking for discrepant evidence or rival explanation (Durrheim and Wassenaar, 2002). To fulfil my aim of ensuring believable results, a number of procedures were undertaken. I aimed for *transferability* by providing in-depth and detailed descriptions. My prolonged engagement in the field enhanced the credibility of the findings and I also conducted member checks by discussing the emergent themes and my tentative understanding and interpretations with the teachers. As the results emerged, I engaged my professional colleagues in peer review to *confirm* my interpretations. My critical presence in the field enhanced the *dependability* of the interpretations and I also reflected on my bias and subjectivity in the study. I finally crystallized the sources of information in this study and used them to build a coherent justification for the emergent themes.

### **1.6.8 Ethical considerations**

Research that directly involves human participants has methodological and ethical implications (Mahon et al., 1996; Durrheim and Wassenaar, 2002). This research involved teachers as participants and I took precautions to ensure that the procedures used to collect data were ethical. Before I began with fieldwork, I obtained written permission from the Department of Education (North West) under whose authority the four schools fall. Written permission was also obtained from the four schools in which I collected data and issues of informed consent, privacy and confidentiality were taken into account. Prior to seeking informed consent from the participants, I informed them of the nature and the consequences of the research (Denzin and

Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2007). Once I had communicated the aims of my study I sought informed consent from the teachers to participate in the study (as highlighted in Appendix 8), pointing out that it was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Struwig and Stead, 2001; Creswell, 2002; Durrheim and Wassenaar, 2002). I prepared a consent form which I asked the teachers to sign before they participated in the research (Struwig and Stead, 2001; Creswell, 2005). I encountered no reluctance or objections to further requests for consent to record the interviews.

## **1.7 Clarification of concepts**

### **1.7.1 Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)**

CAPS is a single, comprehensive and concise policy document, which replaces the Subject and Learning Area Statements, Learning Programme Guidelines and Subject Assessment Guidelines for all the subjects listed in the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12.

### **1.7.2 Classroom assessment**

Classroom assessment is the process of collecting information from learners about their experience of learning in the class (Brookhart, 2001). There are different ways of collecting information, depending on what teachers teach and what kind of information they need. All types of assessment are based on the principle that the more clearly and specifically teachers understand how learners are learning, the more effectively they can teach them. When conducting classroom assessment, some issues to consider are how to allow all learners to contribute, how to respond to feedback and how often to collect feedback.

### **1.7.3 Classroom practice**

Classroom practice refers to activities that are organised, directed and guided by the teacher (Columba, 2001). As teachers involve learners in the lesson, a substantial amount of class time is taken up with various forms of practice, which include reading, writing, demonstrations and other similar activities. By observing how students undertake and practice activities, teachers learn a great deal about learner progress and sources of problems.



#### **1.7.4 Assessment methods**

Assessment methods are based on the idea that learners can evaluate their own learning and learn from the evaluation process. These methods are learner centred in the sense that they give learners opportunities to reflect on both their linguistic development and their learning processes (what helps them learn and what might help them learn better) (DoE, 2002:4). Examples of these methods are self-assessment, peer assessment, group assessment, observation and oral question and answer.

#### **1.7.4 Assessment techniques**

Assessment techniques are formative evaluation methods that serve two purposes. They help the teacher to assess the degree to which learners understand the lesson and they provide the teacher with information about the effectiveness of teaching methods (Angelo and Cross, 2002). Assessment techniques provide day-to-day feedback that can be applied immediately, provide useful information about what students have learned without the amount of time required for preparing tests and reading papers, and help to foster good working relationships with students and encourage them to understand that teaching and learning are on-going processes that require full participation.

### **1.8 Outline of chapters**

This thesis is divided into five chapters:

In **Chapter One**, an overview of this study is provided. This includes a brief background and rationale for the study and the research purpose. The research questions are also presented as well as the methodological plan. In addition, it provides explanations of different terms used in the study and concludes by providing an outline and organisation of the thesis.

**Chapter Two** provides a literature review for the study, including evidence from studies conducted on teachers' classroom assessment practices and the views of different scholars on various challenges or factors affecting classroom assessment practices. It also provides the classroom assessment environment which includes the purpose and methods of assessment as well as the assessment policy environment in the South African context.

In **Chapter Three**, I provide the conceptual framework on which this study rests. I also discuss what classroom assessment is, why teachers conduct classroom assessment, issues of assessment quality, as well as classroom assessment design.

**Chapter Four** describes the research design and methods employed in this study. The chapter begins with a description of the research paradigm employed. It details the choice of the research design, research sites, and sampling of participants, as well as measures taken to comply with issues of trustworthiness.

**Chapter Five** presents case studies of the four participating teachers. For each of the four case reports I provide a detailed background of the teacher, the school, as well as the classroom context. I identify the main themes that emerged from this investigation of the challenges facing teachers in classroom assessment and how teachers deal with the challenges. I also validate teachers' claims with document analysis.

In **Chapter Six**, I engage the findings of my study with findings from the literature review and theoretical framework. This helps to establish whether the emerging theory extends, confirms or refutes what is already known about challenges facing teachers in their classroom assessment practices.

**Chapter Seven** provides a summary of the key findings, highlighting the significance of the findings and contribution to the body of knowledge. I also offer suggestions for further research and provide recommendations and conclusions.

## **1.9 Synthesis**

The primary purpose of this chapter was to present a background context to my research, along with its focus, purpose and methods. I provided the rationale and the research questions, explaining the research strategy and important concepts mentioned throughout the thesis. I conducted my research within a qualitative research paradigm that allowed me to follow a constructivist approach to data collection and analysis.

*Having developed the above foundation for the study, in the next chapter I explore what other scholars have identified as challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices, how these challenges influence effective teaching and learning, and also how teachers in those studies dealt with the challenges. I also look at different views on assessment principles and practices as well as the context of classroom assessment in South Africa.*

# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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### 2.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate and explore the challenges that affect teachers' classroom assessment practices. In the previous chapter, I outlined the structure of this inquiry by providing an introduction and background context, guiding questions and the rationale for my investigation. I expounded the research design and methodology that lie beneath my approach to this study.

This chapter provides a report on the literature review on the challenges teachers experienced with regard to classroom assessment. The chapter first outlines the assessment policy environment within the South African context, followed by the review of literature on the classroom assessment environment. It also pays special attention to empirical evidence of the different challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices, highlighting the way in which these challenges influence effective teaching and learning. Wiersma and Jurs (2005:32) state that reviewing literature helps a researcher to put the proposed study in proper context and to devise inquiries that have not been conducted before. In reviewing literature on challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices, I found some researchable issues, especially on assessment challenges at different school levels, that have not been covered by a number of research projects conducted on this topic in the South African context.

### 2.2 Assessment policy environment (South African context)

The introduction of OBE signalled an important change in the way in which assessment was perceived. First, the purposes and criteria that govern assessment are stated explicitly, allowing learners and teachers to use them as a basis for making decisions about learning. It is through such discussion that teachers gain an understanding of what learners know and can do. This form of assessment therefore is concerned not only with *what* is known but *how* it is known. In addition, it is concerned not only with what is achieved but with the barriers of achievement.

Finally, assessment is not only concerned with one aspect of learning knowledge but with the totality of a learner's experience.

The introduction of OBE and the accompanying policy framework for assessment brings South Africa in line with international trends in the changing culture of assessment (Pryor and Lubisi, 2002). The role and purposes of assessment are being reviewed in many countries, and also in South Africa, where the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 (DoE, 2012) is currently being used. This document represents a policy statement for learning and teaching in South African schools and comprises the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for each approved school subject, the National policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades R-12, and the National Protocol for Assessment Grades R-12 (DoE, 2012). The NCS Grades R-12 is aimed at providing expression of the knowledge, skills and values that are to be learnt in South African schools. The curriculum also aims to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives.

The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) states that assessment can be both formal and informal. Formal assessment provides teachers with a systematic way of evaluating how well learners are progressing in a grade and in a particular learning area. It is important that formal assessment be recorded, with examples including projects, oral presentations, demonstrations, performances, tests, examinations and practical demonstrations. Informal or daily assessment is the monitoring of learners' progress conducted through observations, discussions, learner-teacher conferences and informal classroom interactions. Informal assessment may be as simple as stopping during the lesson to observe learners or to discuss with them how learning is progressing. According to the NCS, informal or daily assessment could be used to provide feedback to the learners and to improve teaching, and need not be recorded. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning and should be planned for. Formal assessment tasks form part of a year-long formal Programme of Assessment (PoA) in each grade. The tasks are marked and formally recorded by the teacher for progression and certification purposes. All these formal tasks are subject to moderation for ensuring quality and that appropriate standards are

maintained. The major purpose of designing a programme of assessment is to ensure validity, reliability, fairness and sufficiency of assessment by giving explicit guidance on the types of activities and the percentage allocated to each language skill within a task.

As stipulated in the NCS Grades R-12, (DoE, 2012), the use of a variety of appropriate assessment strategies that adequately assess learner achievement and develop skills for lifelong learning is required. The strategies and forms of assessment used need to be appropriate for the knowledge and skills or attitudes and the range of competencies being assessed, as well as for the age and developmental needs of the learners. The assessment tasks should be carefully designed in such a way that ensures a variety of skills are assessed. Teachers have the overall responsibility to assess the progress of learners in achieving the skills, and the national and provincial departments of education are accountable for the management of the programmes. It is important that learners who might experience barriers to learning and development are identified early, assessed and provided with learning support. All assessment tasks therefore need to be adapted to accommodate these learning needs. The assessment of learners and decisions made about a learner experiencing barriers to learning involve a partnership between teachers, learners, parents and education support services such as occupational and speech therapists and educational psychologists.

Planning for assessment is an integral part of planning for teaching and learning. The Programme of Assessment (PoA) is planned by the teacher to meet the needs of learners in the classroom and to facilitate teaching and learning. Teaching plans are clearly explained in the NCS document and these outline the appropriate skills, content and strategies. These teaching plans indicate the minimum content to be covered per term. The sequence of the content listed is not prescribed and the time given indicates an approximation of how long it could take to cover the content. Therefore, teachers need to design their work schedules from their textbooks and teach the content per term using appropriate sequence and pace. Continuous assessment (CASS) is a model that encourages the integration of assessment into the teaching and development of learners through ongoing feedback. It is a model of assessment that is used to determine a learner's achievement during the course of a grade, provide information

that is used to support the learner's development, and enable improvements to be made to the learning and teaching process.

The National Protocol for Assessment (NPA) (DoE; 2011) has introduced a number of important changes to the way assessment is thought of in South Africa. Firstly, it emphasizes the importance of formal assessment, not instead of, but in addition to informal or daily assessment. Secondly, the NPA framework emphasizes the types of assessment as well as the importance of school-based assessment, which is a compulsory component for progression and promotion in all different school phases. The NPA and CAPS therefore aim at evaluating the performance of learners against a set of criteria which are explicit and shared. Thus educators, learners and significant others in the assessment process will have a clearer idea of those skills, attitudes and forms of knowledge expressed as desired outcomes towards which they are working. Thirdly, there is an emphasis on performance assessment. Increasing emphasis is being placed on the performance of learners in those areas of classroom life that were not traditionally assessed, including involvement in discussions, speeches, debates and project work. Fourthly, there is recognition that there is a need to develop a wide range of methods and approaches to assessment, recording and reporting. Tests and examinations are only one form of assessment. It has not been suggested that tests and examinations be discarded but rather that they form part of a larger battery of strategies. Fifthly, the new assessment framework leans towards a model of collaboration in learning and assessment. It proposes a three-way process involving the learner, the educator and the parent in an assessment dialogue (DoE, 2007:25).

Examples of such an approach include seeking to elicit parental response to a learner's work in progress and learner-led conferences involving the learner, educator and parent. Assessment emphasizes learner outputs or end products, as opposed to teachers' inputs. Knowledge or content is no longer the principal focus but rather the application of that knowledge and the demonstration of the required skills and values within specific contexts (DoE, 2002:33). These outcomes have to be explicit to ensure that learners clearly understand what is being assessed and what is to be achieved. According to the NPA, assessment has to take place formally

(Assessment of Learning) and informally (Assessment for Learning). Assessment for Learning (AfL) has the purpose of continuously collecting information on a learners' achievement that can be used to improve learning. It focuses on using frequent and varied assessment techniques to guide learners towards achieving outcomes. Continuous assessment makes use of a variety of assessment practices with the intention of understanding where the learner is. Feedback from assessment enables the teacher to provide as much guidance to learners as possible. This feedback guides learners on their strengths and weaknesses and advises them on how to progress.

Assessment is used for formative and summative purposes (DoE, 2007:14). Formative assessment is used to chart the learners' progress as they work towards achieving specific outcomes to become competent. If learners have not met the criteria, they would not be competent and the onus would be on the assessor to specify what they have to do in order to meet the criteria for competence. Summative assessment is formal assessment administered as examination at the end of the year. Outcomes-Based assessment is conducive to reliability in the sense that specific outcomes and criteria are the basis upon which assessment is planned and administered (DoE, 2002:21). These are constant regardless of who is assessing and who is assessed. Laying down these specifications makes it necessary for the assessor to use them as a guide in planning, developing and administering assessment. Because they are specific, known and clearly understood by all, they act as an in-built mechanism against assessor inconsistency and assist with the transparency of assessment and description of standards (DoE, 2011:16). Assessment needs to include integrated assessment, the purpose of which is to provide evidence that the outcomes have been achieved. It makes use of a range of formative and summative assessment methods to enable the learner to demonstrate applied competence.

### **2.3 Classroom assessment environment**

Since many classroom assessment tasks are planned and delivered to groups of learners, both the psychology of learning, with its emphasis on individual differences, and the social or ecological aspects of the classroom context are relevant (Brookhart, 2001). Brookhart and Bronowicz (2003) called this context the "classroom assessment environment", a concept used



in discussions on how assessment and instruction situate the psychology of individual differences within group or social settings. The particular classroom assessment environment may affect the use of feedback by students and individuals, as well as collectively.

Brookhart and Bronowicz (2003:225) further identified eight dimensions of the classroom assessment environment:

- purposes for which a teacher assesses
- methods used to assess achievement
- criteria used in selecting assessment methods
- quality of assessments
- nature of the feedback a teacher gives students on their work
- teacher preparation for and attitudes towards assessment
- teacher's perception of students
- the assessment policy environment

Seven of these are mainly under the teachers' direct control, the last being the exception. Students are given specific expectations for particular assessments each time a particular assessment task is assigned, and they experience the degree to which they meet those expectations and the related feedback. These instructional segments can be termed "classroom assessment", which Meier, Rich and Cady (2006:81) defined as involving an activity segment, i.e., a lesson or part of a lesson that has a focus, a beginning and an end, participants, materials, and goals, where students realize that the degree to which their performance achieves the goal will be judged by the teacher. According to Brookhart (2001:221), classroom assessment includes the in-class assessment, the students' and teachers' preparation for it, and the feedback from it, considered as a whole unit.

The significance of the classroom assessment environment and the importance of the particular classroom assessment event within that environment prompted the decision to explore the challenges facing teachers in as far as their classroom practices are concerned.

Raveaud (2004:196) suggested that a learner's understanding of what constitutes successful learning is affected by routine teacher assessment as much as by high profile but infrequent tests. Every-day evaluation practices are arguably more relevant to children's school experience than evaluation at the end of a term or year. Monitoring learners' progress and assessment is an ongoing activity in the class. Raveaud (2004:196) referred to the following in his analysis of classroom assessment: checking ongoing work, making suggestions, giving oral feedback to learners and marking their work in front of them. He suggests that routine assessment in the classroom constitutes a prism through which one can examine teachers' beliefs and values. Meier et al. (2006:92) asserted that different assessment methods in the classroom support different goals, and outline a variety of assessments methods that could be used in a Mathematics classroom. These include open-ended questions, constructed-response tasks, selected-response items, performance tasks, observations, conversations, journals and portfolios. Their findings indicate that some constructed response items showed how well students applied procedures, while more complex constructed response items or performance tasks allowed students to apply the mathematics they know to new or more complex tasks. The observations and conversations indicated changes in student thinking in class, while journals and portfolios highlighted changes over time. By using a variety of assessment techniques, teachers are more likely to have a better understanding of student learning, which in turn will help improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

Rea-Dickens (2004:21) contended that formative and summative assessments are generally discussed from a teacher's point of view because it is the teacher who plans and administers classroom assessment. My study used interview data from primary school teachers to describe and explore some of the "lenses" through which teachers view formative and summative assessment. Similarly, Brookhart (2001:159) used the terms "formative" and "summative" assessment to differentiate between the two roles assessment play in education. Using assessment in the development or improvement of some educational process is *summative*, while using assessment in decision-making about the end result of an educational process is *formative*. Black and William (1998:17) specifically ascribed the central role in formative assessment to the teacher, and include in it both short-term feedback on individual

assignments and consideration of the diverse set of data generated by ongoing student work. This view of formative assessment assumes a clear co-ordination and integration of assessment with classroom instruction. It is evident that the role of teachers in the use of assessment information for learning requires more attention than it currently receives, and that the role of teachers in summative and grading activities is often over-emphasized. There is a diagnostic aspect to all formative assessment, and diagnostic information can inform both learners' learning and teachers' teaching. The key is having a concept of the goal or learning target, which originally is the teacher's, but which ideally the learner will internalize, eventually setting his or her own goals and monitoring progress toward them (Earl, 2003).

Brookhart (2001:167) also recognized the importance of both learners and teachers as users of assessment information:

A cognitive constructivist perspective suggests that teachers and learners construct schemas or integrate representations from assessments into existing views of the self, of teaching and learning, and of the curriculum, broadly construed. These interpretations include knowledge and beliefs and may also result in intents to use and actual use of assessments. (Brookhart, 2001:167)

According to De Vries, Zan, Hildebrandt, Edmiaston and Sales (2002:42), constructivism is a set of assumptions about the nature of human learning that guide constructivist learning theories and teaching methods of education. Constructivism values developmentally appropriate facilitator-supported learning that is initiated and directed by the learner. In a constructivist approach, individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences through processes of accommodation and assimilation (67). New elements of knowledge relate to already existing cognitive structures. This knowledge is created by doing, researching and actively experiencing reality. This is relevant in the study aimed at understanding teachers' individual challenges about assessment, in the sense that teachers construct their own meaning towards assessment, and this influences the way they teach in their classrooms. When individuals assimilate, they incorporate the new experiences into an existing framework without changing that framework. This may occur when individuals' experiences are aligned with their internal representations of

the world, but may also occur as a failure to change a faulty understanding. For example, they may not notice events, may misunderstand input from others, or may decide that an event is a chance occurrence and therefore unimportant as information about the world (De Vries et al., 2002:76). According to the theory, accommodation is the process of reframing one's mental representation of the external world to fit new experiences.

On the other hand, Gredler (1997:44) saw social constructivism as an encouragement to individuals to arrive at their own version of the truth, influenced by their background, culture or embedded worldview. This implies that individuals construct their own understanding and that they do not simply mirror and reflect what they read. A core notion of constructivism is that individuals live in the world of their own personal and subjective experiences (Karagiorgi and Symeou, 2005:20). This implies that it is the individual who imposes meaning on the world, rather than meaning being imposed on the individual.

## **2.4. The role of assessment in teaching and learning**

Various scholars regard assessment as a key element of teaching and learning (Meier, Rich and Cady, 2000; Brookhart, 2001; Brown, 2004). Teachers can use the information gained from assessment when planning for instruction or in making instructional decisions. Teachers are responsible for providing feedback to students, provision of which is sometimes known as "formative assessment" (Brookhart, 2001). According to Smith and Gorard (2005), feedback is pivotal to helping teachers improve the day-to-day assessment of their students, because it improves learning and gives learners specific guidance on strengths and weaknesses. Brookhart (2001) also argued that assessment can be considered formative only if the information is used to improve performance. This places the learner at the centre. Similarly, Smith and Gorard (2005) asserted that assessment can only be formative if it feeds back into the teaching-learning process, and that in order for students to improve, effective feedback should enable them to know exactly what they would have to do to close the gap between the actual and desired performance. Brown (2008) shared this view, seeing assessment as a process that involves identifying appropriate standards and criteria and making judgments about quality. Similarly, William et al. (2004) acknowledged that increased use of formative assessment (or

assessment for learning) leads to high quality of learning. This is as necessary to lifelong learning as it is to any formal education experience, although it may not be represented in formal ways outside the environment of certification. Assessment therefore needs to be seen as an indispensable accompaniment to lifelong learning, implying that it has to move from the exclusive domain of assessors into the hands of learners. William et al. (2004) maintained that substantial learning gains are possible when teachers introduce formative assessment into their classroom practice, and are crucial to informing the work of teachers.

Boud (2000) suggested that a renewed focus be placed on the role of formative assessment in order to focus learners' attention on the process of assessment and to permit them to learn how to make these processes their own, rather than ones they are subject to. Formative assessment, Boud argued, has been neglected because summative assessment has dominated thinking in educational institutions and in public policy debates, taking up too high a proportion of staff time, energy and resources at the expense of preparing effective learners. A number of scholars (Boud, 2000; Raveaud, 2004; Smith and Gorard, 2005; Chetcuti, Murphy and Grima, 2006) introduced high quality formative assessment practices because it is engagement with these practices that provided a secure foundation for lifelong learning and contributed directly to a learning society.

Assessment, as Raveaud (2004) posits, does not stand outside teaching and learning, but stands in dynamic interaction with it. It is strongly related to other pedagogical factors. Raveaud (2004) illustrated this point by comparing techniques used to teach children to write. In the classes that Raveaud observed in England, writing was usually linked to communication and expression. Children were given a degree of freedom in the message they were conveying, whatever their competence in handwriting and spelling. Some children wrote stories, some drew pictures and others wrote down the sounds. This continued from Year 1 and even through Year 2 for some pupils, until it was replaced by children's attempts to invent their own spelling for unknown words. This procedure is important in assessment because it links to different forms of assessment, which vary according to the level of understanding of the learners.

In their review of literature, Hayward and Hedge (2005) argued that formative assessment is not well understood by teachers and suggest that this has significant implications for staff development. It is important that staff development results in real improvements in children's learning and focuses on the promotion of a deep understanding of formative assessment. That understanding would involve teachers developing skills to help learners perceive gaps between desired goals and their present states of knowledge.

Alternative techniques for assessing learners are becoming more common in the classroom as educators focus on using assessment as a tool for improving teaching and learning. By using a variety of assessment techniques, teachers are more likely to have an understanding of student learning. This is in line with the assertion by Akyeampong, Pryor and Ampiah (2006) that it is through assessment that teachers reflect on their experiences and produce a more sophisticated account of teaching and learning. Assessment, according to Adams (2001), involves the collection of information on what children do and do not know, and their ability to apply this knowledge.

The goal of assessment is thus to determine children's academic strengths as well as their weaknesses, so that teachers can improve instruction and provide more opportunities for learners' cognitive growth and educational experience (MacLellan, 2001). Assessment tasks should reflect the ways in which knowledge and skills are used in real world contexts. Broadfoot and Black (2004) noted that assessment can be a powerful force in supporting learning, and a mechanism for individual empowerment. It can help learners at all ages and stages to become more fully self-aware, more expert in mapping an individual learning path in relation to their own strengths and weaknesses, and in facilitating fruitful collaboration with fellow learners.

## **2.5 Challenges and issues with regard to assessment**

There are a number of factors that need to be taken into cognition when considering teachers' classroom assessment practices. Webb (2005) highlighted factors such as school organisation, traditions and routine. Furthermore, he emphasizes the length of the class periods, learner enrolment in the classroom and the system's expectations for grade-level content as

contributing to teachers' classroom practices. In his arguments, Webb (2005) is of the opinion that short duration class periods, for example those that are less than forty minutes, often curtail sustained learner engagement, classroom discussion and opportunities for reflection. Additionally, a large learner enrolment in a class can pose a challenge for offering constructive feedback to open-ended questions and learners' projects. I follow in this line by exploring and investigating what teachers in my sampling regard as challenges affecting their assessment practices and, most importantly, how they deal with those challenges on a day-to-day basis.

Kotze (2002) investigated a number of assessment problems and identified possible ways of addressing these. He noted that assessment as an agent for reform is affected by particular pressures and demands for real life and by the volatile contemporary South African context. In this engagement, he maintains that assessment as an instrument for reform is influenced by the way in which it is conducted in the classroom by suggestions, conclusions, and perceptions from role players and by degrees of adequacy which determine standards. In exploring factors that influence classroom assessment, Kotze (2002) investigated aspects of learners' abilities through emphasis on thinking and learning as opposed to mere assimilation of content. This kind of assessment makes greater mental demands on learners, not only concerning knowledge of certain fields of content but, most importantly, in the areas of comprehension, application and demonstration of skills.

Educational inventions, new creations and unfamiliar practices may lead to differences in opinion and challenges. Teachers are experiencing growing challenges with regard to classroom assessment on a daily basis. Several researchers highlight challenges such as demands for social reform, provision of educational resources, differing approaches of role players to educational reform, the establishment of a culture of teaching and learning, and controversies around the meaning, management and measurement of classroom assessment as issues that have given rise to a need for educational reform (Rakometsi, 2000; Tladi, 2000; Kotze, 2002; Chisholm, 2005). Furthermore, these scholars argued that new curricula are often intended to alleviate pressing social problems pertaining to issues such as equity, access, redress and accountability. Provision of educational resources in schools in the South African context is seen as only part of

the solution. Some of the challenges leading to issues in the South African education system are related to certain historical disadvantages, the application of a politically oriented education policy, the rejection of education by certain learners as part of political resistance, a lack of discipline and the absence of a culture of teaching and learning.

Assessment is also often perceived as the most significant source of problems for schools and teachers. As Chisholm (2005) posits, the issue of assessment is further complicated by the arguments for or against two possibilities for assessment of school leaving and examinations: an input-based, summative form of assessment or an outcomes-based model for formative and continuous assessment. The numerous challenges that teachers face with regard to assessment highlight the importance of assessment and the implications for sound formulation of assessment policy. It is quite apparent that a well-structured, practically manageable education system and curriculum are essential in order to address challenges and meet the needs of the intended audience in the complex South African context. According to Kotze (2002), the political significance of education has direct implications for the assessment policy. The major issue regarding assessment practices of this novel approach is the role that politics play in the transformation of education in general and in assessment in particular.

Another issue influencing classroom assessment, as highlighted in the literature, is the way stakeholders' experience assessment. As Kotze (2002) posits, learners' responses concerning classroom assessment practices often reveal more than what is written in assessment theory. Opinions, conceptions, beliefs and perceptions of teachers and learners concerning classroom assessment practices indicate that assessment has over the years become an end in itself without any link to specific needs in education (Carles, 2005; Chisholm; 2005; Brown and Hirschfeld, 2008; Dixon and Haigh, 2008). Traditionally, assessment has been perceived as an unpleasant burden resented by learners, while interrupting the core duties of educators, namely teaching and learning. Brookhart and Bronowicz (2003) argued that learners often see assessment as an instrument of identifying failure rather than documenting development and success. The learners perceive the scope of learning as primarily rooted in identifying and reproducing a correct answer to a well-defined problem that has an exact and predetermined



solution. In general, most learners see assessment as a neutral, isolated element of teaching and learning. As Chetcuti, Murphy and Grima (2006) argued, knowledge is experienced as rigid and inflexible, with the emphasis on facts, fixed procedures, and finished products; learned procedures must be remembered and applied in critical problem-solving scenarios and the task of the learner is to rediscover such knowledge. If learners perceive assessment as fixed, predetermined procedures of recollection and reproduction, then the whole purpose of education is defeated. There is therefore very little, if any, development in such an approach to assessment. Higher order learning skills and outcomes cannot be achieved if assessment does not allow for learners' capacity to develop and grow. If such skills are to be attained, varying degrees of adequacy needs to be demonstrated and therefore assessment tools, techniques and methods must reflect the attainment of quality measures and standards.

The arguments, opinions and beliefs mentioned above are not congruent with learning theories such as social constructivism. Charmaz (2000) and Karagiorgi and Symeou (2005) shared the view that conceptual development is key to worthwhile learning. These scholars argue that reflection is a significant activity prior to comprehension and that concept formation and development is an ongoing process of fostering reflective abstraction. The development of the CAPS (DoE, 2011) rests principally on beliefs about cognition as outlined by a constructivist framework.

There is evidence that the relationship of assessment practices to teaching and learning is highly eclectic and idiosyncratic (Adams, 2001; Gao and Watkins, 2002; Brown, 2003; Brown, 2004). From a survey of elementary school teachers, Brown (2004:319) argued that, based on the highly individualistic nature of assessment practices, many teachers seem to have assessment policies based on their idiosyncratic values and conceptions of teaching. Similarly, in his observational studies of secondary English classrooms, Kahn (2000:279) clarified the tensions and inconsistencies between teachers' goals and classroom practices. He reported in his studies of secondary English programmes (that had received recognition for excellence) that teachers tended to be eclectic in their approach (290). This implies that teachers tended to draw on different traditions (the transmission model and constructivist approach) in ways that

produced tensions and inconsistencies within the classroom rather than a coherent and integrated approach to teaching and learning. He found, for example, that teachers often began a work of literature by focusing on the learner's meaning making. Yet, after the initial emphasis on developing motivation and interest, accompanied by a focus on the text and the attendant concern with common interpretations, the concept of the "correct answers" of literary study came to the fore in the final assessment.

Kahn found that the teachers' comments reflected a similar eclectic mix, as they talked about the writing process, portfolios, cooperative learning journals, mapping, critical thinking, and lifelong learning, along with lecturing, note taking, and testing on material covered in class (293). They appeared to incorporate some approaches associated with constructivist models while also being strongly influenced by a traditional model of teaching. Thus, all pedagogical acts, including teachers' perceptions and evaluations of learner behaviour and performance (i.e. assessment) are affected by the conceptions teachers have about the act of teaching, the process and purpose of the assessment, and the nature of learning (Brown, 2004:311).

In their study of teachers' perceptions, opinions and ideas, Gao and Watkins (2002:67) argued that a teacher's perception of teaching is also assumed to affect his/her adoption of teaching strategies, and this will in turn influence the quality and outcome of student learning. Conceptions of teaching in this regard are viewed as different categories of teachers' ideas that lie behind their descriptions of how they experience the teaching process (Brown, 2003).

After interviewing student teachers, Pendry (1997:70) found that they had such powerful conceptions that their learning was significantly shaped by the histories they brought with them. However, their preconceptions were far from simplistic, and often included thinking about learners' assessment, the complexities of classrooms, and ways of learning. Such conceptions may derive from the range of experiences they bring with them to initial teacher education.

There is increasing recognition that the beliefs that teachers hold are the best indicators of the decisions they make during the course of everyday life (Rueda and Garcia, 1994). This focus on belief systems has been usefully exploited by educational researchers trying to understand the

nature of teaching and learning in classrooms. There is a growing body of literature (Rueda and Garcia, 1994; Sugrue, 1997; Tillema, 1997; Brown, 2004; Harris, 2008) that claimed that the beliefs that teachers hold impact on both their perceptions and judgments, and that these in turn affect their behaviour in the classroom. Further, these belief systems are an essential part of improving both professional preparation and, later, teaching effectiveness (Korthagen, 1993).

In another investigation, Sugrue (1997) found that teachers' perceptions of good teaching, lay theories of teaching, and emerging identities as teachers had all been substantially influenced by their prior beliefs. Similarly, Tillema (1997:210) concluded that teachers generally held on to certain beliefs as being central to their thinking, reasoning and action. In these studies there is a rejection of simple cognitive descriptions of student teachers' ideas about teaching in favour of their origins as deriving from the personal history of the individual and from ways in which the culture is mediated through family and school before the students enter higher education (Entwistle, Skinner and Entwistle, 2000:21).

Several empirical studies on classroom assessment indicate that teachers have different views and understanding of it (Akyeampong, Pryor and Ampiah, 2006; Berry, 2006; Vandeyar and Killen, 2007; Brown and Hirschfeld, 2008; Harris, 2008). Maclellan (2001) described assessment practices as experienced by tutors in a particular higher education establishment. The results suggest that while staff declared a commitment to the formative purposes of assessment and maintained that the full range of learning was frequently assessed, they engaged in practices which militated against formative assessment and authentic assessment being realized. For the staff, the primary purpose of assessment was to grade or rank students, but the more developmental purposes of motivating students, diagnosing learning and evaluating teaching were not discounted.

An empirical study conducted by Akyeampong, Pryor and Ampiah (2006:162) indicates that informal assessment is crucial in promoting learning. These scholars explored teachers' understanding of learning, teaching and assessment. The teachers they sampled articulated a consistent understanding of how learning is built up through social interaction and

interrogation of ideas. Constructivist learning was therefore recognizable to the teachers (De Vries, 2001:21). In informal assessment, teachers indicated that they often relied on children's facial expressions to determine how well the lesson was going and followed up by questions to confirm any suspicion of lack of understanding. This kind of assessment determined the way some of them managed or visualized effective classroom learning. Of importance was the use made of informal assessment information to appraise pupils' progress and understand learners' needs. One head teacher indicated that she encouraged staff to make observations on which to base the marks that were entered on the official continuous assessment sheets required by government policy. The attitude of these teachers towards official continuous assessment was not very positive. Their arguments were that when circuit supervisors visited their schools they only looked at registers and lesson notes, or marked work and continuous assessment records. Any systematic formative assessment during teaching and learning in the classroom was neither monitored nor encouraged, so the official requirements, far from aiding more formative approaches, actually got in the way (Akyeampong, Pryor and Ampiah, 2006:169).

The same authors (2006) recommend a drastic reduction in the bureaucratic and official requirements of continuous assessment to give teachers time to integrate formal and informal assessment to better effect, and thus to reduce the assessment-for-marks syndrome. The assessment practice is thus constrained by other concerns, such as teachers' values and conceptions of education, as well as external constraints such as pressure from education authorities. A study conducted by William et al. (2004:48) revealed that most teachers involve learners in setting questions, either for homework or for each other in class. Other teachers mentioned their conviction that group work provided important reinforcement for learners, as well as providing the teacher with insights into their learners' understanding of the work. The teachers studied here sought to increase their use of formative assessment, even though their plans and strategies differed from one teacher to the other.

Warren and Nisbet (1999), in a study of Australian teachers' uses of assessment, found that primary teachers used assessment more often to inform the teacher with regard to teaching than to inform the learner with regard to learning, and that using assessment for reporting to

others was not as important as informing teaching and learning. Similarly, Brookhart (2001:160) concurred with this idea by outlining the relationship between summative and formative assessment. Summative assessment is often assumed to have entirely negative consequences, but if it is aligned to instruction and deeply criterion referenced, incorporating the intended curriculum which should be clearly salient in the perceived assessment demands, then classroom summative assessment, such as a test at the end of a teaching episode or unit, can have positive effects. The argument presented here is that teachers need to be involved in both summative and formative assessment, and must keep the two in tension. Formative assessment is private and focused on the needs of the learner, whilst summative assessment is a response to external pressures and constraints, and the need for accountability.

Several studies on teachers' understanding and implementation of assessment policies in South Africa have been mainly qualitative-interpretive in nature; aimed at establishing an in-depth understanding of how small samples of teachers interpret and translate the assessment policies into practice (Jansen, 1998; Khulisa 2000; Vandeyar and Killen, 2003). These studies support the notion that teachers still struggle to negotiate the demands of outcomes-based assessment, and cannot clearly distinguish between formative and summative assessment.

An ethnographic study conducted by Vandeyar and Killen (2007:105) described how three Grade 4 Mathematics educators still held very strong teacher-centred perceptions of assessment, revealing an inability to adapt to new challenges, and that this was manifested in their classroom practice which conflicted fundamentally with an outcomes-based approach to assessment. An analysis of the assessment practices of these educators revealed several common factors: (a) struggles with outcomes-based assessment; (b) unwillingness to accommodate linguistically and culturally diverse learners; and (c) strong, but not necessarily helpful, conceptions of assessment. The educators who volunteered to allow their assessment practices to be observed believed that they were doing a reasonable job of assessing their learners. The findings reported suggest that this was not the case, and that many educators in South African schools are unable or unwilling to adapt their assessment practices, or their teaching practices, according to the changing demands of the workplace. The perceptions they

hold about teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment appear to result from policies and practices that are no longer relevant. Vandeyar and Killen (2007:112) concluded that a concerted effort needs to be made to engage teachers in thorough training in assessment practices, since "educators cannot use assessment strategies that they do not understand or for which they lack the skills".

In concurring with the above-mentioned view, Hariparsad's (2004) comparative case study of two Grade 8 science educators reflects how the participants had a surface understanding of the new assessment policies, and how resources played a role in their assessment practices. The teacher from the well-resourced urban school was able to implement some of the new assessment methods, while the teacher from the under-resourced township school did not implement any of the methods of assessment required by the new assessment policy. Neither of the teachers was able to reconcile their own assessment beliefs and capacities with the stated goals of a new assessment policy, and both teachers found the traditional assessment practices (that is, examination and testing) to hold greater efficacy in the classroom than the alternatives required by a new assessment policy. Again, the study found that teachers did not have a deep understanding of the assessment policy and did not change their assessment practices deeply as required by the assessment policy. This invariably led them to privilege the traditional examinations and tests in their practice, which proved to be a challenge with regard to classroom assessment.

Overall, the literature review reflected so far asserts that there are possibly various challenges facing teachers' classroom assessment practices, that teachers deal with these in their own different ways, and that this has major influences on effective teaching and learning.

## **2.6 Teachers' assessment practices**

Critical to teachers is the use of assessment to both inform and guide instruction (Rahim, Venville and Chapman, 2009). Using a wide variety of assessment tools allows a teacher to determine which instructional strategies are effective and which need to be modified. In this way, assessment can be used to improve classroom practice, plan curriculum, and research

one's own teaching practice. Similarly, assessment will always be used to provide information about performance to learners, parents, and administrators (Brown and Hirschfeld, 2008). This information is being increasingly seen as a vehicle for empowering students to be self-reflective learners who monitor and evaluate their own progress as they develop the capacity to be self-directed learners. In addition to informing instruction and developing learners with the ability to guide their own instruction, assessment data can be used by a school district to measure learner achievement, examine the opportunity for children to learn, and provide the basis for the evaluation of the district programme (Harris and Brown, 2008). The teacher's role in the changing landscape of assessment requires a change from being merely a collector of data to being a facilitator of learners' understanding of principles.

Kahn (2000:279) reported that teachers assess learning for a wide variety of purposes, for example, to judge degree of mastery, monitor progress, diagnose learning difficulties, evaluate teacher and instructional effectiveness, inform learners about their own achievement, individualize instruction, group learners and provide a basis for school marks. In addition, teacher-designed assessment may serve other important roles in the classroom: as a way of maintaining learner motivation, cooperation, and attention; justifying to learners the inclusion of certain instructional activities; encouraging them to read a particular text, listen to a lecture, or take notes; and rewarding those who cooperate and work hard by completing assignments and listening attentively while penalizing those who do not (Rust, 2005).

According to the DoE (2007:22), assessment is used to determine whether the learning required for the achievement of the learning outcomes is taking place and whether any difficulties are being encountered. Furthermore, assessment is used to report to parents and other role-players and stakeholders on the levels of achievement across a range of competencies acquired during the learning process, and to build a profile of the learners' achievement across the curriculum. Information is provided for the evaluation and review of learning programmes used in the classroom so as to maximize learners' access to the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes as defined in the National Curriculum Statement. Assessment in the NCS is used to assist with the early identification of learners who might experience barriers to learning and

development, as well as to provide them with learning support and to determine the progression of each learner through the acquisition of knowledge and range of competencies. Overall assessment is meant to support the development of all learners and make judgments about learners' progress.

Learners need feedback about their performance to compare with their developing conception of desired performance and training on how to achieve it (Rust, 2005). Teaching learners to monitor their own performance is the ultimate goal of providing feedback. Teacher intentions and uses are realized in instructional planning and other aspects of teaching. Learner intentions to study and use of assessment information to regulate the nature and amount of study are the ultimate goal of schooling, thus fostering motivation to learn and learning itself (Angelo and Cross, 2002).

Assessment, according to Carles (2005:44), is the practice of collecting evidence of student learning. It is an integral part of the learning and teaching cycle rather than a separate stage at the end of teaching. It helps to provide information for both learners and teachers to improve learning, hence the term assessment for learning. Carles (2005:47) highlighted a number of practices that encourage assessment for learning, foremost of which is the development of school assessment policies, including more diversified modes of assessment and reduction in tests and examinations. Assessment for learning also requires a focus on feedback to inform learners of their strengths and how to address their weaknesses. The importance of opportunities to make assessment collaborative with learners or to allow them to carry out peer- or self-assessment is also emphasized. Assessment for learning further requires that teachers share with learners the goals of learning so that they can recognize the standards they are aiming for. The use of assessment that probes higher-order thinking skills, creativity and understanding rather than rote memorization of so-called "facts" is an important component of assessment for learning (Kotze, 2002).

A thread running through assessment for learning principles is that they are focused on teaching and learning rather than on the traditional concept of assessment as measurement. Their basis within current learning theories includes, for example, Shepard's (2000) social



constructivist framework of assessment for learning and a warning that externally imposed testing for accountability discourages thoughtful assessment for learning classroom practices. In similar vein, Black (2001:19) placed formative assessment within approaches to learning that emphasize constructivism, situated cognition and social discourse.

Badders (2000:67) highlighted certain issues that need to be addressed in the development and use of classroom assessment tools. Key among these are purpose and impact, referring to how the assessment would be used and how it would influence instruction and the selection of curriculum. Second is the concept of validity and fairness, referring to whether assessment measures what it intends to measure, allowing learners to demonstrate both what they know and are able to do. Assessment methods also require reliability, namely whether the data that is collected is reliable across applications within the classroom, school, and district. It is important to clarify whether assessment addresses content and skills that are valued by and reflect current thinking in the field (Kanjee, 2009). Lastly, efficiency plays a major role as it refers to whether the method of assessment is consistent with the time available in the classroom setting.

Badders (2000:69) categorized assessment into three stages: baseline assessment, formative assessment and summative assessment. Baseline assessment establishes the starting-point of the learner's understanding; formative assessment provides information to help guide the instruction; and summative assessment informs both the learner and the teacher about the level of conceptual understanding and performance capabilities that the learner has achieved. McAlpine (2002) supported this by highlighting that the wide range of targets and skills that can be addressed in classroom assessment requires the use of a variety of assessment formats.

It is essential that assessment instruments and procedures are appropriate to the intensity and the nature of the support needed by the learner; hence the importance of paying attention to the artefacts used in assessment. The result of such assessment could then be used to develop support programmes. Brookhart (2001:163) proposed a model of teachers' assessment of learners that lists eight evaluation processes, the seventh of which is providing feedback. Formative assessment is considered from the teacher's point of view in definitions that

emphasize the intention of providing feedback on performance that is used for learning. Indeed, Brookhart (1996) distinguished between feedback information about performance supplied to learners by the teacher, and self-monitoring information about performance from learners' own appraisal of their work.

Bloxham and West (2004:722) highlighted that peer assessment has emerged because of the opportunity it provides for learners to participate. Active engagement with assessment criteria during peer marking is seen as beneficial in helping learners understand how they will be assessed by teachers. In addition, various writers stress the importance of student involvement in constructing marking criteria (Smith and Gorard, 2005; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Furthermore, William et al. (2004) encouraged teachers to use strategies and techniques such as rich questioning, comment-only marking, sharing criteria with learners, student peer-assessment and self-assessment. In contrast, Gilmore (2002:345) highlighted assessment strategies which would define or improve assessment practices, such as using a variety of assessment tasks and techniques to cover all children's strengths; the need for short, simple, specific tasks; a greater use of resources such as photographs, pictures and newspapers; using manipulative, visual and audio tasks; and the teaching and practice of problem solving. Other strategies include using group work for teaching and assessment; developing questioning skills for children and teachers; and using cameras and video recorders (Gilmore, 2002:343).

It is clear that different kinds of information must be gathered about learners by using different types of assessments for measuring a variety of aspects of student learning, conceptual development, and skill acquisition and application. The use of a diverse set of data-collection formats will yield a deeper and more meaningful understanding of what learners know and are able to do, which is the primary purpose of assessment.

O'Brien (2000) supported the notion that teachers can use whatever methods are appropriate for specific learners. This statement acknowledges that learners have different capabilities and that no single technique can be appropriate for all at all times. As Killen (2003:33) posits, however, any strategy chosen should be based on desired outcomes to be attained by learners.

## **2.7 Synthesis**

This review has highlighted the classroom assessment environment with special reference to the assessment policy environment in the South African context. While the major concentration in the literature review has been on the multifaceted nature of challenges and issues regarding classroom assessment, the review has also identified meaningful dimensions of teachers' assessment practices. It is evident from the background and literature review that assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning and that assessment plays a major role in the quality of teaching and learning. From the literature reviewed, it is also evident that the implementation of any new assessment policy, tool or practice, whether at the national or local school level, needs to take account of the complex structure of teachers' perceptions, opinions and ideas of assessment. My study therefore sought to explore and investigate the different challenges influencing teachers' classroom assessment practices.

***In the next chapter I discuss the conceptual framework upon which this study rests.***

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

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### **3.1 Introduction**

This study investigated the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices and how these influenced teaching and learning; therefore, it is important to make explicit the bases on which the teachers' classroom assessment challenges were interpreted.

The study utilized the conceptual framework based on the model suggested by Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt (2002). The model highlighted four perspectives – technological, cultural, political and postmodern, with the intention of accounting for teachers' assessment practices. This model was offered as an attempt to comprehend the factors that hinder teachers' assessment practices. It scrutinized the how and why, and not merely the commonness of use of classroom assessment tools, techniques and methods. The model was therefore based on the acknowledgement of the notion of assessment as reflective of values and epistemological beliefs about teaching and learning.

The suggested model consists of four perspectives that underpin teachers' assessment practices and beliefs. The first perspective emphasizes the technological aspects of applying classroom assessment (Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt, 2002:81). It involves technical views of time allocation and management, organisational structure and the availability of resources. It also involves teachers' expertise in developing and conducting classroom assessment as well as likely gaps between home and school expectations pertaining to classroom assessment. These technical aspects can hinder teachers' assessment practices.

The second perspective dwells on the cultural dimension, and refers to the interpretation and integration of assessment into the schools' social and cultural context. This perspective views assessment as a continuous activity and a multifaceted process integrated with learning, with learners actively participating in the different stages of the assessment process (Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt, 2002:81). This view takes into consideration partnerships among various stakeholders: learners, teachers, parents, community members and administrators. Teachers

who support these principles appear to be more dedicated to the use of different assessment tools, techniques and methods.

The third perspective highlights the political dimension, which centres on “the exercise and negation of power, authority and competing interests among groups” (Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt, 2002:81). This view is associated with the pressure of external evaluation on classroom-based assessment; top-down inspection and supervision performed by standardised tests; as well as bureaucratic meddling or institutional preferences and requisitions. Teachers who are powerfully influenced by the political aspect are likely to conduct classroom assessment according to external, standardised existing models.

The last perspective is post-modern, viewing assessment from the environment of ambiguity that distinguishes the current period in history; thus critically questioning the credibility and trustworthiness of assessment practices and beliefs (Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt, 2002:81). Such a critical position may lead teachers to challenge or dispute the implementation of assessment methods, tools and techniques in their classrooms.

The model therefore takes a wide perspective in relation to teachers’ assessment practices, aiming at both the micro and the macro contexts. It thus acknowledges a multifaceted analysis of the issues underpinning classroom assessment from a critical standpoint, and incorporating related social, political and philosophical factors (Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt, 2002). Simultaneously, it includes issues at a local level, such as availability of resources and partnership among the various stakeholders in the school context. As highlighted in the discussion above, and relating to an argument emphasized by Davison (2007), using different forms of assessment is not merely a technical innovation but an intensely conceptual one. Because the Hargreaves (2002) model is geared towards examining innovations in education, it is appropriate for the purpose of examining such a shift in various frameworks.

The model is research based; as highlighted in the research conducted among twenty-nine Canadian teachers teaching different learning areas in grades 7-8 (Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt, 2002:81). The teachers were all identified as being familiar with and committed to using various forms of classroom assessment and confirmed with the existence of the four

perspectives (Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt, 2002). Nevertheless, questions can be posed as to the applicability of the model in a more varied teacher sample, that is, teachers who vary in their familiarity with and support of classroom assessment. In addition, the research strategy utilized in the research mentioned above employed a quantitative data collection method. A point of consideration is whether similar results, namely the existence of the four perspectives as outlined in the model, would emerge on the basis of a qualitative type of data collection and analysis. Additionally, another question can be whether the results mentioned in the above study would emerge in a different context/culture with teachers from a specific learning area. My study therefore undertook to use the Hargreaves (2001) model in a different setting; to understand the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices, how they deal with these challenges, and also how the challenges influence effective teaching and learning.

Special significance has been placed on classroom assessment in educational contexts and this has foregrounded formal acknowledgement of the primary role that teachers play in the assessment process and therefore the discussion of teachers' assessment practices, perceptions and expert knowledge in the area of assessment (Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt, 2009).

Consequently, the primary aim of this study is to shed light on the factors which influence teachers' assessment practices, whether they emerge from the teachers' local context, from their pedagogical belief systems, or whether they are affected by forces and considerations external to the school setting (Neesom, 2000; Davison, 2004). This conversation is specifically relevant in systems which have been made known and are advancing a classroom assessment paradigm while concurrently embracing top-down standardised testing, culminating in tension between formative assessment and high-stakes external examination (Brindley, 2007). Similarly, Leung and Rea-Dickens' (2007) analysis of the rhetoric of policy documents attests to the gap between the official assessment policy within the National Curriculum in the United Kingdom, which dwells upon formative teacher assessment, and the dialogue within policy documentation which shows contempt for basic issues underpinning formative assessment.

Nonetheless, despite the growing research interest in teacher assessment, not enough is known about the challenges that teachers face with regard to classroom assessment and the

perceptions, opinions and ideas which motivate their continuous classroom assessment practices.

As already mentioned in the literature review in Chapter Two, assessment plays a critical role in teaching and learning (Murray, 2006; Jones and Tanner, 2008; Stiggins, 2008). According to Danielson (2008) and Vadar (2010), assessment is crucial for education policy makers and practitioners involved both in accountability, implying how well the learners have learned, and instruction, that is, how to promote higher levels of learning.

### **3.2 What is assessment?**

The term “assessment” has captured an array of meanings within the educational environment (Bennett and Gitomer, 2009). The concept can allude to the procedure teachers use to grade student assignments (Marzano, 2006; Harlen, 2007); to standardised testing imposed in schools (Stiggins and Chappius, 2005); to any activity designed to collect information to be used as feedback to alter teaching and learning activities (Angelo, 2001); or to improve instruction and learner performance (Sparks, 2005). These multifaceted approaches have consequently shifted assessment away from the primary role that it should play in educational institutions – the collection of evidence to improve instructional practices.

Over the years, classroom assessment has been acknowledged as a means of providing an index of student learning (Rea-Dickens, 2000; Stiggins, 2002; Nitko and Brookhart, 2007). It has also been applied as a clear and understandable testing activity that happens after teachers have taught a particular lesson or subject matter (Sanchez and Brisk, 2004; Harlen, 2007). Nevertheless, assessment and testing are two different concepts. Kubiszyn and Borich (2007) and Robinson-Karpus (2006) asserted that testing is only part of assessment because assessment is an inclusive data collection and evaluation process made up of various elements. These scholars added that an inclusive assessment process involves not only test results but also consists of results from different measurement procedures, such as portfolio and performance assessment, observations, checklists, rating scales and rubrics. On the other hand, Angelo and Cross (2002) defined classroom assessment as a comprehensive approach intended

to assist teachers in deciding what learners are learning and how well they are learning. Thus, the assessment process helps teachers obtain useful feedback on what, how much, and how well their learners are learning. Therefore, it must react directly to concerns about effective teaching and learning.

### **3.3 Why do teachers conduct classroom assessment?**

The basic reason why teachers conduct classroom assessment is to collect evidence about the performance of learners (Nitko and Brookhart, 2007; Bennett and Gitomer, 2009). However, teachers become aware that they are not the only end-users of information collected from the process. Undoubtedly, learners also require feedback or feed-forward (Murray, 2006; Mbelani, 2008). The results of the assessment process need to make learners aware of their strengths and weaknesses. On the other hand, parents too are interested in understanding and being aware of their children's performance (Raty, Kasanen and Honkalampi, 2006; Popham, 2008). Assessment is also important to stakeholders such as school administrators and other teachers in the sense that they use information gathered from assessment processes and exercises. Jones and Tanner (2008) therefore highlight three general aims for classroom assessment; pedagogical, managerial and communicative. Collectively, as Sparks (2005) posits, the purpose of learner assessment is to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning. In order for teaching and learning to be effective, teachers must be aware that learning takes place when there is interplay between the teaching process and the outcomes (Raty, Kasanen and Honkalampi, 2006). This means that in order to achieve effective teaching and learning, teachers must move from mere presentations of lessons towards making sure that learners achieve the desired outcome. During assessment of learning, teachers need to identify specific goals and objectives for each learning area or lesson, consistently measure the extent to which these expected outcomes are actually achieved, and determine to what extent learning occurs (Earl, 2005). Additionally, as highlighted by Danielson (2008) and Stake (2004), when conducting classroom assessment teachers are also expected to give descriptions of the role of assessment in making instructional and educational decisions.



Rust (2002) argued that it is easy for teachers to become absorbed in their job and lose track of the precise aim of any specific component of classroom assessment. There is then the possibility that the aim is not achieved, or that they overlook another form of assessment that may be more appropriate. There are a variety of reasons why teachers conduct assessment. These range from motivation, providing opportunities to learn, providing feedback, grading, and as a quality assurance device both internally and externally. Therefore, it is quite apparent that when teachers perform assessment, they have a transparent goal and believe that their assessments advance excellence in learners (Sanchez and Brisk, 2004; Murray, 2006).

In order to achieve effective teaching and learning, teachers need to develop tests and other strategies and administer them to learners at a particular time (Robinson-Karpnius, 2006). Consequently, the results would be used for accountability and for determining the extent to which learners have achieved the expertise and whether the learning skills and outcomes have been achieved. Test marks usually provide the focus for improvement of learners' learning and achievement. Information obtained from assessment may be used to motivate learners to learn more and teachers to teach with greater force. Hence, assessment functions best when its objectives and purposes are clear and when it is carefully outlined to attain those objectives and purposes (Sparks, 2005; Earl and Katz, 2007). In conducting classroom assessment, teachers need to ensure that the assessment process practised adheres to policy requirements. When conducting assessment, it remains crucial that learning outcomes and skills to be achieved are clear and concise (Shepard, 2000). Clarity in learning outcomes means that knowledge, skills and products, as Harlen (2007) posits, need to be stated in behavioural terms or in terms that denote something can be observed through the learners' behaviour. Kizlik (2009) supported this view and argues that it is essential to be clear about what the behaviour defined by the learning outcomes actually means. Furthermore, Stiggins et al. (2004) firmly contended that classroom assessment should always begin with a transparent assertion of the anticipated learning outcomes and benefits of teaching. These scholars maintain that if one does not begin with the anticipated learning outcomes, one would not end up with valid and reliable assessments.

Once the learning outcomes are clarified, the subsequent critical step in establishing assessment measures is to decide on which types of questions or assessment tasks are to be included and what form of test is to be used. Teachers are expected to follow the basic principles and guidelines in constructing assessment tools. These involve adherence to sound testing processes, fair grading and accountable communication of assessment results (Oosterhof, 2001; Johnson and Johnson, 2002; Robinson-Karpius, 2006; Popham, 2008).

### **3.4 Issues of assessment quality**

Classroom assessment literature has acknowledged that in order for it to be successfully implemented, three quality-aligned criteria should be observed as crucial. Consequently, classroom assessment needs to accommodate at least reliability and validity, which are both crucial for making decisions about the quality of evidence collected in the classroom, and fairness, which needs to be carefully acknowledged in the construction and use of assessment.

#### **3.4.1 Validity**

Validity in classroom assessment refers to the extent to which an assessment measures what it purports to measure (Maree, 2010). In simpler terms, it is the extent to which the evidence gathered genuinely reflects the characteristic a teacher needs to know about (Tierney, 2006). Additionally, in classroom assessment, three major types of validity should be acknowledged (Hamidi, 2010). The first is the *content* validity, which serves as agreement between curriculum objectives and the objectives being assessed. This means that it is an aspect of construct validity that emphasizes evidence bearing on the appropriateness of the knowledge, skills and abilities measured by an assessment (Lambert and Lines, 2000). The second is *consequential* validity, which refers to the way in which the assessment is used to benefit teaching and learning processes and to benefit learners. According to Fulcher and Davidson (2007), assessment forms have sequential validity to the extent that they lead teachers to focussing on classroom activities which support learners' learning and are responsive to individual needs. McNamara (2000) claimed that the consequences of an assessment are potentially important because the focus is on the influence it can have on variables and the state and district levels. The third type of validity is *Ipsative* validity (Hamidi, 2010), which is used when teachers take

into account their learners' performance that is formatively assessed during lessons, not using their past records or performance as a valid criterion to judge their learning abilities. To put it in another way: the learner evaluates his/her performance against his/her previous performances. This type of validity is regarded by various scholars (McNamara, 2000; Lambert and Lines 2000; Hamidi, 2010) as important because it places the learner at the centre of the assessment activity and provides diagnostic information on the progress of the individual. It is also called pupil-referenced validity.

### **3.4.2 Reliability**

Reliability is defined as the extent to which assessment produces consistent results. An assessment is reliable when there is limited contrast in learners' scores or in judges' ratings across different occasions with different judges (Brindley, 2003). As a result, reliability needs to be based on performance instead of distinctive scores that have no preset criteria (Lambert and Lines, 2000). Other scholars call this *dependability*. By this they argue that classroom assessment is dependable when discourse (which means the extent to which a learner gets a question right or wrong, depending on the nature of the question itself), and *fidelity* (which refers to the way the evidence is or is not recorded) are present (Lambert and Lines, 2000:11). Three general sources of problems have been discovered with the reliability of classroom-based assessment: variation in scoring by people gathering the information, the instrumentation of data collection, and fluctuations in the learner (Brown, 2004). One practical way of improving reliability is that the assessors need to be trained or experienced so that they know exactly how to find the desired information (Brindley, 2003).

### **3.4.3 Fairness**

The issue of fairness remains the most important challenge in assessment (Kunnan, 2005). According to Lynch, (2001) fairness refers to treating all individuals the same way and providing an equal opportunity to contribute to the research process, or in the case of assessment research, to demonstrate their ability. Cameron (2001) calls it equity in the design and use of assessment. Issues of assessment are at the heart of performance assessment validity. Consequently, all learners taking performance assessments need to have reasonable opportunities to manifest their know-how without difficulty. Fairness will also need to direct

the results of assessment, that is, we need to analyze the uses to which our assessment procedures are being put, including the intended as well as unintended effects on the individuals being assessed (Lynch, 2001:232). In stressing the fairness of assessments or tests, Brown (2005) argues that teachers would generally like to ensure that their personal feelings do not interfere with fair assessment of the learners or bias the assignment of scores. Fairness or equity principles, as referred to by various scholars (Cameron, 2001; Brown, 2005; Kunnan, 2005), require learners to be given abundant opportunities to demonstrate what they can do and also that their learning be assessed through multiple methods. Cameron (2001) also stressed that fairness is critical in planning and designing assessment; that the content is closely examined to make sure that culturally unfamiliar concepts or pictures do not decrease children's chances to demonstrate their learning (Lambert and Lines, 2000). As Hughes (2003) posits, fairness in assessment starts with fairness in the learning process. This scholar suggests that learners be given an opportunity to analyze outcomes and assessment standards at the beginning of the lesson, and a mid-year review conducted to evaluate learners' standing and level of performance against particular standards. Fairness is not without disadvantages in authentic assessment. Four problems with fairness in assessment have been identified by Hamidi (2010). The first one is that the performance called for in authentic assessment forms is either oral or written. Secondly, the responses called for in performance assessment involve complex thinking skills. Finally, the use of authentic assessment might aggravate the difficulties with culturally unfamiliar content. According to Hamidi (2010), if the content related to a particular theme is unfamiliar, the learner may be unable to respond to any questions contained in the assessment.

### **3.5 Classroom assessment design**

A fundamental aspect in classroom assessment is how to design accountable assessment which will provide good quality information about learners' actual performance without distorting good teaching and learning practice (Farhady, 2003). As Bryant and Timmins (2002) argued, classroom assessment design requires teachers to have determined the appropriate objectives. They also need to take great care that the design does not affect or distort those objectives. As

a result, assessment in the classroom should be carried out through six specific steps followed in order of function (Hamidi, 2010). These steps include planning, data collection, data organisation, data evaluating and final reporting.

### **3.5.1 Planning**

Planning is an integral component of assessment. It determines why a teacher needs to conduct assessment, what the teacher aims to achieve, and who is to be assessed. It also specifies the entire assessment process. The aspect of time needs to be considered in dealing with assessment and the extent to which the teacher can assess the learners.

Teachers have meaningful goals for teaching and learning and clear purposes for assessment (Brindley, 2003). They assess to achieve a goal, to inspect the effectiveness of continuous teaching and learning, and to improve the learning process. One of the major purposes of assessment is to collect evidence of learning in order to adapt the materials and curricula. Teachers make decisions about learners' current learning needs (Brown, 2008).

In classroom assessment teachers are expected to assess learners' current abilities in a particular skill or task; for example, when the teacher assesses learners' oral communication ability when they need to communicate orally. Teachers can also assess multiple abilities of learners simultaneously; for example, assess their learners' vocabulary expansion, how they have progressed in reading comprehension, and also how they have observed rules in reading passages. Hence, it is essential that teachers should have an adequate perception of what they assess in their classrooms.

The issue of who to assess is of utmost importance as well. According to Alderson and Banerjee (2001), teachers need to be aware that learners have different levels of efficiency and skilfulness and different types of schematic and systemic knowledge. Teachers also need to take into consideration that some learners are more active than others; some are quick at learning and some are slow at it. Furthermore, they should anticipate that learners vary in how they learn by establishing different goals for learning (Penaflorida, 2002). Consequently, classroom assessment requires sensible prior judgment of the individuals before teachers assess their performance.

In classroom assessment, teachers require the use of a variety of instruments, formal or informal. Teachers need to keep records through portfolios, observations, tests, assignments, journals, quizzes, checklists, drawings, learner-teacher conference, peer editing, self-assessment, peer-assessment and narrative records.

On the question of when to assess, teachers must take note that assessment is interwoven with instruction. Whatever teachers assess, they are actually in the process of teaching. They assess when they need to make instructional decisions at the formative and summative levels, even if the decisions are small.

### **3.5.2 Collection**

In order to make decisions about the effectiveness of classroom assessment in different aspects of pedagogy, we need to gather adequate and appropriate evidence (Inbar-Lourie and Schmidt, 2009). Previously, tests were the only means used as the end-of-term instruments to collect evidence about learners' learning, progress and achievement. Assessment reform involves adopting diverse alternatives to classroom assessment. According to Suurtamm, Koch and Arden (2010), these alternatives are believed to reflect the real-world and authentic picture of the learning process. Record keeping and collection of work samples by both teachers and learners provide systematic information that enhances communication.

### **3.5.3 Organisation**

The information gathered cannot by itself be evidence based on which decisions are made. It should be orderly and well structured. Orderly collections need to be carefully planned in the same way as instruction (Berry, 2006). Teachers need to structure the evidence they collect through various assessment types in order to make the evaluation and reporting processes possible and help the authorities to make easier decisions (Earl, 2003).

### **3.5.4 Selection**

According to Hamidi (2010), even though structuring, organising and sequencing information are at the service of facilitating optimal processing, not all the gathered organised evidence is needed for immediate reporting. Teachers need to choose those chunks of assessment

information that serve teachers' and learners' immediate needs and are of use for classroom activities.

### **3.5.5 Evaluation**

For the purpose of reporting and communicating assessment information to stakeholders, judgements need to be made regarding the effectiveness of instruction and curriculum and how much the learners have been able to progress towards the goals they have set (Tierney, 2007). This evaluation process preferably takes place after each lesson or each instructional session until the end of the term. Evaluating learner progress at the end of major units can assist teachers to decide whether the learners are ready to proceed to the next unit and for planning the next unit (Gilmore, 2002). Assessment at the end of each unit of instruction can also provide information about how effective the unit was.

### **3.5.6 Reporting**

The final phase in designing classroom assessment is to communicate assessment results to various stakeholders. Teachers are the main users of the evidence gathered. They use assessment to check the effectiveness of instruction and materials (Grosser and Lombard, 2005). They also make decisions about learners' needs in the next term. Teachers acquire information on how well their learners reached stated goals and achieved outcomes. Thus, they evaluate learner progress or achievement. Moreover, teachers use the evidence gathered to do more careful planning for the next teaching cycle.

Involving learners in assessment provides them with clear feedback as to their progress and makes them more accountable for their own learning. Learners can reflect on what they have learned. They can take more active roles in making decisions about what their needs are for the next lessons. As Hamidi (2010) opined, communicating assessment results to learners can facilitate learning that is to follow because learners become aware of what learning outcomes are.

Parents also play a prominent role in classroom assessment. Assessment results communicated to parents provide them with concise feedback and explicit evidence of their children's progress. Parents are then able to use the information to monitor and supervise their children's

work and assignments at home based on the suggestive guidance provided by the teacher. Parents can gather relevant evidence about their children's learning in order to assist the teacher in internal decision-making (Hill and Tyson, 2009). Communicating assessment results to parents can create a communication line between teachers and parents and they both would be able to monitor learners' learning more effectively through exchanging views.

Finally, school administrators need reports to make a variety of decisions about assessment-related issues at a global level. They are concerned with more convenient and careful scheduling and curriculum planning. They are expected to make sound decisions about different needs for different levels in line with assessment policy. This major responsibility constitutes administrative accountability.

### **3.6 Synthesis**

Based on the conceptual framework outlined in this section, I have chosen to focus on the model of Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt (2002: 81) as a filter through which I will comprehend and interpret the factors that influence teachers' assessment practices. Furthermore, the conversation is intended to analyse how teachers deal with the challenges and how these challenges influence effective teaching and learning.

I will draw on the above-mentioned conceptual and theoretical model as illustrated and located in the literature on teachers' classroom assessment practices to formulate the framework that I will use to understand the challenges teachers have to contend with in classroom assessment.

***The next section deals with the research methodology adopted in the study.***



# CHAPTER FOUR

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I provided the theoretical and conceptual framework on which I based my study. This conceptual and theoretical framework served as a filter through which I interpreted teachers' classroom assessment challenges.

The current chapter provides a description and discussion of the research process that informed this study and gives the rationale for the choice of the research design, the research sites and the sampling of participants. I also present a detailed description of the data collection process, strategies and data analysis. I explain how I complied with issues of trustworthiness in qualitative research and describe the ethical considerations, quality assurance measures as well as limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with an exposition of the importance of the study to the broader educational context.

### 4.2 Paradigmatic assumptions

#### 4.2.1 Social constructivism and interpretivism

According to Creswell (2003), qualitative researchers often deal with socially constructed facts of existence and intricate features that are inseparable into discrete variables. It thus remains the researcher's task to attempt to describe, comprehend and interpret how various participants in a social setting construct the world around them (Merriam, 2009). I chose to base my study on the qualitative approach because qualitative design employs an inductive strategy which is not based on predetermined or preconceived ideas but on theories that emerge from data itself.

Qualitative research aims at the development of theories and comprehension, its objective being to promote better self-understanding and increase insight into the human condition (Schwandt, 2000). In qualitative research the emphasis is on improved understanding of human behaviour and experience. As a qualitative researcher I took advice from Creswell's (2003)

observation that in a qualitative approach the researcher often makes knowledge assertions based largely on constructivist perspectives, that is, diversified meanings of individual experiences, socially and historically constructed with a goal of developing a theory or pattern. I obtained the views and perspectives of teachers as key informants; that is, what they said, understood and did. I also probed the research setting in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices. I was not only concerned with the challenges but also with providing insight into the way such challenges influence effective teaching and learning. Neuman (2003, 69-81) argues that the interpretive approach in qualitative research analyses social actions through direct and detailed observation in their natural setting in order to understand and interpret how people create meaning in their social world. Because of the choice of the research design and the nature of the problem under investigation, the proposed study followed an interpretive approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:2) which enabled me to shed some light on the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices, how the teachers deal with these challenges on a day-to-day basis and also how these challenges influence teaching and learning. My research design could not be isolated from my paradigmatic perspective on the world of research. Mason (2002:59) writes that when one defines one's paradigmatic perspective as a researcher, the interplay between ontological and epistemological assumptions, meta-theoretical underpinnings, the research question and methodology become of utmost importance.

How people think the social world is constituted, or what they think it is (the ontology) shapes how they think what they can know about it (Schwandt, 2000). Conversely, how they look (the epistemology and the methods they use) shapes what they can see. People's thought processes about epistemological and ontological concerns have to be combined with a grounded, strategic and practical consideration of the methods chosen and used (Patton, 2002). Everything that I wrote and researched was coloured by my personal ontology and epistemology, which in turn influenced my methodology.

In this study I investigated the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices and as such I identified with the qualitative interpretive paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:2).

I wished to explore and understand the experiences and practices of teachers so as to be able to record and interpret their voices. From an interpretive viewpoint I presented and represented the teachers' narratives in a way that enables the reader to obtain a certain degree of insight into the educational experiences of these teachers. I did not alter the stories, but let the raw details stand alone so that any reader would be in a position to make his/her own interpretations and sense of what s/he read. I also realized that social constructivism would provide valuable insights because interpretations cannot be disconnected from the social context from which they emerge (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2000).

As an interpretive researcher, I was interested in describing and interpreting or explaining what I heard, read, and saw in each teacher's practice, in search of deeper understandings of classroom assessment challenges, and for obtaining richer theoretical insights. Constructivists believe that individuals actively deduce their own social realities and that the researcher is able to understand these by interacting with the participants. Like Bevan and Bevan (1999), Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002), I believe that teachers' experience of assessment can be regarded as a co-construction that acknowledges the interpretation of a social reality that in turn is socially constructed and situated within and against the backdrop of a social and political context.

I was interested in what one needs in terms of expertise, attitudes and skills if one wishes to be in a position to narrate the lives of others, and I presented the voices of others in a more or less unmediated way (Lather and Smithies, 1997:126-127). I wished it to be plainly evident that I respect the participants of my study by finding a less intrusive way of conducting research. I also needed to find a method that would make me aware of how to interpret, select and narrate the teachers' classroom assessment challenges.

In order to deal with power issues, I collaborated with my research participants by working to build good and lasting relationships with them, by organising and maintaining trust in those relationships, and by treating the interviews as interactive conversations (Charmaz, 2000). I kept the concerns relating to power in mind through all levels of data collection. The existence of a multiplicity of "truths" (Daiute and Fine, 2003:64) implies that I could not make any

assertion that my text would represent a privileged truth beyond critical scrutiny. In my view, the knowledge and significance that is derived from what one engages with is more like construction than finding or discovering (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Schwandt, 2000).

I had concluded, therefore, that the fundamental purpose of my study was to describe the teachers' experiences as support for my understanding of those experiences. The social constructivist paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003:23) is concerned with uncovering and interpreting meanings as they are experienced by those who are the subjects of research, and with understanding their views and constructions of the world rather than those of the researcher. Research participants' experiences were explored in terms of their subjective experiences, their perceptions, views and feelings, as these are mediated by their continuous interplay with the "reality" of their everyday lives, i.e., the framework in which they perform their connections, and their frames of reference. While the interpretive character of qualitative research tries to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them, the way in which people experience the world is a consequence of both the world-as-it-is and of the exclusive manner in which people advance their own experiences (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999:124,157; Jackson and Klobas, 2008).

From an ontological perspective there are diversified realities, and this diversification ascertains each individual's perceptions of reality. People encounter a diversity of interpretations about the world, because human reality is mutually and socially constructed and presented (Willig, 2001:13). Since each individual advances reality from a constellation of different viewpoints, it is evident that no two people will perceive the world in the same way (Williamson, 2006). In my attempt to comprehend and interpret the experiences of the teachers, I assumed that each teacher experiences the world through the prism of diverse realities, and that no two realities can ever be similar or even equivalent. Relativist ontology denies that the world "out there" is fixed in terms of human experience, although it may assume a complexity of causality of a world made up of structures or objects that have a causal relationship with one another (Karagiorgi and Symeou, 2005). For realistic purposes, one assumes the existence of a fixed empirical or physical universe and reality, even though such a position has long since been

undermined in the field of quantum physics (Willig, 2001:13). However, since people need assumptions that will allow them to function in the “real” world, they give their consent to various ad hoc assumptions about the macro-physical world in which they experience outer reality (Mason, 2002).

On the contrary, the social and inner personal worlds that human beings create for themselves do not function quite so simplistically and smoothly, precisely because human beings do create multiple realities which they experience as perfectly “real” and valid (O’Kane, 2000). This is something that makes human beings interesting and complex, because they all create their own facts of existence, living in a world that is from time to time evolving and in which meanings are always being negotiated. One’s social world and inner personal reality are always being interpreted and re-interpreted. It cannot be otherwise because a social and personal reality is constructed, consciously or unconsciously, by the multiplicity of shifting meanings that make different realities (Schwandt, 2000; Mason, 2002). I therefore adopted an approach that enabled me to exhibit reconstructed comprehension of teachers’ experiences in relation to classroom assessment challenges.

The epistemological view that forms the focal point of my research is that knowledge is relative, plural and subjective, and that the researcher and the research participants co-create this understanding (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003:23). This does not mean that the researcher is the one who “knows” (O’Kane, 2000); rather, this suggests that the teacher who gave me permission to conduct research into his or her “reality” is the “knower” and the expert of his or her life. It is possible to obtain knowledge of another person’s inner reality by cautiously and analytically examining the views, meanings, experiences, accounts, actions and events of that person’s life. Such understandings are co-created by both the researcher and the participant, both of whose voices will be recognizable in the conclusions. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) posit, there is no distinct interpretive truth that is entirely valid. As argued above, the “truth” is relative and personal, but what is important is to find one’s voice. One can be blinded by advocacy; conversely, one should not be so self-conscious or critical of oneself and others that there is no space for other voices to be heard and incorporated (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

According to Plummer (2001:12), humans are experiencing the steady birth of a more provisional world in which there is an advanced consciousness of diversities, differences and differentiations. In contrast to Plummer's optimistic viewpoint, one could point out recent socio-political movements throughout the world, such as the changes in the United States of America (USA), that indicate that the opposite might be happening (Lather, 2003:12). In spite of this, I found myself espousing a definitively postmodern worldview because of my agreement with many of the arguments and methods proposed by some postmodernist thinkers. Postmodernists respect the existence of plurality of perspectives (Lather, 2003:12), as against the dogmatic assumption that there is only one single truth that emanates from a single privileged discourse or authority. Secondly, they focus on what is local and contextualized rather than on grand narratives, and, finally, they emphasize flux and openness rather than continuity and restraint (Plummer, 2001:14; Lather, 2003:12).

The guiding methodological strategies that correlate with the aforementioned ontological and epistemological frameworks are interactional, interpretive and qualitative in nature. The ontology of constructivism supports this point of view in that it regards people's subjective experiences as being real, valid and therefore unconditionally important. My view is that teachers' challenges can best be understood by interacting with and listening to them.

## **4.3 Methodological paradigm**

### **4.3.1 Qualitative research approach**

This section refers to the plan of the intended research study (Mouton, 2001:55; Punch, 2005:53). It is important before research is undertaken to develop a procedure that would give order and direction to the research study so as to assist the researcher not to lose focus on the research inquiry (Burton and Bartlett, 2005). This is done through research design and methodology. My research design aims at providing detailed aspects involved in planning and executing a research study, from identifying the problem through to reporting and publishing the results (Punch, 2005). At its most specific level, the research design of a study also refers to the way the researcher guards against and tries to rule out alternative interpretations of results (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit, 2004).

In using a qualitative research design I am more interested in the interpretations (Bryman, 2004) that teachers attach to their assessment practices. Consequently, my choice is based on an explorative approach to the experiences of teachers, based on their daily interactions in teaching and learning. According to Creswell (2002), narrative research provides an opportunity to understand and represent the lived experiences of the research participants in order to answer questions of meaning, experience and social significance (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). I presented such “lived experiences” through narratives. The narrative option I chose enabled me to understand teachers’ individual challenges related to classroom assessment in schools. This is in line with the claim by Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004:20) that knowledge is not only constructed by observable phenomena but also by relating people’s opinions, beliefs, values and reasons. In addition to the narrative component, this study employs a qualitative approach that uses research methods designed to discover what challenges participants are faced with regarding assessment in their classrooms.

Qualitative methods aim to discover and understand how people construct meaning out of the way in which they perceive their lives. These methods are sensitive to the diversity that forms of expression take because they incorporate ways of listening and considering exceptions, allowing meanings to be heard without interference or coercion. Because they are also open-ended and flexible, they facilitate the emergence of new and unanticipated categories of meaning and experience. The particular methodology I employed in order to discover and do justice to the perceptions and complexity of my research participants’ understanding is the narrative research design. In essence, I attempted to answer my intellectual questions in terms of the perspectives of my research participants.

It is through a reflexive approach that the researcher’s construction of what is explored becomes more visible (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000:150). Being reflexive is a specific part of reflective research. It indicates reflection on different levels and allows for the consideration of more than one theme simultaneously. I attempted to be reflexive about my process, my views about the data and my interpretation, because everything that one communicates is an interpreted representation of a perceived world. These notions of the presence of multiple

voices, the plural nature of reality, and the multiplicity of human views are also informed and influenced by postmodern thought (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000:150).

From the outset I did not incorporate any political perspective in my representation of the teachers' voices, because I did not want them to be part of the power equations of society. I contemplated various postmodern positions, and realized that a negation of power is almost impossible. My very commitment to be aware of my own power, my own voice and the voices of the teachers, my commitment to how I represented the teachers' assessment challenges and my commitment to my ownership and my role as a researcher, automatically propelled me into a postmodern, feminist and poststructuralist domain (Lather and Smithies, 1997; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Olesen, 2000).

#### **4.3.2 Narrative inquiry**

In this section, I provide my understanding of narrative research and/or narrative inquiry? I use the two terms interchangeably, and a large number of definitions of both exist. As I went through these I realized that there was no single, correct manner of carrying out narrative inquiry. I present here an overview of the definitions that I think best answered my needs. I used these approaches to frame my own approach to narrative inquiry because they reflect the ontological and epistemological assumptions that I have made my own.

McLeod (2001:104) explains that, to a large extent, people make sense of their experience and communicate their experience to others in the form of stories. Narrative is a human activity of making varied experiences meaningful and coherent to the self or another in terms of personal assumptions and beliefs relating perceptions to the self or to another person (Bleakley, 2005:536). Whether this other is an actual person, a diary, an audio tape, or some other object or being (seen or unseen), narration, on whichever level, helps in objectifying one's experiences which, until they are articulated or narrated, remain purely personal or internalised. Narration helps to give definition and clarity to thoughts that, until they are articulated, often remain vague. This is especially true of thoughts that unduly disturb or excite people or thoughts that remain partially defined (but emotionally charged) on the periphery of consciousness. Narrative inquiry therefore attempts to understand and represent experiences through the stories that



individuals live and tell (Creswell, 2002:525). The narrative inquirer tells and retells, lives and relives, presents and re-presents the stories that make up people's lives, individually and socially, in order to answer questions of meaning, experience and social significance (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:71,187).

The narrative approach implies an acceptance of pluralism, relativism, and the validity of individual subjectivity (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998:2). All these factors are themes in postmodern and poststructuralist thought. Lieblich and Josselson (1994:xii) also maintain that the subjective reflective nature of the narrative coincides with the feminist ideology that advocates a compassionate and non-authoritarian understanding of "the other", although they contest the simplistic notion that narrative is a purely feminist domain. Narratives always and inevitably exist within a circumscribed discursive space, constituted by the social world. Freeman (1993:198) maintains that the way one understands, talks and writes about the world is socially constructed. I used the latter mode of understanding to inform my selection of research participants, my data generation process, and the processes through which I established a relationship with the research participants. This helped me to act in a way that built trust in my research participants as I made a safe and containing space in which they shared their day-to-day stories and challenges in classroom assessment.

I therefore utilized my own generic qualitative study with a narrative research design. In this study I sought to understand teachers' classroom assessment challenges, i.e., how they dealt with those and how the challenges affected the efficacy of teaching and learning. I accessed and explored the reported experiences, which included first-person accounts, interpretations, memories, thoughts, ideas, opinions, understandings, emotions, feelings, perceptions, behaviour, practices, actions, activities, conversations and frustrations. I used the narratives that revealed teachers' everyday interpretations to present a reflexive and interpretive understanding of their experiences. Bleakley (2005) emphasizes that people's narratives reflect not only their own meaning making, but also the themes of the society or culture in which they live.

I immersed myself in the socio-cultural context of the teachers, observing their behaviour, experiences and actions closely in relation to their assessment practices. This helped me to understand and construct meaning out of their perspectives in their natural context.

According to Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998:72), the goals of narrative inquiry are firstly to assist in understanding the inner or subjective world of people and how they think about their own experience, situation, problems and life in general. Secondly, it provides insight into the individual that clarifies what has previously been meaningless or incomprehensible and that suggests previously unseen connections. Thirdly, narrative enquiry conveys to a reader the feeling of what it must be like to meet the person concerned. Fourthly, it effectively portrays the social and historical world in which the person lives, and fifthly, it illuminates the causes and meanings of the events, the experiences and conditions of a person's life.

A further reason for my choice of the narrative research design was that it captured the kind of everyday, ordinary data that was familiar to the narrator (Riessman, 1992:2). One of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world of individuals is through verbal accounts and stories that individuals narrate about their lives and their experienced reality (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998:8). Additional data-creation techniques are therefore intended to enhance the verbal accounts and to produce stories about teachers' classroom assessment practices and challenges.

On the other hand, Riessman (2002:697) argues that narrative research is full of loose ends and seeming contradictions. It also lacks the relatively fixed and interpretive framework that a researcher uses to analyse and interpret the findings. A compromise that I had to consider in choosing a narrative design was that I had to accept the process of working in an emergent design. Unlike research approaches that commence with well-defined hypotheses and are then tested by rigid research designs, qualitative narrative research leads a researcher in new directions as it continually changes and unfolds. In qualitative research, a researcher cannot reason his or her own way towards a causal hypothesis that will serve the experimental design. Instead, s/he aims to arrive at a provisional interpretation through exploration and description. It is also open-ended in the sense that traditional notions of distance and objectivity become

distorted. I continuously reminded myself of the necessity to strive for coherence, consistency, comprehensiveness and simplicity (Rosenwald, 2003:140-141).

To emphasize but one aspect of qualitative research, participants' stories do not mirror a world "out there". They do not aspire towards the empirical certainties of quantitative research but rather are constructed, provisional, creatively authored, often frankly rhetorical, and replete with assumptions and interpretations (Bleakley, 2005). Just as quantitative research has its own characteristic advantages and disadvantages, the advantages of qualitative research reside precisely in its subjectivity, its rootedness in time, place and personal experience; with stories both encouraged and valued for their descriptive and interpretive potential (Riessman, 1993:5). Narrative construction uses experience as data and its utility and effectiveness is dependent on the quality of the interactions between the research participants and the researcher. According to Robinson and Hawpe (1986:111) it is in reflecting on experience that one constructs stories, and experience does not automatically assume a narrative form. Creswell (2002:528) points out that since one cannot directly convey experiences, no matter how well they are narrated, the researcher has to interpret the constructions with participants in order to make sense of their world. The participants' experiences are shaped by the researchers' construction of the narrated events.

Narrative research is therefore a highly selective and constructive act on my part as a researcher. In narrative research, the researcher as author assumes the power of the researcher as constructor. At the final stage, I am the one who decides what to tell and how to tell it, and what stories I wish to relate about my research participants, about myself as a researcher, and as a methodologist writing for other readers.

The interpretive function of narratives is used in the construction of individual stories, which can simultaneously be subjected to a social constructivist process that helps one to appreciate the social role that stories perform. Josselson, Lieblich and McAdams (2003:23) posit that the interpretive function of a narrative entails a focus on the meaning that people attribute to their day-to-day lives. It is by means of this meaning-making process that people make sense of their personal and social worlds, as well as (in the case of qualitative research) the particular

experiences, events, and states of interest to the researcher. The researcher utilizes this interpretive function intensively to make sense of another person's world, resulting in a double hermeneutic as "the participants are trying to make sense of their world ... and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith and Osborn, 2003:51).

The constructed nature of narratives actively entails constructing the world through narratives and through being open, sensitive and receptive to the stories told by others and oneself. Narratives are social constructions developed in everyday social interactions, and are shared meanings that make sense in the world as people experience it. Narratives allow people to construct meaningful connections between actions. Murray (2003:112) therefore highlights that people create narratives which then become central to personal understanding of the self. This relates to Plummer's (2001) suggestions about the social conditions that facilitate the emergence of new stories, and that stories "can be told when they can be heard". He is concerned with the social role that stories play, and he has investigated the kind of stories that are told and why they are told. Individual stories may influence collective understanding, and provide an effective and alternative way of making connections between the lives and stories of individuals and a wider understanding of human and social phenomena (Reddy, 2005:51).

In this research I used the interpretive function of narratives to investigate and explore the challenges teachers experience and how they construct their subjective experiences in the world in which they live. However, as the social world is "always already interpreted" and constructed in a particular social setting (Mason, 2003:192), the constructed nature of narratives is embedded in the perceptions of and interpretations formed by teachers.

An important aspect that is central to narrative research is collaboration, because the emphasis is placed on listening and attending to the research participants' point of view. I have drawn extensively on postmodernist theory to make sense of my own and of other people's lived daily experiences (Josselson, 1992; Evans, 2002; Reinhard and Chase, 2002). As far as Kelly (1999:398) is concerned, experience can only be understood within the context of the social, linguistic and historical features that shape it. On the other hand, there is much to learn from

other people's subjective interpretations or accounts. The argument here is that the personal and social cannot be separated. Narrative inquiry is a process that connects the individual to the environment s/he shapes or is shaped by. A life is lived in a particular time, place and under particular circumstances, and an individual lives within a context (Plummer, 2001:6).

There exists a distinctive relationship between experience and narrative. Clandinin and Connelly (2000:414) define experience as "stories people live". These scholars worked from an assumption that experience is both personal and storied; that people convey something of their experience, either to themselves or to others, in a storied form. Stories are therefore the vehicles that come closest to the experience of others as they relate their experiences. People live their stories, and it is through telling that they reaffirm and modify them, and create new ones. Human beings are interpretive beings who make sense of experiences through narratives that are socially constructed by means of language (Rapmund and Moore, 2002:22). The function of narratives is to order experience, to give coherence and meaning to events, and to provide a sense of history and of the future.

People's narratives and their efforts to make sense of their experiences are inextricably implicated in time because people state their views, perceptions, thoughts and feelings in terms of particular moments in time and in terms of a representation of space. This raises the question of how accurately human beings are able to represent experiences and interpretations of those experiences, given the highly subjective nature of time and space perceptions. One might thus ask whether such experiences are actually "true" in the traditional logical-positivistic sense of the word, or whether they approximate in some way to "truth" in terms of an evaluator's paradigms, bearing in mind that there are a number of different philosophical understandings of what truth is.

As far as Polkinghorne (1988:158) is concerned, a narrative approach assumes a particular understanding of what knowledge and truth means. The aim of a narrative inquiry is not to arrive at a kind of truth or certainty, but rather it seeks to create narratives that manifest all the signs and appearance of being true, real, authentic, convincing and coherent in the context in which they exist. Narratives do not produce the kind of knowledge that can serve to predict

future outcomes, nor can they be used to control human experience because they are never normative in intention. Instead, they produce knowledge that deepens, enlarges, enriches and illuminates understanding of human existence. A narrative is a subjective account from a perspective influenced by the passage of time and the flux of human emotions and intentions (Polkinghorne, 1988:159). Narratives create knowledge as a consequence of the interactions that take place between researcher and research participants. Such knowledge is also exploratory and tentative because it describes the lives of individuals and leads to a thorough understanding of the experiences and the meanings that people ascribe to them.

A critical point that I, as a narrative inquirer, needed to consider is the relationship between me and my research participants, and the elements of representation and voice. These are important aspects in understanding what a reflective researcher means and they are related to the tentativeness of epistemological issues discussed above. According to Riessman (2002:220), “we cannot give voice, but we hear voices that we record and interpret”. I thus reflected deeply on the process of the representation of hearing, recording, and interpreting voice and the positioning of the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002; Mason, 2002; Plummer, 2002; Riessman, 2002).

In narrative research, participants are co-constructors of the research in the sense that they are creating their own history in the text. Narrative inquiry brings about a fundamental reconstruction of the relationship between the researcher and the research participants (Casey, 1994:231). Clandinin and Connelly (2000:63-65) also elaborate on the necessity to establish a collaborative relationship between researcher and research participants because narrative inquiry implies the sharing and interpenetration of two or more persons’ spheres of experience. Narrative research has brought the individual back into the social sciences so that s/he can provide the world of research with insights into how people make meaning (Becker, 1999:73).

### **4.3.3 Case study**

A case study is a comprehensive investigation of a bordered structure which is premised on the gathering of extensive data, with the aim of bringing to the fore the understanding and the making of meaning of a situation of choice (Creswell, 2002). This description paved the way for

this study in the sense that the bordered structure consisted of identified primary school teachers within their different schooling contexts. The quest for embarking on case study design emanated from the need to capture an understanding of challenges and practices in teachers' classroom assessment. This is in agreement with the constructivist and interpretive paradigms, which are geared towards capturing the individual and subjective experiences negotiated by individuals. These experiences are negotiated within the coffers of the individuals' world of operation (Charmaz, 2000). The definition of a case study is not dependent of the particular procedures negotiated; rather, it is dependent on the individual case the researcher is exploring. In essence, a case study is not a procedural option but one of what the researcher intends to explore for better understanding (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

This assertion elucidates the standpoint in this study. A "bordered structure" that interested the researcher was explored, in this case challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices. The procedural approach originated from the original purpose of investigating the life experiences and practices of assessment of a specified number of participants (four primary school teachers in the Intermediate Phase). This research design can be further described as a natural case study, embarked on because of the quest to generate understanding with respect to challenges teachers face in terms of classroom assessment, and their experiences and challenges in adapting to policy requirements, which typify a particular case (Stake, 2005:445). Furthermore, Stake (2005:450) argues that the "intrinsic" design or natural design is aimed at building up the issues pertaining to the case under investigation itself, its background and the elucidation it offers, thus the presentation of a "thick description" in this study.

A case study design is important in this project because the experiences and challenges of a group of people are being explored in terms of their real life situations, as well as their individual subjective experiences (Cohen et al., 2000). This case study design has fostered a comprehensive investigation that considers the "wholeness" of each of the teachers under investigation as well as their contexts, allowing the presentation of a comprehensive depiction of their stories. The three pertinent ideologies of qualitative research, namely telling, perceiving, and elucidating, are sustained by case study design (Cohen, Manion and Morrison,

2007). These benefits agree with the interpretivist paradigm, forming the foundation upon which this study has been engaged. This has led to the generation of credible comprehension, vivid description and knowledge that was vital for providing answers to the research questions (Cohen et al., 2000).

In this design, case study allowed the tone of voice of the teachers in a South African schooling context to be heard (Cohen et al., 2007). I have taken cognizance of the notion that case study design has the tendency to establish cause and effect, by distinguishing the position of situations within their specified terrain. In the same vein, case study designs give a sequential description of recounting effects, with the tendency to contain events that were not envisaged as well as variables that lack control in research. Consequently, the broken bridge between theory and practice is re-established (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002). This case study has obliged the fortitude to comprehend how the theories underpinning the study communicate to teachers' challenges of classroom assessment. In addition, a case study has the strength of illuminating other peculiar circumstances by exploring the possibility of generalizability of findings to other situations. It is acceptable for an individual researcher to embark on case study research, which explains why this line of action has been pursued (Cohen et al., 2002).

From what I have observed in the process of conducting this study and in reviewing the relevant literature, it is important to state that in any research design, no matter how efficient, there are liabilities in terms of shortcomings, and such shortcomings have to be taken into consideration (Cohen et al., 2007). Since this study focused on a group of identified teachers in South Africa, particularly in one of the nine provinces, namely North West, in a specific district of education, it may not be plausible to generalize findings from this research to other situations (Yin, 2009). Nevertheless, the objective of using the interpretivist paradigm is not aimed at drawing this kind of conclusion, because of the perception of actuality as well as the comprehension that people fabricate their own distinctive and "subjective" explanation of their experiences. Some of the known limitations of the case study design involve being subjective and subject to the prejudice of the onlooker (Yin, 2009).



#### **4.3.4 Sampling procedures**

I limited the scope of the research, confining my purposive sampling to four primary schools, (see presentation of findings in Chapter 5, items 5.2 to 5.5). I sampled a black township school (semi-rural), a school situated in town, another school situated in an informal settlement, and an independent school (known in South Africa as a private school which does not rely on state funding). My choice was based on the fact that each of these schools had its own history, culture of learning and teaching, and its own climate, and I was interested in finding out to what extent context plays a part in teachers' classroom assessment challenges.

In purposive sampling, the researcher applies his/her experience and judgment to select cases that are representative or typical. I chose primary schools because of my greater familiarity with this context and also because the rolling in of the new assessment policy in schools has happened over a length of time so that primary school teachers have had more time and exposure to the new policy as opposed to secondary school teachers. Merriam (2009) explains that "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learnt". I chose primary school teachers on the grounds of practicality and purpose (Punch 1998:193-195). I did not anticipate that access would be easy, since I knew as an educator myself that teachers are sceptical, reluctant and generally unwilling to be interviewed.

I had to factor cost and time into my sampling procedures, using an element of convenience sampling in my purposive sampling approach. The convenience sampling meant that teachers were willing and able to participate in the study (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). As my studies were carried out on a part-time basis and within a fixed time period, efficiency was crucial. I therefore limited the area from which I selected participating schools to an area that was accessible to me in terms of workplace and home.

My research participants were teachers in North West, one of nine provinces of South Africa. All were experienced teachers in the Intermediate Phase of the primary school. The rationale for choosing this phase is based firstly on my experience as a classroom teacher and teacher-educator in this particular phase; secondly, exit examinations and systemic evaluation are

currently being introduced by the national DoE in this particular phase, and teachers are more likely to pay full attention to assessment. I chose the purposive sampling method because I wished to include teachers and schools who were willing and able to participate in the research study. The key informants were the four teachers, from four intentionally selected schools, typical of the context of a developing country such as South Africa. Willingness to participate in the research study was elicited from the teachers themselves, with the approval of the school principals and the DoE (see Appendices 1 to 6). This sampling strategy could be viewed as resulting in “theoretical sampling and sampling adequacy” (Morse et al., 2002:12), where the research participants (the chosen teachers) have knowledge, experience and perceptions of a research topic; in this narrative study, of the new assessment system. It is a strategy of working with rigour. The reason for limiting my sample to four teachers was to obtain in-depth qualitative information from each teacher that would provide the opportunity to become closely familiar with each participant in terms of their assessment knowledge, understanding, challenges and practice.

The most important criterion for choosing the participants was accessibility (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). This simply meant that I preferred to engage with teachers who were more rather than less accessible. Accessibility was from the start one of my most decisive criteria for selecting research participants. Accessibility meant that I was assured of predetermined levels of reliability and convenience in coordinating times and places for meetings with them, necessary for maintaining the momentum of the research relationship.

The figures that follow depict the map of South Africa and that of the North West Province. North West is one of the nine provinces of South Africa, as can be seen in Figure 1. This province (Figure 2) is located to the West of the major population centre of Gauteng and borders four districts of Botswana. Domestically, it borders the following provinces; Limpopo, Free State, Gauteng and Northern Cape. The North West Education Department is categorized into regions and further classified into Area Project Offices (APOs). As highlighted in Chapter One of this study, I chose to focus on Bojanala region and particularly in the Brits APO because of my familiarity with this context.

Figure 1: Map of South Africa



(Source: [www.southafrica.info/about/geography/provinces.htm](http://www.southafrica.info/about/geography/provinces.htm))

Figure 2: Map of the North West Province



(Source: [http://www.cyberprop.com/property-to-rent/South\\_Africa/North\\_West.prf](http://www.cyberprop.com/property-to-rent/South_Africa/North_West.prf))

## 4.4 Data collection methods

This study investigated the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices; more specifically, how these challenges influence classroom practice. My data collection plan included various methods to obtain information from the research sites. I used semi-structured interviews which, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:47), are frequently used in qualitative data collection and are well documented in qualitative research. I also used observation, as this is an important process by means of which researchers establish a link between reality and their theoretical assumptions (Mouton and Marais 1990:156-157). This study also used document analysis, a technique that relies heavily upon a variety of written materials for data, insights and judgements about programmes or events (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). I chose various methods of data collection so that methodological triangulation would be possible; that is, information received from one source was used to corroborate or refute that from various others. I conducted the major part of my research study in the first term because this was the time when teachers appeared to be dealing with a number of challenges such as National Annual Assessments, classification and other school-related challenges. I observed four educators, one from each of the four schools, over a period of three months, spending a few weeks with each teacher, observing their practices and analyzing assessment-related documents.

I developed a variety of methods and tools to collect data; the rationale being that these provided me with confidence that the research would be rigorous, credible and justifiable as research. I viewed these not only as intimately interrelated and mutually reinforcing, but also as a necessary opportunity for the educators to produce data in a variety of forms. Each of the methods and tools was informed by and aligned with each of the critical questions. To respond to the main research question: *"What kind of challenges affect teachers' classroom assessment practices?"*, a semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect information before the classroom observations in order to elicit teachers' challenges regarding assessment. In addressing the secondary question: *"How do teachers address challenges in their assessment practices?"*, I used the methods mentioned above, but also added document analysis, including teachers' assessment policies and records. In order to respond to the last question: *"To what*

*extent do the challenges influence effective teaching and learning?”*, I used interviews with each teacher after the classroom observations to elicit their responses as to how they experienced and dealt with classroom assessment challenges.

I went out into the field, in this case the schools, to investigate teachers' challenges concerning classroom assessment, viz. how their views and understanding were manifested in what they did and in what they said. I did anticipate however, that my sampling plans might change or expand, data collection methods might be modified or data might need to be treated differently, or the conceptual framework or theoretical thinking initially brought into the study might demand revision; all responses to a research context that was not static but dynamic and complex. Although I started with a well-formulated research design or plan, I was open to the possibility of the research process being influenced by particular contextual factors.

#### **4.4.1 Observations**

Classroom observations were also used to collect data; observation being the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of people, and defined as “the process by means of which researchers establish a link between their theoretical assumptions and reality” (Mouton and Marais, 1990:156-157). The assumption in this study is that there are numerous challenges that teachers face and these influence effective teaching, learning and assessment. The observed lessons were videotaped, so as to form a database for analysis. Observational data represents a first-hand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a second-hand account of the world obtained in an interview. Observations allow for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. Smit (2003:44) writes that observations are also conducted to triangulate emerging findings, used in conjunction with interviewing and document analysis to substantiate the findings. After all the observations I shared the observation notes and interpretations with the teachers to check whether my interpretations of the classroom activities were accurate.

#### **4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews**

I conducted in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, which provided me, the interviewer, and my research participants, the interviewees, with an opportunity to clarify

questions and answers in order to ensure accurate responses and therefore to give a true reflection of the respondents' opinions. When using this method of collecting data the interviewer can probe the interviewee for clarity or for more detailed information when needed. I was non-judgmental towards the responses provided by the participants, in order to help minimize biases.

Interviews were also tape-recorded, with full permission and consent from the participants, to ensure that important information was not omitted. Because I wanted to collect data in the form of stories, that is, in the form of first-hand accounts with a beginning, middle and an end (Riesman, 1993:3; Cortazzi, 1993:86), and because interviews allow respondents and the researcher to move back and forth in time, to reconstruct what happened in the past and to predict the future, the use of open-ended interviews (Kvale, 1996:5; MacMillan and Schumacher, 2001:443) matched my research purpose. I prepared open-ended questions for all participants so they could best voice their experiences freely. These questions allowed the participants to create their own options for responding. I regarded the face-to-face interview as important because it provided me with useful information and also permitted respondents to describe detailed personal information.

By using the interviews I had better control over the types of information received since I asked specific questions to elicit rich and thick data. Semi-structured interviews involved direct interaction between me and the participants and allowed me to move the conversations to cover any aspect of interest that arose. I also asked supplementary questions in order to explore general views or opinions in more detail. I opted to use semi-structured interviews because they are built up of open-ended questions that allow participants to respond in their own ways. This makes them useful for investigating sensitive topics, as Creswell (2003:44) posits: "although interviewers have little control over semi-structured interviews, they remain a means to obtain directives as to what interviewers know and have little knowledge about".

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:47) argue that in-depth interviewing is a data collection technique relied on extensively by qualitative researchers because it enables the researcher to obtain a large amount of data quickly and it allows immediate follow-up questions that are

necessary for clarification. In addition, interviews allow the researcher to check description with facts and therefore ensure more insight into the problem under investigation. I used an interview guide consisting of questions to be asked during the interview and guidelines on what to say at the beginning and close of the interview. The interviews were accurately transcribed, coded and interpreted in accordance with the suggestions provided by Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit. (2004:74-79).

The interviews were aimed at identifying the different challenges teachers face with regard to classroom assessment, and at how these challenges influence effective teaching and learning. This study relied entirely for its findings and conclusions on information given by respondents during interviews. It was therefore important to make certain that the interview process became effective and reliable.

#### **4.4.3 Document analysis**

I collected a variety of learner and teacher records from each of the teachers and learners' workbooks and tests records in order to explore assessment challenges and how teachers dealt with these. I collected samples of learners' workbooks from each teacher's class. The purpose was to explore whether learners' workbooks reflected the challenges that teachers had highlighted and the teachers' assessment practices in general. I constructed follow-up questions after analyzing the workbooks in order to find out how teachers coped and accommodated the challenges. The teachers' lesson preparations were analyzed to find out how teachers interpreted these and how the documents were linked to the teachers' everyday assessments.

### **4.5 Data analysis and interpretation**

A key characteristic during data analysis in interpretative research is the production of high quality, meaningful and relevant data that makes it possible for valuable insights to emerge within a social context. I selected content analysis as a technique to analyse transcribed textual data so as to comprehend the meaning of text, action and/or narrative through the process of interpreting the emergent themes (Creswell, 2003). Content analysis was based on the work of Creswell (2003), with whose description of narrative research design it had an appropriate fit.

The data analysis process was an iterative process (Olson and Spiers, 2002) in which I continuously moved backwards and forwards between the research text, the data creation, data analysis and interpretation (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). During the initial stages of data creation I read through my first few interviews and looked for whatever themes emerged from the data and field texts. I read through the stories and underlined whatever phrases I came across, making analytical notes.

According to Ely et al. (1997:160), qualitative research is a deeply interpretive endeavour, with analytical processes at work in every stage of crafting the research. In spite of this, a researcher reaches a stage in the research process when he or she begins to work quite specifically and deliberately at analysis. I was open-minded about this and began to analyze the data in depth once my engagement with the research participants ended.

In order to organise my data holistically, I reread the raw transcripts and field notes (Smit, 2003). I simply read through the material several times to form an overall impression of what each specific teacher's story was about, my aim being to understand the intricately interwoven parts of each unique story. I identified narrative threads, tensions and patterns within the field texts of each story and grouped, labelled, organised and sorted the data necessary to understand each individual teacher's assessment practices. I then wrote a narrative version of each teacher's story, in this way inductively analyzing the generated data to obtain a rich and descriptive account of those subjective experiences that my research participants were willing to share with me. These narratives were written to present and represent a descriptive and explanatory account of the assessment practices of teachers. Writing the narratives became my analysis as I made sense of the teachers' worlds in a storied way. According to Daiute and Fine (2003:63), writing is often a phase of data analysis, while, similarly, Richardson (1994:517) confirms: "I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it".

Narrative inquiry begins with experience as lived and told in stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:414). Interpretive research always involves a circular movement between the general and the specific (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999:381). While the outcome is usually presented in



general and theoretical terms, it remains at the same time an account of particular experiences. In contrast, Clandinin and Connelly (2000:141-143) argue that a researcher must decide whether he or she wants to present more general findings or focus on and present the participants' stories; a procedure more in line with what I sought to establish in writing the narratives. I set out to understand particular stories and present them in a way that people would be able to relate to, even in different circumstances. After writing the narratives I proceeded with the interpretive phase, the focus being on making sense of the narratives, what they meant and also what could be extracted from them.

#### **4.6 Quality criteria of the study**

Considering that the aim of this study was to investigate and explore challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices, ensuring the quality of the study could not be established separately but was an integral component of the overall design and implementation of the various processes throughout the study. The term "quality criteria" refers to ensuring the trustworthiness of the study so that the research measures what it was intended to explore (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007).

There are a number of criteria that contribute to the quality of the research, notably trustworthiness, credibility, validity, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

The relevant question to ask when ascertaining the *credibility* of a qualitative research is: *Has the research been able to investigate what it was designed to study?* According to De Vos (2002), credibility is an innate strongpoint of qualitative research, with the disposition of investigating a scenario based on the claim that "an in-depth description showing the complexities of variables and interactions will be so embedded with data derived from the setting that it cannot help but be valid" (De Vos, 2002:346).

Within the parameters of that setting, population and theoretical framework, the research will achieve *validity*, which along with credibility has been ensured by taking into consideration the diverse realities and subjective experiences of the research participants. In this study, validity

was also ensured through the content analysis (Creswell, 2003) technique used, where diverse perspectives of experiences of the research respondents were obtained.

The study engaged in peer examination, through asking colleagues to air their views on the findings. The data was given to impartial colleagues with experience of qualitative research methods and processes, and findings were then discussed. Peer examination is similar to member checking, but includes a colleague who is experienced in qualitative methodology and is able to discuss processes and findings with the researcher (Krefting, 1991; Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Creswell, 2003).

The concept of *transferability* was proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a substitute which can be used to predict and establish the external validity or the extent to which research findings from a specific piece of research can be generalized to other situations and people. On the other hand, De Vos et al. (2002) have proposed that in qualitative studies transferability can be challenging because of its characteristics, especially its distinctively exploratory and descriptive nature. These characteristics are usually discernible in its ability to give detailed reports about different phenomena from diverse viewpoints (De Vos et al., 2002).

Conversely, the use of case study designs is potent enough to give illumination to other comparable contexts. It has been affirmed that when reference is made to the theoretical grounding in order to indicate how perceptions and paradigms navigate the fabrication of data and its analysis it becomes feasible for those reading the research to observe how it is connected to a body of theory. This gives the opportunity for other interested investigators whose area of work hinges on such studies to verify the extent to which transferability is feasible (De Vos et al., 2002).

In order to ensure *dependability*, it is important to engage in member checking, peer debriefing, triangulation, prolonged engagement and observation in the research field (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). Owing to the small sample of four teachers used in this study, only limited insights into the phenomenon (classroom assessment challenges) were obtained, thus dependability could not be guaranteed. Nevertheless, based on its epistemological stance (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000), the strong point of this research

embraces the reflective and broad perception of distinctive situations, meaning that it cannot be ascertained as completely dependable when larger samples are engaged.

Finally, *confirmability* points to the extent to which the findings are the end products of the aims of conducting this research and not of the subjectivity of the researcher (Mouton, 2001). Krefting (1991) posits that reflection and member checking can improve confirmability. In this study, I consulted a colleague who has not been directly involved with the research process to serve as a peer reviewer. I requested the peer reviewer to go through the process of research with the help of the audio tapes, transcriptions and summaries. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), this is meant to allow the peer reviewer to reach the same conclusions as the researcher. The peer reviewer was present through the process, but not directly involved. Through the use of the peer reviewer, the research findings, themes and narratives were confirmed and verified.

## **4.7 Ethical considerations**

The overall purpose of the research and the rationale for every step taken were explained to the research participants before the commencement of the research process. The four teachers were taken through the research process and briefed individually before formal lesson observations commenced. The lesson observations took place during the school day and during periods as agreed upon and stipulated in the research plan. The interviews with the teachers were conducted at agreed times, and most took place after school when the learners had gone home. This was done in order not to unduly infringe on the teachers' contact time with the learners. Anonymity and strict confidentiality were assured by informing them that pseudonyms would be used instead of their personal names and the names of their schools (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009).

Participants were made aware that they could decide to withdraw their participation at any time if they felt uncomfortable. The letter of free and informed consent sent to participants was worded to assure them that their non-participation would not lead to any punitive action

against them. The process of data collection did not commence until ethical clearance was obtained to conform to the rule given by Denzin (2005:33), suggesting that:

our primary obligation is always to the people we study, not to our project or to a larger discipline. The lives and stories that we hear and study are given to us under a promise, that promise being that we protect those who have shared them with us.

Safety factors were conveyed to the participants of the study both in their letters of consent and verbally before the commencement of the interview sessions, and measures to alleviate risks were taken (Bryman, 2004). Teachers were assured of confidentiality by pledging that their class lessons were not being recorded as evidence against them, and that the divulged information would not be used as evidence against them. All these pledges were adequately reflected in their letters of free and informed consent (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2007).

## **4.8 Synthesis**

In this chapter I have described my pragmatic assumptions, research design, sampling procedures, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, quality assurance measures, ethical considerations and the limitations of the study. I have also illustrated how I constructed evidence, drawing on and integrating multiple data collection strategies. This chapter therefore forms the pillars on which the following narrative case studies rest.

***In the next chapter, I present the narratives that portray the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices, the coping strategies that the teachers adopted to deal with the challenges, and the way the challenges influenced effective teaching and learning.***

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

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### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I present the narrative case studies of the four selected teachers with the objective of exploring the challenges that affect their classroom assessment practices; how the teachers deal with the challenges and furthermore, how the challenges influence effective teaching and learning in their classrooms. These case study reports begin with a biographical description of the teachers; followed by the institutional contexts in which their teaching and assessment unfolds; and conclude with a presentation of evidence generated by the multiple instruments employed. The discussion concludes with a synthesis that draws on the major themes that characterise challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices.

### **5.2 Case Study One: Mrs Bloom**

#### **5.2.1 Background**

Mrs Bloom (pseudonym) is a 42 year old white female teacher at Sunshine Primary School (not the real name), an independent school situated in Brits, a small town in the North West Province, South Africa. Her home language is English, having migrated from England to South Africa when she was a child. Her highest qualification is a University Diploma in Education; a three-year primary school oriented teaching qualification, which she obtained from the University of North West. She began teaching at this school in 1995. In her teacher training much emphasis was put on the basics of learning how to teach, with a specialization in teaching methods and teaching practice. In these training years, Mrs Bloom did not get any specific training on assessment. She gained assessment knowledge through her experience as a teacher and from in-service workshops from North West Department of Education (NWDE). At the commencement of this research, Mrs Bloom was in her seventeenth year of teaching at Sunshine Primary School. She was the Head of Department (HoD) for English in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4, 5, 6 and 7), and also responsible for teaching Home Language (English) in Grades 6 and 7. From my personal observation of Mrs Bloom, I learned that she was

a hard worker, an open-minded person, and a teacher who was committed to making a difference in her school. She aimed at improving her classroom practice. After my classroom observations she would often ask me what I thought of the lesson and how she could improve it. This I regarded as a fundamental feature of her assessment practices and teaching identity.

### **5.2.2 The school**

Sunshine Primary School is a relatively large independent school which formerly catered for white learners. However, black learners were admitted to this school after the country's first democratic elections in 1994. The school began in 1976, and celebrated thirty years of "excellence" in 2006 (as stated in the school's newsletter), and this was considered a significant milestone in the life of the school. It first opened its doors to 393 learners and 15 teachers on 11 May 1976. Since then it has grown to a staff complement of 44, with the learner population standing at 1,280 (Grades R to 7). The language of learning and teaching (LOLT) is English and all learners have English as their home language. The staff is predominantly White (twenty-one males and twenty females), with two Black female teachers and one Black male teacher.

Since the opening of the school in 1976 many major infrastructural improvements have taken place, including the construction of a fully equipped science laboratory and a library which has been stocked with books, media equipment and improved upon by the parent community. The parent community also built an after-school centre and a reception year facility. A tuck shop was also built, initially run by the staff and parents but now outsourced. With the assistance of the parents, the playing areas and sports fields were laid out and developed. The grounds were in good condition owing to an efficient and dedicated ground staff, and the large garden and playgrounds were attractive and well maintained.

From my experience as a teacher and researcher I was struck by the attractive appearance of the school, the first impressions suggesting that it was well resourced. At the main gate there was a security system fitted with an intercom system. The spaciousness of the grounds was visible, appealing and inspiring. The large administration building housed a large reception area with attractive tables and chairs, fresh flowers on the table and attractively draped curtains. Three secretaries working in a large, well-furnished and well-equipped office received visitors

and students, and one immediately stood up to assist me when I first entered. The administration area was strongly secured with burglar-repellent gates controlled by the secretaries. A visitor could not proceed to the classrooms without requesting access from the secretaries.

When I first entered the school it was apparent that safety and security measures were in place and that there was discipline at the school. There were no learners visible outside the classroom. On a number of my visits to the school I observed that teachers were in their classes. I also discovered through speaking to the principal that the school was often used by students for research purposes and also by local universities for placing students for teaching practice. I immediately realised that this was my first bit of insightful evidence about the broader context and institutional culture in which Mrs Bloom was teaching.

### **5.2.3 Mrs Bloom's classroom context**

Mrs Bloom's classroom was situated in the third row of classrooms near the front gate. It was a large classroom with 20 chairs and 10 tables for the learners, and one large table and chair for her. It was approximately 5 x 6 metres, with a green 3-metre chalkboard occupying almost the entire front wall. On either side of the chalkboard were two steel cabinets that she used to store her learners' workbooks and copies of worksheets, files for the different grades that she taught, and other curriculum documents. Her classroom was well ventilated, with almost the entire western wall consisting of large opening windows.

Mrs Bloom usually did her classroom administration, such as speaking to the learners, motivating and encouraging them, roll call and register marking at her standard teacher's desk, which was slightly larger than the learners' tables, and which was located in front of the class. Around the walls were posters, pictures, wall charts, and teaching and learning aids, arranged according to the different learning areas. At the back of the class was a long bookshelf, running from wall to wall and containing books.

She was responsible for four Home Language (English) classes for Grade 6 and 7, and was also the HoD for English in the Intermediate Phase. The teaching periods were on average about 35 minutes long and on most days she taught double-period sessions. Within the school's five-day

timetable cycle, Mrs Bloom had ten “free” or administrative periods. She found it very challenging and indicated that the ten free periods were not enough for her HoD work. She still had to supervise a reading session for 15 minutes every day, as per requirement of the curriculum.

There were 35 learners in her current Grade 6 (B) class (17 girls and 18 boys), consisting of 12 whites, 10 Africans, 5 Indians, 2 Chinese and 6 Coloureds. I include this demographic breakdown because Mrs Bloom often referred to language barriers and differences in class in terms of the ethnic composition, essentially suggesting that some learners experienced difficulties responding in and understanding English.

On the strength of this introduction to the teacher and her school context, I now discuss the main findings of the research questions.

#### **5.2.4 Mrs Bloom: research findings**

As indicated in Chapter 4 (Research Methodology), data for the research question was primarily derived from semi-structured interviews and lesson observations. On the strength of extensive scholarship that “understanding assessment practice” is not rigid, fixed or static, but keeps on evolving over time, the findings were informed by all the semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall sessions and casual conversations we had throughout my stay at the school. In presenting the evidence, I draw on my investigations into challenges that affected Mrs Bloom’s classroom assessment practices, how she coped with the challenges and how the challenges influenced effective teaching and learning in her classroom. I present these as themes that emerged from the data.

##### **5.2.4.1 Policy interpretation**

A major challenge highlighted by Mrs Bloom was policy interpretation. This was an important inquiry in the sense that I worked on the assumption that the way in which a teacher relates to and practices assessment depends to a large extent on his or her understanding and interpretation of the policy on assessment. She expressed her understanding of assessment as follows:



*I would say assessment is a way of determining where children are in terms of what has been taught, first of all where they are now and then, also to see how much they grasped of what has been done. So it gives you as the teacher direction of where they are, what knowledge they have acquired, and that guides you as to what you still need to do. In other words um ... you assess to see what they have gained and how far they have progressed along the way.*

Her understanding was in line with the definition of assessment as stipulated in the National Protocol on Assessment (NPA) for Grades R-12 (DoE, 2011). This policy is part of a developmental process aimed at increasing the capacity of the South African education system, teachers, school management teams and the departmental officials. The policy aims to enhance its effective implementation by developing an authentic assessment system that is congruent with OBE in general and the National Curriculum in particular (DoE, 2011).

The National Protocol on Assessment (NPA) Grades R-12 (DoE, 2011) defines assessment as:

*... a process of making decisions about a learner's performance. It involves gathering and organising of information (evidence of learning) in order to review what learners have achieved. It informs decision making in education, and helps teachers to establish whether learners are performing according to their full potential and making progress towards the required levels of performance (or standards) as outlined in the National Protocol for Assessment. (DoE, 2011)*

Although the policy indicates how assessment needs to be fair, reliable and valid, recent literature (Vandeyar and Killen, 2007) documents an inability or unwillingness of many South African teachers to adapt their assessment practices to the changing demands of the country's school education. Mrs Bloom was very clear in her mind and in her articulation of her understanding of the assessment policy that the policy was a guideline, a frame of reference for assisting teachers in executing their tasks:

*The learning area specialist once came to our school to check on our assessment. She gave us a quiz, to check as to whether our assessments were valid, fair and reliable. She requested us to use an assessment task that we once did in class. I was very happy at*

*the end of the exercise when she told us that my quiz as well as another teachers' quiz in my department were the best.*

As can be inferred, Mrs Bloom was very optimistic and enthusiastic about the possibilities of the underlying assessment key principles, namely, that assessment is concerned with issues of reliability and fairness. Assessment is conducive to reliability in that learning outcomes are the basis upon which assessment is planned and administered. This is a constant feature, regardless of who is assessing and who is being assessed. These specifications require the teacher to use them as a guide to planning, developing and administering assessment. Assessment tasks are regarded as fair and free from bias when they are equally good measures for learners of different linguistic, gender, culture and socio-economic groups present in the school population. This also refers to learners having equivalent resources with which to perform the task, at home or at school, and having an equal opportunity to learn.

#### **5.2.4.2 Assessment is time consuming and requires much paper work**

Mrs Bloom noted with great concern the amount of paper work involved in assessment. As HoD she was worried that most teachers were striving to complete this rather than helping learners to achieve the learning outcomes and meet the assessment standards. She indicated that in the Home Language (English) learning area a teacher is required to assess learners in all learning outcomes, namely listening, speaking, reading and viewing, writing, thinking and reasoning, and language structure and use, in addition to compiling assessment tasks that include more than one assessment standard. The Home Language assessment standards assume that learners are able to read, understand and speak the language taken at Home Language level. The assessment standards support the development of these competencies, especially with regard to various types of literacy, notably reading, writing, and visual (also regarded as critical) literacies.

According to Mrs Bloom, assessment consumed most of her teaching time because she believed in providing learners with ample opportunities to achieve the learning outcomes. She believed it was an opportunity to get to know her learners even better, on a personal level. Most of the time teachers concentrate on completing the work and recording, without paying extra attention to learners who are struggling to achieve. Mrs Bloom was proud to mention that

a learning area specialist for English who once visited her to give her support as HoD was very impressed with her work.

Mrs Bloom's understanding of the rationale behind provision of expanded opportunities for learners is consistent with the policy, which highlights that learners must be given an opportunity to learn at a varied pace so as to achieve learning outcomes and assessment standards. Expanded opportunity is one of the principles of assessment. This principle requires that teachers find multiple ways of exposing learners to opportunities that will enable them to demonstrate their full potential. Learners are expected to succeed, but not necessarily at the same time and in the same way. The teacher needs to maximise opportunities for every learner by challenging them to achieve and improve as individuals, but not to compete against other learners (DoE, 2007).

#### **5.2.4.3 Planning for assessment and using a variety of methods**

Mrs Bloom understood that the method of assessment had to be adapted according to what was being done in class. She mentioned that she looked at assessment standards and the learning outcomes and then designed an activity. In so doing she was able to see which assessment methods she could use, whether it would be an informal discussion where she just listened to what the children were saying or a formal assessment where there were specific criteria to assess. When she assessed she wished to see what the children could or could not do. If the content of assessment was to provide a straightforward answer, such as an adverbial clause or phrase, she did not provide criteria for assessment, but if it was a reading lesson she gave learners criteria to assess reading. It was the activity that determined which assessment methods would be used.

On planning for assessment, Mrs Bloom said the following:

*Ok ... before I draw up any assessment task, I look at the assessment standards, these I get from the National Protocol on Assessment. It clearly stipulates what learners in my grade six class are expected to be able to do, and how they are to be assessed. So my assessment is kind of fixed even before I give them an activity.*

This is in accordance with the assessment policy, which states that assessment tasks have to be weighted to collectively engage with all the Learning Outcomes (LOs) and Assessment Standards (ASs) for the particular grade. However, Mrs Bloom did not provide her understanding of the definition of an assessment task, how it was compiled or of what it consisted.

The assessment policy at her school consisted of a clear assessment plan communicated at the beginning of the year in calendar format. All teachers were expected to practice assessment according to the prescribed policy. In the assessment plan parents were informed well in advance about the dates of assessment tasks and what their children needed to learn for that particular activity. Project work was also communicated to parents, who were informed about a particular project that the learners would engage in. They were also informed about the types of materials learners needed to bring to school. The assessment timetable was beneficial in the sense that it provided learners with advance knowledge of what was to be assessed.

Mrs Bloom's practices were consistent with the policy which described planning for assessment as an integral part of the planning for teaching and learning. The assessment programme was planned by the teacher to meet the needs of learners in the classroom and to facilitate teaching and learning. Each assessment programme thus contributed to the compilation of an assessment plan for the school.

Even though Mrs Bloom had indicated in the interview that she also used lesson plans for her lessons, she could not provide me with a copy of such a plan. Rather, she showed me a teaching plan (extracted from the CAPS document) and indicated that she used it to prepare for her lessons. She said that writing a lesson plan would mean she had to copy everything from the teaching plan as the information was essentially the same, adding that she could not teach without the teaching plan. I observed that all the lessons she taught were indeed derived from the teaching plan, in which she had described clearly the learning outcomes and skills, activities to achieve the assessment standards, assessment forms and resources. However, the assessment standards themselves were not outlined. According to the CAPS guidelines for Home Language (English) (DoE, 2011), assessment standards in each learning area are

important as they define the minimum requirement for achieving the learning outcome at a specific grade. Teachers teach towards learning outcomes and the activities to achieve a certain assessment standard or a group of clustered assessment standards can be varied. At the same time, they can assess in many different ways, depending on what they would like to find out.

On the question of the difference between the current way of assessing and the one used in the previous curriculum, Mrs Bloom said that:

*It is very different. In the past we just wrote tests and exams, we were not given any hint of what to study, and how we would be assessed. Again ... it was in the form of marks, like ten out of ten. Of course when you got ten out of ten we understood it to mean that you did extremely well.*

As Mrs Bloom posits, her assessment practices were very different from those used to assess her at school and during her training. When she assessed reading she let the children read, whilst listening to their pronunciation and fluency, how they paid attention to reading signs and how they changed their tones. She used a rubric to assess reading, and gave them feedback with comments for improvement. Reflecting on her schooling she said, *“In the past, teachers used to ask us to read and just award marks on whether you could read or not”*.

Assessment of reading is now formal, fair and less subjective. Reading is very important because it prepares learners for writing. When she felt that learners had read enough she gave them a spelling test. She was very strict with spelling, and when a learner missed one letter in a word she marked it as wrong:

*I've heard other teachers saying in content subjects like Arts and Culture, Social Studies and Life Orientation ... as long as the child has got an idea of a word, even when they have missed a letter, they mark it as right. I do not like that at all. It gives learners an impression that correct spelling is acceptable in Languages and not in content subjects.*

Mrs Bloom indicated in the interview that during her schooling years they were encouraged to spell correctly, irrespective of whether they were in a History, Mathematics or Language class. Her previous experiences influenced her present practices in classroom assessment. She

encouraged her colleagues to pay attention to spelling across all learning areas because she believed it was the right thing to do.

#### **5.2.4.4 Challenges regarding implementation of assessment**

Mrs Bloom engaged learners in oral questions and discussions based on their prior knowledge at the beginning of every lesson to ascertain how much knowledge they already had. Her practice was consistent with the requirements of the National Protocol for Assessment (DoE, 2011), which states that questioning is an integral part of teaching and learning because it is aimed at generating evidence on learners' ability to listen, interpret, communicate ideas, and sustain a conversation in the language of assessment. Oral questions were used to assess interpretation of ideas, expression of ideas, complete questions and short answer questions.

After each lesson, Mrs Bloom gave an assessment activity to see how much the learners had grasped, and also to identify if they had problems with the content. This gave the learners direction as to where they had gone wrong and how they could improve. In this way she could easily diagnose their problems. Her understanding was linked to a diagnostic type of assessment, as described in the CAPS. This type of assessment is similar to formative assessment, which is developmental and used to inform teachers and learners about their progress with the aim of improving teaching and learning; its application leads to some form of intervention of remedial action or programme. Mrs Bloom believed diagnostic assessment provided information on the strengths and weaknesses of learners or inappropriate teaching methodology. She also believed that assessment played a major role in teaching and learning:

*Assessment is my most important focus because it guides me and the children as well; it tells us where we are and where we aren't, where we are ok ... and where we have problems.*

This statement made it apparent that Mrs Bloom believed in and was practising continuous assessment. This understanding is aligned to the principles of the NPA, which outlines that assessment is ongoing, takes place over a period of time and supports growth and development (DoE, 2011). Continuous assessment allows the teacher to assess learner performance formally and informally throughout the year, and also allows for formative assessment, regular

interventions and support where needed. It uses a range of methods of assessment that cater for diverse learners' needs and styles of learning.

In all her assessment tasks, Mrs Bloom communicated the criteria to learners, using rubrics and giving them to learners well in advance, before an assessment task was handed out. This is very important because it guides learners on what to expect in an assessment task. In this way they are directed to where they should be and how to get there. She liked rubrics and checklists because they made marking easier, and felt that they were fair because she could mark the task according to clear guidelines, unlike in the past when teachers would look at a piece of work and mark it, for example, six out of ten or ten out of ten, without having a clear measure of what the numbers implied.

Her understanding of rubrics and checklists was strongly connected to the assessment guidelines, according to which rubrics consist of criteria and levels of competency or performance, with clear descriptors for each level according to each criterion. A rubric is therefore a tool for assessing learners that describes a continuum of performance quality ranging from poor to excellent, and consists of a set of criteria that defines a task in its entirety and by which it is evaluated. Assessment criteria are derived from learning outcomes and assessment standards, and these are statements of what learners must know and can do. The CAPS advises teachers to generate rubric criteria from assessment standards because these form part of learners' instructions and enable them to know what is expected of them.

Mrs Bloom organised quarterly phase meetings in her department to discuss assessment and other issues related to learning area. In these meetings she endeavoured to remind her colleagues of what was required from them regarding assessment. The school operated on a system that everything concerning teaching, learning and assessment had to be endorsed by the HoD before it could be adopted. For example, the finalisation of the progression schedule for a particular grade has to be approved by the HoD. She mentioned that she normally provided feedback:

*... this is a bit vague, if someone were to use this, would they understand? So we try to be clear and concise in assessment*

*guidelines so that any teacher will be able to use the rubric and get more or less the same mark for learners.*

She believed the better the teachers' mastery of English the better the rubrics. However, she was concerned that some teachers who were Afrikaans speaking still struggled, especially with language skills, for instance when they could not find an appropriate English word.

In one of the intermediate phase meetings, Mrs Bloom gave the teachers a memorandum on assessment and on how to comment for reports. The school also had a School Based Assessment Team, the role of which was to take care of all assessment issues in the school. In the phase meetings teachers also shared ideas and good practices.

#### **5.2.4.5 Lesson presentations**

I observed ten lessons in Mrs Bloom's Grade 6 English class in a period of three consecutive weeks.

In the first observed lesson, Mrs Bloom wrote the date and the topic ("It all sounds the same to me") on the side of the chalkboard. She asked learners to take out a worksheet that she had given them some time before. This was a worksheet on homophones, and beneath the title was a space where a learner could write his/her name. After that there was a box with 32 words. There was an explanatory paragraph about homophones underneath which read:

Homophones are words that sound the same but are often spelled differently and have different meanings. They are easily confused and are important to learn. Look at the homophones in the word list carefully. Try to think of the differences between each pair of words or set. If you are not sure of some, look them up in dictionary.

Underneath this explanation was an activity (Numbered 1 to 15) which contained missing words, from which the learners were required to select a word that fitted in with the sentence.

The teacher explained what homophones were as learners looked at their worksheets. She read the explanation from the worksheet and asked them to underline key words. Learners identified key words and the teacher wrote them on the chalkboard. One learner provided the following: *hear-here, cereal-serial, dear-deer*. She then asked learners what these words meant.



Learners gave answers such as: *listen, place, animal, food*. As the teacher was writing on the chalkboard she was explaining some unfamiliar words from the activity sheet, for example, *reign-rein, dear-deer, face-phase* [sic].

The teacher then took out reading books and called two boys to hand them out to the rest of the learners. She began by explaining the story and asked learners to identify unfamiliar words. Defining adjectives and personification, she then gave the learners an activity in which they were expected to read through the adjectives and decide whether they described “a sea god”. If they did not know the meaning of the word they could use a dictionary. She then wrote the date and the theme: “*Choosing adjectives to describe the sea god*”. This was dictionary work.

During this lesson the learning outcomes and assessment standards were not provided. Assessment took place in the form of oral questioning as well as writing of the activity. She wrote on the chalkboard, learners wrote the activity in their dictionary books, and then she requested them to paste their worksheets in their books. In this way they were actively involved in the learning process.

I observed a similar pattern in the second lesson. Mrs Bloom began by reminding the class about what had been done in the previous lesson on the theme: “*The Sea*”. She introduced the concept of subject and predicate, and explained what these were with examples: “*Sentences can be divided into two parts, the subject – that is who or what the sentence is about and the predicate – the rest of the sentence, and this always starts with a verb*”.

She then wrote the following example on the board:

| <b><i>Subject</i></b>         | <b><i>Predicate</i></b>              |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>The sea</i>                | <i>washed over the beach</i>         |
| <i>Sarah</i>                  | <i>lay in the sun and tanned</i>     |
| <i>Several colourful fish</i> | <i>were trapped in the rock pool</i> |
| <i>The blue beach ball</i>    | <i>bounced on a crib</i>             |

She requested learners to write the table in their books while she went to the office to photocopy the learners' work. When she returned she requested learners to look at the worksheet which they had earlier pasted in their books. She explained what would be done in the next period:

I want you to read about a legend. I want you to look at the evidence, discuss about what you think of "Atlantis the legend". You are provided with the evidence, what you then need to do is to make your own judgement about the legend.

As before, in this lesson Mrs Bloom did not communicate the learning outcomes and assessment standards, nor did she inform students about the purpose of the assessment at the outset. She involved learners in the discussions but did not monitor how these unfolded as she was busy making copies. It was evident that these first two lessons were not fully consistent with what she had mentioned in the interviews about communicating criteria of assessment to learners beforehand.

In a follow-up lesson on the same theme, Mrs Bloom asked the learners to open a particular page of their English reader, telling them to look in their books and to follow silently as she read the story. After reading, she wrote the date, theme, page number and topic on the board and asked a series of questions from the story. After reading the first question she told learners how the answer should be started. The answers started with statements, for instance:

*Scientists believe that.....*

*Scientists believe this may be.....*

*Scientists account for.....*

*Plato may have.....*

She wrote all the opening parts of the statements, asking learners to complete them and write the activity in their workbooks. Most were able to provide answers, which suggested that they understood the activity.

As learners were busy with this activity, Mrs Bloom started recording marks for the previous activities. She called out names and learners were expected to give marks as their names were called. Significantly, some learners, when called to give marks, indicated that their books had not been marked, while others indicated that they had not written the task owing to absence. There was much movement and noise during this activity as learners often stood up to consult the teacher about their marks before giving them out. The lesson lasted for 35 minutes and when the siren sounded the teacher asked one learner to collect the reading books and another to collect the class workbooks. In this lesson, Mrs Bloom had read through the story and learners were required to follow silently, a practice that she had not mentioned in any of the interviews. I noticed, however, that she was not assessing reading but rather learners' comprehension of a text.

During one of the observed ten lessons, the teacher recorded reading assessment. She handed out reading books, *Born to Run* by Michael Morpurgo, announcing that "... *today you are reading for marks*".

She waited for them to calm down (which took some of her time) before giving them the page number. She then referred them to a particular page and randomly started calling learners' names for them to read. After the first learner had read about a paragraph she stopped and called the next. She continued with this practice for most of the period, and a number of learners read very well, without her stopping to correct them. As learners were reading she awarded them marks based on a rubric. After a particular learner had read, s/he collected the marked rubric, with his/her name on it.

Overall, this group that I observed read very well, except for one boy who battled with pronunciation, for example the word *quickly* was read as *quietly*, *I am* read as *Am I*. In the paragraph that this boy read there was a *pound* sign, which he could not read at all.

Mrs Bloom continued calling learners from her class list to read, unaware that some were absent on that day. She urged learners to read aloud so she could listen to their pronunciation and tone. This was in agreement with what she had mentioned in the interview, as were the use of a rubric to assess reading and the immediate feedback and comments for improvement.

One assessment task that she gave to the learners was a spelling test. On each day she handled a particular lesson she would remind the learners of the date for the spelling test. She even wrote the details of the test (date, time and marks) on the chalkboard as a daily reminder. On the day of the spelling test she handed out blank sheets of paper and wrote the date and the topic (*Spelling Test*) on the chalkboard for learners to copy onto their worksheets. She asked them to write 1 to 20 and started dictating the words. Most learners did very well, which Mrs Bloom claimed was because they had read and practised the words several times.

Generally, all ten lessons observed were characterised by active interaction between Mrs Bloom and the learners. When she presented the lessons she did not communicate the purpose of assessment but in the worksheets that she provided as class activities and assessment tasks she clearly stipulated the learning outcomes, the assessment standards and the rubrics.

My summary of the modal pattern of the ten observed lessons indicates that what learners were to learn was clearly explained and that learning outcomes and assessment standards were communicated in most assessment tasks. The learners participated actively in the lessons. When looking through the learners' books, I discovered that some were unmarked. Continuous assessment was conspicuous and assessment tasks were recorded. Reading was mostly emphasised, but although constant feedback was provided, relatively few forms of assessment had been used.

#### **5.2.4.6 Challenges regarding peer assessment**

Mrs Bloom did not support peer assessment, indicating that for most of the time it was not objective. She said that she had tried it once but was convinced that it did not work for her. She had given learners some written work as an activity they were supposed to write in their jotters, after which she asked them to swap the books and mark each other's work. She explained clearly how to mark the activity, which was to read the work, check for spelling mistakes, return it to the owner to correct and submit final drafts. When she finally checked what they had done there were many mistakes and spelling errors. Some had apparently awarded marks because they did not wish to offend their friends, remarking that the work was "*beautiful*", even when it was poor. By contrast, others were nasty in their remarks, not taking

the exercise seriously. This resulted in upsetting many learners in the class, leading to Mrs Bloom's decision not to use peer assessment again for formal purposes.

It is clear from this related experience that Mrs Bloom believed peer assessment to be subjective and a waste of her time. She also understood that peer assessment had to be recorded continuously. However, this was in contrast with the assessment policy, which clearly states that the results of such assessment activities are not formally recorded for promotion purposes but may be considered when a teacher has to make a professional judgement about the progress of a learner. According to the policy, peer assessment actively involves learners in assessment and allows them to learn from and reflect on their own performance. The results of informal daily assessment tasks are not formally recorded unless the teacher wishes to do so. In such instances a simple checklist may be used to record this assessment; however, teachers may use learners' performance in these assessment tasks to provide verbal or written feedback to learners, parents and the School Management Team (SMT). This is particularly important if barriers to learning or poor levels of participation are encountered.

#### **5.2.4.7 Homework**

Mrs Bloom usually gave learners homework but did not base assessment on it, feeling it did not fulfil the purpose because most parents and older siblings did the homework on their behalf. After giving learners homework, she went through their books and recorded their marks on a separate sheet. She did this because she felt that learners only put extra effort into their work when they knew it would be recorded. She was optimistic that this had a positive impact on the children and that it constituted positive reinforcement:

*I do as if I record it; actually, I record it on a separate record sheet, but do not use the mark for any formal or final assessment. I told my class the other day that I do calculate the homework marks and add them to the final year mark, and all of a sudden I had the whole class submitting homework.*

Mrs Bloom mentioned that the assessment activities I observed were challenging, and she was satisfied that they all went well. She reiterated that there were only two learners who she thought needed intervention, because they had language barriers. They did not understand or

speak English very well. She also mentioned that she had tried to call their parents several times but they had not responded. She related an excuse given by one of the children who stayed with only her father:

*When I asked Leonie why she did not do her homework she mentioned that when she got home after school, she prepared supper with her dad, and then they went to the rugby match, and finally there was no time to do homework. I discussed this later with the father but nothing seemed to change thereafter.*

#### **5.2.4.8 Support from departmental officials**

Mrs Bloom also related having shared her concerns with a departmental official, only to be told that as a teacher she was responsible for making children work. She had a problem with this kind of statement as she believed people do things because they are motivated to do them and that in the long run they would see the benefits, not simply because somebody had forced them.

The assessment policy requires that moderation be adhered to on a sample basis at the different levels of the system. A moderation mechanism should be put in place at school, as is the case with Sunshine Primary School, as well as at provincial and national level. The moderation of continuous assessment is done for each learning programme by the learning area specialists. Furthermore, the policy states that provincial departments of education should ensure that appropriate moderation procedures at school and district levels are in place to verify and moderate continuous assessment as well as assessment tasks.

When asked to comment on the kind of support she received in dealing with classroom assessment challenges, Mrs Bloom highlighted that it would be “nice” if they had people who really knew and understood what the national DoE wanted. She was of the opinion that most district officials did not know what was required of them and also believed that the learning area specialists were unsure of their work. She mentioned that she wished they could just come to their school at one point and show them what they really wanted to see in assessment. In most cases they gave teachers different and contradictory information. This was frustrating, confusing and de-motivating for teachers, leading them ultimately to do what they felt was

right. She mentioned that she had invested much energy and time in drafting assessment tasks according to what specialists had indicated, only to find at a later stage that it should have been done differently, or to be told at the next meeting that she had done it all incorrectly and so to redo it.

Mrs Bloom mentioned that she had once attended a regional workshop where teachers from different districts were invited. Teachers had conflicting statements about issues in the curriculum; one official even telling them to ignore what the district prescribed and concentrate on national issues; consequently, Mrs Bloom was convinced that some district officials did not know what was expected from them in terms of their job descriptions. She believed there was only one learning area specialist in the Intermediate Phase responsible for monitoring English Home Language who was committed to her work and made an extra effort to assist teachers. This woman had once told Mrs Bloom that everything that they did at her school was of a good standard. As Mrs Bloom related:

*I confronted her the other day when I met her in the mall, her name is Mpho, and asked her why they do not come to our school to provide support. She told me that our school is doing very well; the officials do not really concern themselves with schools such as Sunshine, because they have a lot of dysfunctional schools to deal with. Of course I understand that they cannot be everywhere at the same time. Maybe it is true and sensible that they cannot waste their time, resources and energy where they know that things are running smooth.*

Mrs Bloom highlighted with concern that the learning area specialists in her district had shifted the issue of support of schools to clusters, into which those in her area were grouped, each with a leader for each learning area. The cluster leaders attended training sessions conducted by learning area specialists and other district officials at the beginning of the year to empower them in this specific role. The cluster leader's responsibility was to coordinate meetings twice a term, mostly at the beginning and end of the term. The major purpose of these meetings was to address challenges faced by teachers in the classroom. Mrs Bloom always found these sessions fulfilling, in the sense that teachers shared ideas and good practices and advised each other on challenging aspects ranging from policy to practice. At the time of this research, she was

patiently waiting for a cluster meeting, as she had questions regarding the assessment policy itself. The cluster leaders did not visit schools, but rather called a meeting in one central venue which teachers were expected to attend. The learning area specialists would just “pop in” sometimes to cluster meetings, for monitoring purposes only.

#### **5.2.4.9 Learners with barriers to learning**

Mrs Bloom also had a problem with a particular learner, Toby. She mentioned that to get him to sit in his chair was a difficult task. When he was given work he would stand up from time to time, claiming either to be looking for a pen, a sharpener, a pencil or a ruler. When he finally found whatever it was he was looking for he would go back to his chair, start asking somebody what it was that they were supposed to do. Mrs Bloom admitted that it was very stressful to deal with this child. She had once invited the parents to discuss his behaviour, which resulted in Toby receiving a beating. She felt sorry for him and did not report him to his parents again. When Mrs Bloom consulted his previous teachers they all remarked that Toby had always been like that, one saying that he was a clever boy who got bored very easily. Mrs Bloom was convinced that Toby needed professional support.

She admitted that children like Toby made it very difficult for her and other learners to continue with work and assessment in the class. Her frustrations also suggested that she did not have knowledge of Inclusive Education, a policy introduced by the DoE for teachers to understand and support children with learning barriers.

#### **5.2.4.10 Communicating assessment**

When asked about her understanding of recording, Mrs Bloom highlighted that it was an integral part of assessment. She kept a record book for her learning areas and recorded pieces of work immediately. The school had bought every teacher a laptop computer which teachers were expected to use to store assessment records. She mentioned that she still preferred to use the old system of recording, on hard copies, mainly because computer systems crashed or acquired viruses. There was an instance at school where one teacher’s laptop was stolen and all her data lost.



Mrs Bloom was aware that pieces of work had to be recorded, but did not substantiate this aspect. Recording, as defined by the assessment policy, is a process in which the teacher documents the level of a learner's performance in a specific assessment task and indicates progress towards the achievement of the learning outcomes. Records of learner performance should provide evidence of a learner's conceptual progression within a grade and his/her readiness to progress to the next grade. Such records should also verify the progress made by teachers and learners in the teaching and learning process, and be used to monitor learning and to plan ahead (DoE, 2007).

Mrs Bloom mentioned with great excitement that when the learning area specialists had visited her the previous week they met with all Intermediate Phase teachers to discuss assessment in detail. Amongst issues discussed were different terms used in assessment, namely validity, reliability, transparency and trustworthiness of assessment, which teachers have to consider when planning for assessment. She indicated that this was very interesting as they had shared ideas and practices that worked for them. All the teachers, as well as the learning area specialists, had an opportunity to see the learners' books and see what their colleagues were doing and, importantly, to see if they could copy the best practices. This represented a kind of internal moderation.

Communicating and sharing assessment-related information was a practice common to teachers in Mrs Bloom's department. She mentioned that there always seemed to be great pressure around the time when marks had to be submitted at her school. A number of teachers experienced difficulties, for a variety of reasons, in coping with the deadlines. The School Management Team had therefore implemented a policy or guidelines regarding assessment and the submission of recording sheets. It advised teachers to use up-to-date and accurate class lists, and that as soon as pieces of work had been assessed they were to be recorded. The learners' marks needed to be continually recorded so as to identify learners with barriers to learning. Teachers were also informed in the memorandum of what to do when they realised that a particular learner did not have marks. They were expected to contact the parents and have proof of such notifications. If there was no improvement within a week the teacher had to

arrange a meeting with the HoD, and together they could call the parents, interview them over the telephone or detain the child to ensure that s/he completed the work. Each teacher received two signed copies of the memorandum, signed, with one kept for their own records and the other returned to the HoD for office records. Teachers were expected to record this information on an intervention form.

With regard to making learners aware of their strengths and weaknesses, Mrs Bloom mentioned that she provided clear feedback in the learners' books:

*I write them little stories and expressions like ... here you've got it right, or please pay attention to spelling. In cases where I assess reading I will give them feedback such as ... watch out for reading signs – stop, question marks, and exclamation marks. I try to make little notes in their copies of rubrics.*

Mrs Bloom also provided feedback in the form of report cards, a system followed by schools generally to update stakeholders of the progress of learners. At the end of every term she prepared report cards and the school organised parent evenings where these were handed out. She then discussed the children's work with the parents and suggested workable strategies to assist them. For the learners who struggled, an intervention form was used. This form was introduced by the DoE, the main purpose being to identify learners with barriers to learning. Teachers were expected to fill in this form with parents, before submitting it to the facilitator for Inclusive Education at the school, whose responsibility was then to devise means of supporting the learners identified with barriers to learning. When such learners were discussed with parents, this facilitator had to be present so as to explain to the parents the procedure for the process of intervention, and let them sign the form.

Mrs Bloom's understanding of the reporting process is consistent with the requirements of the assessment policy, which states that when assessing learners, teachers and the school need to be accountable to learners, parents, the education system and the wider community. Being accountable implies that schools are required to give feedback to parents on their children's progress and performance by means of a formal reporting instrument such as a report card.

The DoE also expects schools to use other reporting mechanisms, such as parents' meetings, school visitation days, letters, telephone calls and a school newsletter.

#### **5.2.4.11 Parental involvement**

On the issue of parental support, Mrs Bloom indicated that the parents at her school were not very involved:

*The principal always tells me I see it the wrong way. He feels the parents are not involved because they are happy and satisfied with what is happening at the school, which I suppose could be true (laughing). He thinks parents are positive and pleased with their children's progress.*

Mrs Bloom had sent out a parent perusal note in the previous term, and pasted it in the learners' books. She asked parents to go through their child's book with them and to comment on how they thought the child was progressing. Some parents complied, in different ways. She expected parents to write quite detailed comments, to discuss with their children and engage with them. Most of them ticked "satisfied" and signed, but did not take the trouble to give comments. Mrs Bloom was upset that they did not even write comments such as "*well done Thabo, try harder Nelly, Suzan please pull up your socks, or Bontle please work on your spelling*". On the contrary, Mrs Bloom further related that there were some comments that upset her greatly. Some parents took this opportunity to criticise her, as in the case of one parent, "*I see in this activity, on the rubric, you gave my child a 1 out of 2, I feel my child should have got a 2 out of 2*".

Mrs Bloom expressed further:

*You know, I was quite upset because anybody looking at this particular work would see that the child cannot get a two out of two, because of the child not meeting the criteria fully. So sometimes the parents use this as a springboard to sort of become personal and actually comment on something that I feel um... they themselves do not have expert knowledge on.*

As a measure to counter the above, the school had drawn up a new parent perusal note, which was sent out later in the year and on which the teachers were given clear instructions on how it

was to be handled. The teachers clearly requested the parents to go through their children's work to assist them, but not to comment on the teacher.

As can be inferred from her claims, Mrs Bloom was very upset about comments from some parents. She believed that teaching was the one profession that parents felt they could comment on, irrespective of whether they knew anything about education or not:

*I don't think parents do that with doctors, they do not tell doctors what to do with their children when they are sick, or with the mechanic who fix their cars, but for some reason they feel qualified to tell the teachers what to do and how to do it.*

Although Mrs Bloom admitted that it was only a few parents who did so, she found the comments heartbreaking and demoralising. She did accept, however, instances when a parent did not understand how she came to a particular decision, and she was always willing to provide explanations for her decision-making. Some examples of the comments that made her uncomfortable were: *"this is biased; this is unfair; this is your personal opinion"*. Mrs Bloom replied to comments such as these by explaining how she came to a particular conclusion about a learner's achievement. She felt that parents were did not support teachers but rather criticised them, and that they should rather be coming to school to find out how their children were doing, and asking how they could support them.

On the other hand, Mrs Bloom also made parents aware of their children's progress, inviting them to parent evenings, where they had an opportunity to go through their children's work and received feedback and comments on the report cards. She also invited parents to her class throughout the year, to keep them updated regarding their children's work. This was also an element of the school's assessment policy. She preferred to speak to parents on a one-on-one basis. When she noticed children with learning barriers she involved their parents as soon as possible and discussed strategies for assisting them. This was important for her, in order to understand from the parents' side how they observed their children at home. The challenge, however, was that some parents did not respond, even when proper procedures had been followed to make them aware. There were, however, some who were very supportive because they wanted the best for their children:

*I once had a problem with one boy in my class, who told his mother every day that he does not have homework. I took it upon myself to design a homework timetable for my class, where parents sign and put the date every day, to acknowledge that the child has work to do. This really helped me to alleviate the problem with learners who do not want to do homework.*

#### **5.2.4.12 Classroom support**

As HoD, Mrs Bloom coordinated book control, where teachers in her department came together with learners' books for a particular learning area. She distributed the books randomly and teachers perused the books to see whether there were enough assessment tasks, work was being controlled properly, and whether the work was valuable and according to the school assessment policy. She then wrote reports based on the teachers' inputs.

Mrs Bloom also conducted class visits, where she monitored teachers' work in the English department. Some of the information about assessment she gathered from Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) sessions, a Collective Agreement Number 8 of 2003 (DoE), the main objective of which was to ensure quality public education for all and to constantly improve the quality of learning and teaching. IQMS was thus aimed at enhancing and monitoring performance in the education system, and at identifying special needs of educators, schools and district offices for support and development, so as to provide support for continued growth, promote accountability, to monitor the institutions' overall effectiveness, and to evaluate individual educators' effectiveness. When she served on the school's IQMS panel she had an opportunity to assist and support teachers in her department as well.

As far as her work was concerned, monitoring was rarely done by the principal or deputy principal. Mrs Bloom reported that because there were two HoDs in the Intermediate Phase, one checked the other one's work. For issues of transparency and openness they also requested one teacher in the English department to handle book control for them. She checked the two HoDs' work and gave them feedback.

#### **5.2.5 Summary**

A number of pertinent challenges emerged from Mrs Bloom's narrative case. First, her understanding of assessment appeared to be firmly rooted in her interpretation of the

Curriculum and Assessment Policy. The policy was the only source that she consulted, and as such played a significant role in assisting her to deal with assessment-related challenges. Her ability to cope with assessment-related challenges was also embedded in the assessment knowledge and experience that she had acquired over the course of her teaching life, particularly in her role as HoD in the school. In dealing with assessment-related challenges, Mrs Bloom opted for continuous assessment rather than the examination-driven assessment as required by the assessment policy. Mrs Bloom appeared to use a variety of assessment techniques and provided learners with expanded opportunities to perform to the required assessment standards. She was of the opinion that there needed to be a change in the way learners were assessed at her school and that the focus of this change would be on preparing learners with better analytical, thinking and interpretive skills. Mrs Bloom believed that the purpose of assessment was to inform learners where they stood as compared to their peers as well as to identify their weaknesses and strengths. As far as she was concerned, assessment served to provide information for reporting and forecasting purposes, to identify high and low achieving learners in the classroom, and also to direct the pace and pathway of their teaching. Mrs Bloom interpreted assessment as increasing the workload of teachers, as it required much paperwork and extra preparation time. Her lack of understanding of the Inclusive Education policy also negatively influenced her classroom assessment practices. She readily admitted that she still needed more training on assessment in general.

In summary, Mrs Bloom's challenges resided in policy interpretation, time constraints, a great deal of paper work, planning and using various forms of assessment, ways of implementing assessment, using peer assessment, homework, learners with barriers to learning, communicating assessment effectively, parental involvement, support from the departmental officials and team work in her school.

A further in-depth analysis of the findings will be provided in Chapter Five, which will include the theoretical underpinnings of these findings.

The next section introduces another teacher, Mrs Naidoo, and examines challenges that affected her classroom assessment practices, how these influenced teaching and learning in her classroom and how she dealt with the challenges.

## **5.3 Case Study Two: Mrs Naidoo**

### **5.3.1 Background**

Mrs Naidoo (pseudonym) was a 38-year-old Indian Black female teacher at Lowveld Primary School (not the real name), a school situated in a small town called Brits in the North West Province of South Africa. Her home language is English. She is originally from KwaZulu-Natal, one of the provinces of South Africa, moved to Pretoria in 1988 and had been in the field of education since then. Her highest qualification was a degree in Education from the University of Durban Westville in 1998. She was a full-time teacher, but in between had ventured into adult education and teaching at different schools. Mrs Naidoo was an accredited assessor and moderator. She studied privately for this certificate in 2007 in a weeklong training programme and compiled a portfolio as part of her assessment. The assessor training was conducted by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) known as *International Competencies Network*. She had also enriched her knowledge by attending in-service training workshops on school management, conflict management and diversity management facilitated by departmental officials. She did not receive any training specifically on assessment but such training was incorporated into the NCS training that the DoE offered for a week in 2005.

Mrs Naidoo was a self-motivated teacher, with a positive attitude and committed to working hard, despite the fact that there was much pressure in the workplace. The following quotation reflects her very first challenge;

*I really think there is a lot of pressure on teachers in terms of curricula, assessment and teaching generally. So you have to be able to stand up to it and be ready for the challenges.*

At the commencement of this research, Mrs Naidoo was in her eleventh year of teaching and was the deputy principal of the school. She started teaching at this school in April 2009, having been a teacher at Peckaboo Primary, where she taught English to Grades 4, 5 and 6. I observed

that Mrs Naidoo was a confident, energetic, dedicated young woman, committed to teaching and learning. In most cases, when I came to the school, she was either busy with a class, extracurricular activity, or administrative duty. Sometimes I waited for her for a few minutes to round off her departmental work before we began with lesson observations.

### **5.3.2 The school**

Lowveld Primary School (pseudonym) is a large school situated in Brits town. The school began in 1970 and initially catered for learners whose parents were working in town. The medium of instruction and language of learning and teaching is English. The total staff complement was 49, made up of 43 professional and six non-teaching staff. The management team consisted of the principal, two deputy principals, and six HoDs for the different learning areas. At the time of this research, learner enrolment stood at 1,200. This school was not as attractive as the first one I had been to. The school buildings looked older but well looked after. There was a security guard watching over the school premises, but apparently not concerned about who entered or exited. The school building was double storey, and consisted of eight large blocks. The administration block was a single-storey building, with a well-secured reception area. There was a counter in the reception area and therefore no visitor could pass to the principal's, deputy's or HoD's office without the administrative assistants providing entry.

Mrs Naidoo's office was located at the back of the administrative building in a single wooden room. In this office there was a medium-sized table, two large chairs, a small cupboard and a shelf. This was where she spent most of her time when not busy with the class or school management meetings. She liked it but could not leave her valuables there as theft was rife at the school. Every afternoon she had to carry her laptop computer and other valuables to the staffroom for safekeeping until the next day.

### **5.3.3 Mrs Naidoo's classroom context**

Mrs Naidoo's classroom was located on the second floor of the school building, on the first block after the main gate. It was a standard classroom with 38 small tables and small chairs, with one large chair and table for the teacher. There was a wall-to-wall shelf, on which she kept teaching aids, reading books as well as learners' books. There was a chalkboard, which she used



for much of her lessons. The class was well ventilated, with posters covering much of the wall space. This was where all my classroom observations took place.

As a deputy principal, Mrs Naidoo did not have a register class. She taught the learning area of Home Language (English) to Grade 6 and was the deputy principal responsible for the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4, 5, 6 and 7). The teaching periods were on average about 40 minutes long and because she taught Home Language, most were double. The school also operated on a five-day timetable cycle, with Mrs Naidoo having ten free periods, which she used for her administrative work as deputy principal. She complained that these were not enough for the weight of administrative work. She worked collaboratively with two HoDs who also reported to her, and she tried very hard to work effectively with them and to support them.

There were 38 learners in Mrs Naidoo's class, 28 girls and 10 boys. During my ten classroom observations I noticed that the learners were well disciplined, even though they made noise when they moved between classes. When they came in for her class they played and talked and made noise, but immediately became very quiet when she appeared. This suggested to me that Mrs Naidoo was a very strict teacher, and one who encouraged learners to obey school rules. When they came to class they remained standing, waited for her to enter the class, greeted her and still waited for her to tell them to sit down. This also suggested to me that, by this time, the children had already accepted the school's discipline, rules and regulations. They also knew that when they came to her class they should look out for pieces of paper lying on the floor and throw them in the dustbin, even before she could say anything.

There were consistent interruptions to the lessons because of announcements made on the intercom system. On several occasions during my observations, learners were called from Mrs Naidoo's class to the office. This had a negative impact on the learners and the lesson because when they returned they struggled to fit in with the lesson. Sometimes she needed to go back and explain what was done during their absence, but sometimes they had to get this information from their peers.

### 5.3.4 Mrs Naidoo: research findings

This section is a thematic analysis of the challenges that affected her classroom assessment practices.

#### 5.3.4.1 Policy interpretation

Mrs Naidoo's views on what she understood by classroom assessment were expressed as follows:

*I would say I assess the learners' abilities holistically, what the learners' competencies are and to see if basically they have met outcomes as set per term by the Department of Education for each learning area. A child has to be able to accomplish something at the end of each year or each term and you basically use the correct means to see if the child is able to meet those goals.*

In providing her understanding of classroom assessment, Mrs Naidoo referred to the purpose of assessment, which was in line with the CAPS in that she highlighted “*assessing learners' abilities and competencies holistically*”, implying that teachers had to establish whether learners were performing according to their full potential. Mrs Naidoo was aware that she should use various different methods to assess learners, as was evident in her expression of “*using the correct means*” in her understanding of assessment.

Based on the information provided by Mrs Naidoo in the interview, teachers under her supervision did not really have a clear understanding of the assessment policy or its guidelines. She felt teachers still needed much training and workshops on assessment, stating that her greatest concern in the school was the implementation of Bloom's taxonomy, a way of classifying educational objectives under the three domains of cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills. Mrs Naidoo thought much assessment in her school did not probe the deeper thinking processes of the learners expected by Bloom's taxonomy, and as a result children did not develop complex thinking skills, and were unable to synthesise, analyse or evaluate. According to Mrs Naidoo, children might be able to recall and best apply information but they could not go into the deeper levels of thinking. As a deputy principal, she had observed that the questions that some teachers set in their assessment tasks did not probe learners' thinking and did not take them to a higher level. She felt teachers needed to attend workshops

on Bloom's taxonomy, especially on how to implement proper questioning techniques. Her personal feeling was that this needed to be done by somebody with experience of the classroom, such as the HoD, an SMT member or mentoring teacher. She indicated that before learners wrote the examination in the second term, she had requested teachers to send her their examination papers once the HODs had checked them. That was for her to ascertain the assessment level. She found that there were some learning areas where the questioning needed to be upgraded, and felt that the learners' thinking processes could be probed further. However, this was not happening. She found some tasks to be at the level of the learners, but too simplistic.

#### **5.3.4.2 Support from the department**

According to Mrs Naidoo, the assessment policy was streamlined and prescriptive, but there were still loopholes. Her major challenge was with support and the direction that teachers needed from the DoE. She felt if those could be addressed it would make life easier for her, especially with the introduction of the CAPS.

The support from the DoE raised serious concerns for Mrs Naidoo. She felt a need for more training on assessment and believed that this was a general problem not only for her school but in other schools as well. The introduction of the CAPS posed a serious challenge in the sense that teachers needed effective training on it. Teachers needed training so as to be able to use the CAPS effectively, and they needed guidance on how to implement the content and teaching plans. Mrs Naidoo strongly emphasised that teachers also needed to be mentored: Her expression was as follows;

*I think mentoring teachers would be very fruitful. A teacher who is very good in assessment could be matched with the one who has challenges in assessment. These teachers can discuss assessment-related issues.*

#### **5.3.4.3 Some teachers still rely on traditional forms of assessment**

Teachers in her school needed to move away from the old school of thought, that of relying on tests as the best way to assess. Her approach was that learners had to be looked at holistically, that it was important for teachers to look at what the learners' competencies were, and to base their assessment on that. She seemed knowledgeable about Inclusive Education, in that she

understood that teachers had to cater for diverse learner needs, but felt that this aspect was often overlooked in her school. She understood that children had to be looked at differently, that teachers had to cater not only for the bright learners, but also the average ones and those who were below average. Mrs Naidoo also understood that diverse learner preferences had to be taken into consideration in assessment:

*There are children who are more inclined towards practical tasks and those who are actually good at writing things down. A teacher needs to get a good balance in the forms of assessment to be used as well as how to use different tools effectively, like the rubrics and checklists and not only to rely on tests and memoranda.*

Her understanding was that with assessment should not only assess where the learners are at that particular moment, but should allow the learner to think laterally; to engage in lateral and critical thinking. She did not think teachers at her school were giving learners that opportunity. She felt learners were not given enough case studies because teachers felt that they could not cope. She believed that the case studies, if handled in class, would actually take the learners further.

The current way of assessing learners was making a difference in the way learners were taught:

*If teachers assess the way they are supposed to, then they would get a much clearer picture of the holistic competencies of learners. I think previously the focus was more on the learners' ability to read and write and that was it. Now we are giving learners an opportunity to investigate and do. I think we are finding that the results are much better. If assessment techniques are used correctly then assessment results would be interpreted correctly.*

#### **5.3.4.4 Planning for assessment**

Mrs Naidoo was aware that she had to use the CAPS document in planning for assessment. She regarded this document as crucial to assessment; its guidelines needed to be clearly understood when assessing learners holistically. She used these documents in order to guarantee fairness, reliability, validity and transparency.

Mrs Naidoo understood that assessment has to cater for the abilities of learners, citing the following example:

*You cannot expect to set an assessment task on the beach, for instance, when none of your learners have been to the beach. So these are also the kind of factors that you need to take into consideration as well.*

Mrs Naidoo understood clearly that when setting an assessment task or presenting any lesson, the context plays a major role. The theme chosen has to take into consideration learners' backgrounds and life-worlds. Mrs Naidoo used the specified content and teaching plan when conducting assessment. These covered planning for the whole year for the grade and were broken down into terms.

The school had its own assessment plan, drafted on the basis of the National Protocol on Assessment. It served as a guideline for what was supposed to take place in assessment at the school, with a programme for each term, designed on a template. Each educator was expected to fill in his/her learning area, number of assessment tasks, assessment activities and forms of assessment. This was regarded as core planning.

Mrs Naidoo believed her classroom assessment practices were in line with what the policy required. She mentioned that, in her school, all teachers had copies of the CAPS. This policy, she said, informed teachers exactly when assessment needed to be conducted, how many assessment tasks were to be administered per term, and how assessment tasks were to be compiled. Her planning was based on this policy.

Although Mrs Naidoo had indicated in the interview that her planning was based on the CAPS, she did not have her own preparation file as was required by the school. This preparation file would have documented all assessment tasks already dealt with in her classroom and would provide evidence of the content and skills she had already addressed. She only provided me with a copy of the lesson plans that appear in the CAPS document. When I asked for her preparation file, she indicated that because she had only been at the school for six months she was still busy arranging her preparation file, and that she would give it to me before I finished data collection at the school. However, when I reminded her of the lesson preparation file at the end of the data collection, she still maintained that because of her administrative responsibilities and workload as a deputy principal she could not get it ready. This is when I

realized that, much as I tried, I would never get hold of the file. I decided to use and analyze the copies of lesson plans (extracted from CAPS) which depicted Mrs Naidoo's planning for content, skills and assessment in the learning area of Home Language (English) provided by department. She had indicated earlier in the interview that she preferred to use it as it prescribed exactly what teachers needed to do. All lessons and assessment tasks that I observed were derived from this lesson plan.

#### **5.3.4.5 Challenges in using various methods of assessment**

On the question of how often and when she assessed learners, Mrs Naidoo mentioned the importance of continuous assessment. Her basic procedure was to look at all that she needed to cover, break it up into sections, teach and assess as she went along to see how well the learners had grasped the taught concepts. When she had covered enough material to conduct assessment, and when she felt comfortable that the learners had had enough exposure to the concept and had grasped what was required, she would go back and assess. She had a clear understanding of continuous assessment in keeping with the policy, although she often referred to concepts rather than outcomes and assessment standards to assess learning.

On the issue of peer assessment, Mrs Naidoo admitted that she used it but makes sure that she oversees the process. Citing an example of a spelling test, she said she often used peer assessment, asking learners to mark each other's books according to the answers on the chalkboard. She found that some learners were extremely strict in marking, while others were very lenient. Some even went to the extent of assisting each other by writing the correct words for their friends when they had left blank spaces. In reaction to this she told them beforehand to identify blank spaces in the books they were supposed to mark, and mark them wrong. When the learners had finished marking the books she collected them, checked them, appended her signature and date and put the final mark.

In her class, Mrs Naidoo gave learners the opportunity to assess each other in group activities, team assessment or team building activities. When it came to investigations, however, this practice became very complex because sometimes learners found it very difficult to mark each other's work. When learners did an investigation, except in a group research project, she would

ask how much a particular learner contributed in a team; in writing, the only time she gave peer assessment was when they edited each other's work. Even in this instance, however, not every child got the opportunity to mark because some were weak in performance.

Group work in Mrs Naidoo's class enabled learners to share their thinking, brainstorm ideas, learn to consolidate, evaluate and edit the contributions of group members, and take pride in their work as individuals and as members of a team. She believed that the negative aspects of group work tended to emerge when there was a lack of preparation. Before she began with group work she first determined how learners would be grouped, what outcomes were sought, how learners would be assessed, and how to achieve group effectiveness.

Regarding assessment, Mrs Naidoo used rubrics, memoranda and investigations. She preferred spoken texts (oral activities) and written texts, assessing learners through class work. She mentioned that she used to consider giving homework but gave up the idea because of lack of parental support. She realised at a later stage that assessing learners on a homework task would be unfair to them, whereas if she could support them in class they would be able to earn a better mark. She always felt that class work was more reliable, because most of her learners were comfortable with the classroom environment, where minimal contextual factors affected their performance. When they did not understand something she would clarify it immediately in class. Based on her experience of teaching in the Intermediate Phase, she felt that classroom-based assessments were much more effective than homework tasks.

Mrs Naidoo was concerned that, as a school, they were not focussing on the numerous possible techniques, tools and forms of assessment. She felt that learners needed to be exposed to a variety of assessment opportunities. Teachers had to stop relying on tests, which were common practice in her school. She understood that she had to use diverse methods to cater for the different levels of learners and their preferences. She understood that when incorporating the auditory and tactile preferences, learners needed not only to write but also to speak, listen and create. However, she felt teachers at her school were not doing enough of these. She highlighted that in Mathematics, for example, teachers needed to stop using tests and give learners an opportunity to design teaching aids related to it. According to her understanding of

using diverse methods of teaching and assessment, learners should be in a position to design an abacus, for example, or create a chart. They also needed to be able to integrate Mathematics with other learning areas.

Summative assessment was being used twice a year in Mrs Naidoo's school, in accordance with the school's assessment plan. She gave learners an examination at the end of terms two and four, but also agreed that this practice was not advocated by assessment policy. She believed that this was good practice in that learners and parents still believed that tests and examinations were important, and attached much meaning to them. In their mark sheets, the examination was weighted as one activity in the term, not given extra emphasis but regarded as an activity that the learner had to complete. Mrs Naidoo felt they should continue with this assessment because it was more descriptive of the overall performance of the learner each term. It was added to the work for the rest of the term, and so fitted into continuous assessment. She emphasised that she not only relied on examinations but on the examination in conjunction with other activities.

Her summative assessment for the second term comprised a comprehension test designed to test the learners' reading ability. Questions were based on the comprehension test and ranged from simple recall to inductive reasoning. The second set of questions was based on the writing skill, requiring learners to design an advertisement for a show at the school, taking into consideration spelling and grammar as well as comprehension of other aspects of language, such as spelling, types of sentences, statements, commands, parts of speech, pronouns, conjunctions and sentence construction. This summative assessment was on the language aspects, with writing, spelling and oral activities tested separately from the listening skill. The investigation was also tested separately, but based on an investigation activity conducted previously in class. Another investigation component of the summative assessment required them to know and understand fiction and non-fiction, and investigate the difference between the two concepts.

The one assessment that Mrs Naidoo felt, upon reflection, she would restructure was a research report. The learners were not at the level of doing a research report so she returned



to and restructured her criteria to allow them to perform better. She gave them guidance, then marked the work based on the criteria. She told them that it was alright if they did not construct a research report, but rather that the aim of the exercise was to find information and draw up a comprehensive report on oral tradition storytelling and its origins, characteristics, and its mistakes.

The other assessment task that Mrs Naidoo gave to the learners was based on skimming and scanning. She felt that the learners enjoyed the task because it was drawn from their context. She used the learners' timetable, issued them with copies of the class timetable and asked them to find out answers to the questions she posed. An example of the questions that she asked was: *What time do you have the learning area English or Life Orientation?*

In some instances she would give them the timeframes, in others she would leave it open. An example here was: *between eight and ten, what learning area will you be having?*

In the latter instance they had to think where this timeframe fitted, looking at the timetable itself. This was a creative activity and learners enjoyed it.

The second activity she gave was a television guide from a local television channel with which most of them were familiar, indicating a variety of programmes and the times. Mrs Naidoo used a range of questions regarding what time a particular programme was broadcast. In this activity she engaged them in critical thinking, asking them to draw up a summary of a particular programme in their own words. She also used a range of questioning techniques and she liked this task because it probed their deeper levels of thinking without their even realising it. She felt she had achieved the learning outcomes with a good assessment task.

Mrs Naidoo also taught poetry in her class, but felt the learners had not as yet been exposed well enough to poetry. She argued that poetry required learners to be appreciative of the aesthetic aspects of life. She presented a poem and asked them to identify basic figures of speech such as metaphor, personification and simile, wishing them to progress from the simple to complex levels in poetry and demonstrate an ability to analyze a poem for its deeper meaning. During the lesson she explained concepts related to poetry such as "poet" and

“persona”. She used South African poetry and incorporated some praise poems from the learners’ various cultures.

#### **5.3.4.6 Communicating assessment**

Mrs Naidoo felt that it was mandatory to give assessment criteria to learners prior to the actual assessment task. A teacher had to give these in advance, informing learners what was expected of them. She referred to an example where she did a writing exercise with them, and gave them instructions as well as a rubric on which the assessment would be based. In this manner, learners knew exactly what she was looking for and how the marks would be structured. They also knew that they had to fulfil these requirements to obtain good marks.

Mrs Naidoo felt that all the tasks in the term had gone well and were successful. She emphasised that during the term the focus was on listening assessment and the theme she worked on was the oral tradition in storytelling. The learners were able to get a story out of their own context; something that they were familiar with in their culture. The listening assessment went well, but the problem was with the storytelling, because learners were not familiar with how to construct a story, or how to write an essay, a paragraph, or a composition. She used the results of the storytelling to remedy many problems such as language, sentence construction, spelling and grammar, and the misuse of words such as borrowing and lending.

#### **5.3.4.7 Objectivity in assessment**

Mrs Naidoo highlighted that the issue of objectivity in assessment was problematic, because in most cases teachers were unable to use the rubrics effectively. She had observed that there was no common understanding of rubrics and the rating scales that teachers used. Through discussions with other teachers Mrs Naidoo realised that these problems were generally prevalent in other schools as well.

#### **5.3.4.8 School activities**

The day-to-day running of the school was also a factor that hindered her assessment practices, drawing a complaint about many of the activities taking place at school. In most instances the learners would be absent from class due to athletic competitions, a show at school, excursions, motivational talks, visits from the health department, planetarium visits and shows. Mrs Naidoo

also experienced a busy administrative workload apart from handling a demanding learning area such as Home Language (English), teaching it adequately and assessing it.

#### **5.3.4.9 Support and resources**

Another contextual factor was the support that children received at home. When Mrs Naidoo wished to probe the deeper levels of thinking and give learners an investigative research topic, they had to have the means to visit an Internet cafe or the library to conduct the research. A substantial number of children did not have the facilities or resources to assist them in doing research. For instance, she wanted to order more material to equip the media centre to make it more functional. She had set a goal for herself to get research books in the following term so she could teach the learners issues of research methodology.

#### **5.3.4.10 Feedback and identifying learners' strengths and weaknesses**

On the issue of recording assessment information Mrs Naidoo highlighted the following

practice:

*I record assessment activities most of the time. I keep a file and record learners' activities on a mark sheet. I use a mark sheet and when I am done, I put in the totals and transcribe the information onto a new sheet and I then file it. I record all assessment tasks and activities on the mark sheet.*

Assessment results were used to improve on teaching and learning. She believed that feedback was very important in assessment. When she provided feedback to learners her objective was the improvement in a particular task. She made learners aware of the gaps in their performance and provided them with an opportunity to rectify their mistakes and perform better. In her assessment she informed learners about their strengths and weaknesses. She often had reflection sessions after every assessment activity, where she looked at how a particular child had performed and showed them where they had gone wrong. When they did storytelling she provided feedback in the form of a rubric which she used to assess a particular milestone in oral storytelling. In her comments, she encouraged learners to improve on their voice projection, to avoid speaking too softly, to speak louder, to try not to fidget when they spoke, and to maintain eye contact when they told the story. These examples were all the feedback she gave when she

marked. She tried very hard to let them know that their weakness was spelling or sentence construction. The way she structured her criteria for marks helped them to understand the nature of their weakness.

Mrs Naidoo mentioned that she normally engaged in discussions with other teachers on classroom assessment. The day before one of my interviews with her she had a meeting with the principal, where she suggested that as a staff they should start having feeder group meetings, such as at the end of the year when learners were progressing to the next grade. She gave an example of Grade 4 teachers meeting with Grade 5 teachers to brief them about the learners they were passing through. The teachers would also share information on the types of intervention strategies possible for learners experiencing barriers to learning.

She emphasised that these feeder group meetings would assist teachers in understanding learners who needed special attention, as well as those who had certain social circumstances that hindered their performance. She would then know what types of learners she had in her class at the beginning of the year. Mrs Naidoo suggested that they start implementing this in the whole school. She learned of this practice from colleagues in other schools.

As a deputy principal, Mrs Naidoo had influenced the staff to hold meetings regularly and discuss general curriculum challenges. Assessment issues were dealt with by the School Based Assessment Teams (SBAT). In the previous week, prior to my visits at the school, teachers had a cluster meeting where assessment was discussed at departmental level. The SBAT attended meetings on behalf of the school and that information was then cascaded to the rest of the teachers.

#### **5.3.4.11 Parental involvement in assessment**

At the beginning of each term, Mrs Naidoo issued the assessment plan or programme for the grade to parents. In this plan, learning areas and learning outcomes to be assessed were communicated to parents. Learners were generally required to ask their parents to sign their marked tests and return the document to the school. This assisted her in making parents aware of their children's performance. If it was weak she provided the child with another opportunity to improve. She only alerted parents when the case was serious and when she discovered that

the child could not cope. Mrs Naidoo informed parents well in advance if their child was in danger of failing, not coping with the learning area, or if there were any learning barriers.

On the issue of parental involvement, Mrs Naidoo highlighted that some parents were very responsive. They sat with their children, offered to work with the teacher and kept good contact thereafter. Other parents did not respond to invitations to come and discuss problems relating to their children. Parents who were supportive of the school even went to the extent of organising personal tutors for their children. She believed if partnership between the teachers and the parents was not what it should be it could impede the quality of learning and teaching in the classroom. She felt strongly that parents were responsible for the continuity of learning at home, in being able to supervise homework activities and in supporting their children regarding school requirements.

#### **5.3.4.12 Moderation**

There were monitoring mechanisms in her school, with the staff constantly engaging in moderation of assessment as well as preparation of assessment tasks and portfolios. There was also external moderation at departmental level, and within the school where the assessment records were moderated by the HoDs before these were passed on to the deputy principal. In general terms, the school management team endorsed the assessment results.

Departmental officials did visit their school, but not as often as the teachers would have liked. However, whenever teachers at her school needed any assistance they would call the district officials at any time. When they visited the school the departmental officials moderated the teachers' assessment portfolios and looked at the types of assessment. A checklist would be sent in advance to indicate what they would be looking for, and teachers had to make sure that the required documents were made available, in this case by the learning area specialist responsible for a particular learning area.

Mrs Naidoo was responsible for one learning area, Home Language (English), and assisted one of the HoDs who was overloaded with work. Teachers were required to submit their assessment plans for each term. The SMT would then do class visit moderation by work control and internal moderation before cluster moderation. The moderators also looked at whether the

quality or nature of activities was on par with the required levels. In this kind of moderation the moderators looked at the teachers' files, the learning programme and the type of work to ensure that there was progress and no repetition.

In her school there was a SAT, but Mrs Naidoo was not happy about its functioning. It coordinated meetings within the school and engaged the staff members in setting up an assessment policy. In these discussions they outlined the policies and practices that were to be conducted in assessment, and set up timeframes for assessment. As a deputy principal, Mrs Naidoo had been tasked with putting together the school assessment policy; to outline the important role players and their specific roles, and how the policy needed to be structured. She worked towards improving assessment practices at her school; however, the lesson periods were too short. For her to be able to get the best out of the learners, she needed to give them sufficient time to engage in discussions, to read and to complete assessment activities. Mrs Naidoo believed that for assessment to be done properly much time was required.

### **5.3.5 Summary**

A number of pertinent challenges emerged from Mrs Naidoo's narrative case. First, she displayed a clear understanding of the CAPS as well as the NPA. Second, it would appear from the data presented that Mrs Naidoo was able to deal effectively with the challenges she experienced in her classroom assessment practices. She used different forms as well as techniques of assessment, and was therefore able to identify her learners' strengths and weaknesses and support them. She used continuous, peer and group assessments and assessed through the use of rubrics, memoranda and investigations. In most of her assessment tasks, Mrs Naidoo clearly communicated learning outcomes and assessment criteria to learners. It would appear though that she was not completely conversant with the terminology of assessment. Mrs Naidoo used both formal and informal assessment forms to identify barriers to learning.

The challenges she experienced in her class could be summarized as follows: policy interpretation, planning in assessment, inability to use various forms of assessment, communicating and ways of reporting assessment, objectivity in assessment, extracurricular

activities, lack of time, moderation not effectively done, lack of proper feedback to learners, inability to identify and support learners' strengths and weaknesses, lack of departmental support, lack of adequate resources and parental involvement.

The next section looks into Ms Motsepe's challenges with regard to classroom assessment practices and the way she proceeded to deal with the challenges in her actual classroom practice.

## **5.4 Case Study Three: Ms Motsepe**

### **5.4.1 Background**

Ms Motsepe (pseudonym) was a 33 year old Black African female teacher at Lethabong Primary School (not the real name), a predominantly Black school situated in a village around Brits town. Her home language was Setswana, and she was from the North West province. Her highest qualification was a degree in Education Management from University of South Africa (UNISA) in 2000, specializing in Education and Psychology. She initially aspired to become a psychologist but the qualification placed more emphasis teacher training. During her university years she was assessed through tests, projects and assignments. Ms Motsepe did not receive any training on assessment during her university studies. She gained much assessment knowledge from an Assessor Training Course that she completed in 2007, organised by the Skills Education and Training (SETA). However, this training did not focus on classroom-based assessment but rather on the general aspects of assessment in a broader context. It was also based on company-related assessments and expected trainees to translate these into their specific fields. The training was conducted within a week. Ms Motsepe had also attended one-week National Curriculum Statement training in 2003, organised by UNISA.

Ms Motsepe's training needs were largely on assessment methods. She felt she used only a few assessment methods and would like to explore more. She wished that teachers would come together, discuss the different methods of assessment, and agree on which methods to use as a phase in the school:

*Quite often as teachers, we kind of rush to conclude that learners cannot achieve in class, when we have not explored the different assessment methods to see which ones work with certain children. We do not assess the same way and we also do not assess the way we should. I think in most cases, children do not have problems, the problems lie with our own methods of teaching and assessment.*

In reflecting on assessment practices at her school, she pointed out that teachers in her school experienced quite a number of challenges hindering their assessment practices. It appeared to her that they did not take it seriously, because some went to class without preparing their lessons. She had observed that most teachers went to class and asked learners “*what did we do yesterday? Take out your books, let’s see*”. This, according to Ms Motsepe, confused the learners.

At the commencement of this research, Ms Motsepe was in her eleventh year of overall teaching, but in her eighth month at this particular school. She had started teaching at an Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Centre in 1998, where she conducted evening classes for adults. She worked there until 2003, offering subjects such as Afrikaans, History and English. She also worked at UNISA, in the Centre for Community Training, as well as in the Teacher Education Department as an assistant administrator in 2004. From 2005 until 2008 she was employed in a full time capacity at Brackenfell Primary School, a former Whites only school in Rustenburg in the North West Province, South Africa. She started teaching at Lethabong Primary in 2009. Ms Motsepe was an intrinsically motivated teacher, who indicated that the school had advertised a post for another deputy principal for which she had applied and was prepared to take up the challenge.

#### **5.4.2 The school**

Lethabong is a relatively large school situated in a village, a traditionally Black area. This school caters for Black learners from the surrounding villages. Lethabong Primary School is a relatively old school, founded in 1970. A principal, a deputy principal and 26 teachers constituted the academic staff of Lethabong Primary School. All staff members were Black South Africans, 22 female and eight male. There were two administrative assistants and two ground staff. The



school taught from the reception year to Grade 7, and had a total learner enrolment of 1,200 at the time of this study. The school building and grounds had a high-wire mesh enclosure fence and a lockable gate at its only entrance. The caretakers were vigilant who entered the schoolyard. The school was a single-storey brick building with corrugated iron roof, 30 classrooms, one computer laboratory, one kitchen and four learner ablution blocks. There was one administrative office, a principal's office and the deputy principal's office. The administration block was situated centrally. The classrooms were relatively large and accommodated on average 35 small tables and chairs. There was a large green chalkboard in each class as well as a teacher's chair and a large table. Each class had a built-in cupboard with a lockable door for storage of learning and teaching material, and a number of burglar-proofed windows.

The sporting facilities were for football, netball and athletics. The fields needed minor maintenance in terms of painting the touchlines. There were ten parking spaces for staff and several trees around the schoolyard. Overall, the school was in relatively good condition and conducive to learning, with some painting and minor repairs needed in various parts. The schoolyard was very clean, with flowers and roses planted in front of all the classes and the administration block. Ms Motsepe mentioned in one of our informal conversations that the school was often subjected to robberies, and in the past valuables had been stolen. However, management had installed a security system, burglar bars and lockable gates in an attempt to curb this problem.

#### **5.4.3 Ms Motsepe's classroom context**

Ms Motsepe's class was situated in the second block of the school building near the main gate. It was a relatively large classroom accommodating 46 learners. Due to this large number, Ms Motsepe had arranged that learners in groups of five. A challenge with this kind of seating arrangement was that once all learners were seated it became very difficult to move around the class as the desks, chairs and learners' bags occupied most of the floor space. She taught all lessons in this classroom. She was a register teacher, taking care of the everyday administration of this class. Ms Motsepe had taken the initiative to decorate her class and encouraged learners

to keep it tidy at all times. There were posters and teaching aids in the class, as well as a lockable cupboard. Learners' books were neatly arranged on shelves and there was also a reading corner stacked with reading books. Ms Motsepe was teaching Mathematics and English in this Grade 6 class. I opted to engage with the Mathematics learning area, in an attempt to understand some of the learning area related challenges affecting her assessment practices. I chose this learning area because the periods were mostly in the morning, and this gave me ample time to return to work after the lesson observations.

The home language of the learners in Ms Motsepe's class was Setswana. The learners were not proficient in English, even though it was regarded as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). Absenteeism was rife during my six-week observation period in Ms Motsepe's class. She had indicated this to me earlier and attributed it to a lack of parental support. I also noticed that the learners were generally not well disciplined, and that there was an overwhelming disrespect for the teacher. Continuous talking throughout the lesson was common, as was backchat when she attempted to discipline the class. However, she tried extremely hard to manage and restore discipline in her class.

#### **5.4.4 Ms Motsepe: research findings**

Through my continuous engagement with Ms Motsepe during my research at the school, I noted the following challenges that appeared to influence her classroom assessment practices.

##### **5.4.4.1 Understanding of assessment**

As with the previous two cases I firstly wanted to get a sense of Ms Motsepe's understanding of classroom assessment. In explaining her understanding of assessment she indicated the purpose of assessment:

*We need to assess in order to know how learners understood what has been taught and whether there is progress in learning. Assessment is important to indicate what the learners have been taught and what they know.*

By comparing her response to the assessment definition as outlined in the NPA, I would argue that Ms Motsepe had a shallow interpretation of assessment. However, the key aspects that

she mentioned in her definition were progress and learners' learning. Ms Motsepe indicated that she used continuous assessment throughout:

*I teach them today, and the next day I revise the work and give them an assessment activity. When it is a double period, I teach them in the first period and assess them in the next. Without assessment, teaching would be pointless.*

This response reveals a profound understanding of continuous assessment as compared to the assessment policy. The policy does not state that learners should be assessed immediately after teaching, but rather on an ongoing basis (DoE, 2007:18). Furthermore, assessment is not a separate entity from teaching and learning.

Ms Motsepe expressed the concern that she sometimes felt she was rushing learners when she assessed them immediately. She preferred to teach them for two periods and then assess them. She could not assess long after the lesson as she discovered that this affected learners negatively. Her understanding was that assessment had to be an integral part of teaching and learning. She believed that learners should be assessed "*now and then*"; otherwise she would have problems in tracking down the progress of each. She also understood assessment as playing an important role in her self-evaluation and reflection on her teaching.

According to Ms Motsepe, assessment at her school was not at all conducted according to the policy. When the learning area specialist had visited them earlier in the year, they compared the schools' assessment plan with the policy and found that these were not in complete agreement.

#### **5.4.4.2 Planning assessment**

Since she started at this school, Ms Motsepe had not been provided with any policy document. She used to have them at her previous school, which was also where she gained much assessment knowledge and information, but she had left them, as they were the property of the school. She survived by borrowing policy documents from colleagues whenever she had to consult and engage with policy issues.

Ms Motsepe indicated in the interview that she used the learning programmes, work schedules and lesson plans that she found at the school, but in most instances she used her own knowledge and experience to prepare for lessons for her class. Even when she had planned the lesson beforehand, she would adapt it based on the learners' understanding. She preferred not to follow the policy while disregarding the learners' needs. Ms Motsepe was aware of the existence of the CAPS but admitted that she still had to learn more about it.

The DoE supplied teachers with policy documents, and the lesson plans are clearly written in the CAPS document for each learning area. Ms Motsepe explained that she did not like to use these lesson plans because they were not specific and in some learning areas they were too prescriptive. In her school most teachers relied on these. The lesson plans were used for a term but she did not find them very useful because she preferred to plan daily. The planning file that she provided me with contained the term schedule and lesson plans only. There was no record of the CAPS document that she said had been provided by the DoE. The term schedule covered the content and topics, learning outcomes, assessment standards, context, resources, assessment and duration. The lesson plan was not clear at all. Ms Motsepe had earlier indicated that the department provided them with copies of lesson plans and that she preferred not to use them, but rather developed her own. It appears from the lesson plan that she did not understand how to write one as stipulated by the CAPS, nor understand what "context" meant. The aspects that she listed under "context" referred to skills that learners would have achieved at the end of the lesson. Also, in the lesson plan she did not write out the assessment standards in full. When I asked her what the figures meant she only mentioned that they referred to the assessment standards, but could not say in particular what they were. The lesson plan revealed that she did not have a clear understanding of a learning context or methodology. The CAPS specifies that:

Contexts should be selected in which the learner can count, estimate and calculate in a way that builds awareness of other subjects, as well as human rights, social, economic, cultural, political and environmental issues. (DoE, 2011)

Ms Motsepe mentioned that the assessment tasks I observed went well. Her evidence was based on the marks that the students obtained. The majority of learners received high marks. The learners were able to add, multiply, subtract and divide. She included all these aspects in the speed tests. She was also pleased about the Mathematics project. In this project, learners learnt about two- and three-dimensional shapes, with Ms Motsepe communicating the learning outcomes and assessment standards on each worksheet beforehand.

#### **5.4.4.3 Using various forms of assessment**

Ms Motsepe believed in peer assessment but preferred not to use it too often. Her interpretation of peer assessment was that she would ask one learner to ask the group questions, because she believed they would understand the lesson better if their peers conducted the assessment. This created a relaxed and free atmosphere for the learners. She also preferred to give learners homework but did not base assessment on it. She explained the content clearly and when she was convinced that learners understood she would give them homework. She complained that sometimes the parents did the homework for the child, thus defeating its purpose. She used different methods in her assessments, indicating the use of projects in Mathematics as well as tests and class work. She was satisfied with the projects that learners did as they showed that they had grasped the content.

#### **5.4.4.4 Resources**

Ms Motsepe compared this school to the one where she came from. It had been well resourced and the teachers highly committed. She had been very disappointed when she came to this school, feeling it was under-resourced:

*In my previous school, I used to take children outdoors, to perform activities and we used to take teaching aids and equipment to explore outside. Learners would bring other materials from home and we designed Maths teaching and learning aids. I cannot do that at this school. Learners do not bring anything from home even when I write letters to parents to request them to support their children.*

This confirmed my own observation that the school was under-resourced. During my visits to the school the photocopier was not in a working condition. Ms Motsepe wanted to produce

worksheets for learners but had to write the activities on the chalkboard every day. However, because she was energetic and innovative, she designed two assessment tasks and the summative assessment task at her own cost. She also gave learners some notes to study at home and wrote them on the chalkboard for them to copy, a practice that she did not like because some learners did not copy correctly and this affected their performance. She preferred to have enough evidence of the learners' work.

#### **5.4.4.5 Overcrowding**

Another challenge that Ms Motsepe identified was overcrowding, which hampered her progress in assessment because she had to mark 46 books each day and assess the learners individually. Discipline appeared to be a major problem as some learners made noise while the teacher was attending to individual learners. As mentioned earlier, Ms Motsepe could not even move around the class because there was literally no space to do that. She often relied on intelligent learners to assist her in supervising class work and other class activities while she was busy attending to some individuals.

#### **5.4.4.6 Lesson presentations**

I observed ten lessons in Ms Motsepe's Grade 6 Mathematics class in a period of three consecutive weeks. In the first observed lesson, she informed the learners that they were going to work on a worksheet. They were requested to use pencils so that it would be easy for them to erase if they changed the numbers. She started by asking learners to say the formula for calculating the perimeter of the base of a rectangular prism. Learners started saying it in a chorus: "*perimeter of the base times (x) height times (x) one plus (+) two times (x) area of the base*". Learners said this formula three times. Ms Motsepe then asked learners to name the prism that was on their worksheet. They identified it as a triangular prism. She then informed the class that "*Today we are going to calculate the volume of the triangular prism and the volume of the two rectangular prisms on the worksheet*". She had designed two rectangular prisms using matchboxes and indicated that a rectangular prism would look like a couch or a sofa. Learners had to use extra sheets to calculate the volume of the rectangular prism. She continued reminding them of the formula, writing it on the chalkboard. She showed learners how to calculate the volume of the rectangular prism, and used examples.

Another activity was for learners to calculate the volume of the triangular prism. Again she asked the learners what the formula was. Learners had already memorized the formula as *“the area of the triangular prism times (x) height of the prism”*. Ms Motsepe reminded them about the learning outcomes for this lesson, which was *“To solve problems using a range of strategies, including estimation”*. She showed learners how to calculate the volume by writing examples on the chalkboard. They then practised the calculations. In the abovementioned lesson she communicated the learning outcomes to the learners but not the assessment standards. She also gave a number of examples to assist them towards estimations and calculations and used the chalkboard to write all examples.

In another lesson, Ms Motsepe began by informing learners that they were going to write a class test on that day. Before she could administer it she indicated that revision work was important and that they would start by practising the necessary steps. She asked learners whether they had practised at home the way she told them to. It was clear from their answers that some had practised and others had not. She wrote an example of an activity on the chalkboard, continuously asking learners questions to involve them, using a number of examples to make sure that they understood the concept. The lesson topic was *“calculating the volume of the triangular prism”*. She then wrote down the date on the chalkboard, getting the learners ready for the class work. Learners took out their test books and copies of the prisms that she had previously provided. She further explained that the class test consisted of two questions. She then wrote on the board the learning outcomes and the assessment standards. Learners were expected to copy this information into their books.

In question one, learners were required to calculate the volume of the triangular prism. In question two they were required to calculate the volume of the rectangular prism. The prisms together with the measurements were provided. Learners were expected to do this activity, referring to the prisms provided. As learners were writing, Ms Motsepe moved around the overcrowded class, in an effort to provide assistance to learners. As she was moving around in the class, she marked learners work. She reminded learners that these types of questions would also be in the term test, so it was very important for them to know the formula and to keep

practising activities. She also informed them that the test would cover all work done in the term.

I had an opportunity to look at the learners' work and noticed that they all did well in the class work. What I appreciated was that she had given a good number of examples to enable learners to perform and achieve. However, I wondered whether she did this in all the activities or only when I observed her lessons.

In another lesson, Ms Motsepe indicated that learners were going to write a speed test. She wrote the date on the chalkboard as usual, as well as the speed test number. She wrote 20 sums on the board which learners were required to copy and then indicate the answers. The sums were additions, subtractions, divisions and multiplications. She gave learners extra sheets to do their rough work. As usual, she moved around the class to check on their progress. When the learners had completed writing she collected the answer sheets and randomly handed them back to the class so that no learner had his/her own work. She told them that they were going to mark the speed test. She gave them the following instructions:

I want you to mark this work. You are going to mark neatly and take responsibility for your marking. The answer is either right or wrong. I do not want to see any fancy stuff there, just a tick or a cross. After marking I want you to write your name and surname at the bottom of the activity to see who the marker was.

She wrote the examples of the tick and the cross on the chalkboard. She read the sums one by one from the speed test, and then learners indicated the correct answer and marked. She continued like that until all sums were marked.

Ms Motsepe used peer assessment in the speed test. It gave her the results that she had anticipated because she had spelt out instructions clearly. She indicated precisely how learners were to mark and by merely asking them to write their names on the marked work reduced any form of bias that would have otherwise prevailed. During the interview she indicated that this was how she always conducted peer assessment. She let learners take responsibility and accountability by appending their names to the marked work. Learners in her class wrote a summative test at the end of the term, the purpose of which was for her to know how well



learners understood the term work and to identify any gaps in their understanding. The test was administered like an examination, taking the form of a paper-and-pencil test which learners to write answers in the spaces provided on the examination paper.

Teachers at her school did not follow the assessment policy. She herself had never seen the policy and whenever she asked about it teachers started looking for it. She felt teachers at her school were assessing based on their previous knowledge and experience. Ms Motsepe indicated that when she had an opportunity to look at her colleagues' work, she was very disappointed with the quality of work:

*There was an instance where a teacher gave learners an activity of filling in the numbers in Grade Four. The teacher gave numbers 1 ... 3 ... 5 ... 7 ... 9 ... and so on. Learners were expected to fill in the missing numbers. I mean ... this is work for Grade One not for Grade Four.*

The abovementioned citation clearly suggests lack of preparation and planning. It also shows a lack of commitment towards teaching and learning. Ms Motsepe was concerned about the standard of work in her colleagues' classes. She provided learners with a range of opportunities to improve their marks, a practice that aligns with OBE's key principle of expanded opportunity. If they had done poorly in an assessment task she gave them additional work to improve and achieve better marks. She mostly used projects to assess the learners, as well as speed tests and tests. As far as projects were concerned, Ms Motsepe gave clear instructions on how to carry them out.

#### **5.4.4.7 Communicating assessment**

Ms Motsepe recorded all assessment tasks, indicating that she recorded the marks immediately after marking. She used record sheets where learners' names were written alphabetically. She explained that it was important to record so as to keep track of the learners' achievement. However, Ms Motsepe did not consider homework in assessment. She did not use it to allocate marks but to encourage learners to study and to provide an opportunity for parents to assist and keep abreast of their child's educational activities and progress. The reason she did not use

it for formal assessment was that she had discovered that instead of assisting the child with homework, parents and older siblings tended to do the homework themselves.

After every assessment task she made learners aware of their strengths and weaknesses. In this way she could identify learners with barriers to learning, an important aspect of Inclusive Education. Whenever she discovered a learner with learning barriers she would inform the parents and discuss how the child was to be supported. Ms Motsepe believed that she created a warm atmosphere for the learners to trust her so she could assist them in achieving the desired outcomes.

Ms Motsepe said that she often had an opportunity to discuss assessment with her colleagues, even though this happened informally. She regarded this approach as a quicker way for teachers to learn more about their learners. At the beginning of each year she took it upon herself to talk to her learners' previous teacher about those who appeared to have learning barriers. After being alerted by teachers about particular learners, she would start to observe those individuals and try to give them individual attention.

#### **5.4.4.8 Support in assessment**

Ms Motsepe had not attended any workshop or training in assessment conducted by the Department of Education. The officials who normally visited the school were from the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) directorate and mostly focused on performance measurement.

Ms Motsepe indicated that once during the year a group of officials from the district had visited the school in order to conduct monitoring. They spent just one day in the school and only checked the teachers' preparation files. The HoDs at the school were also supposed to check the teachers' work but did not do so. The learning area specialists had visited the school recently and discussed the schools' assessment plan with the teachers, but they concentrated on one learning area and checked those teachers' files as well as their learners' work.

#### **5.4.4.9 Parental involvement**

Parental involvement at this school was minimal: Ms Motsepe indicated that out of the 46 sets of parents of the learners in her class only about five responded to invitations to visit the

school. She attributed this to most parents being still very young and either having babies or working in town. She still had reports from the previous term that some parents did not collect, simply because they did not come to the school. These parents were not aware of anything that happened in the school and as such could not support their children. Overall, parents were ignorant and uninterested in what was going on in the school. Children came to school with inappropriate uniforms and teachers could not meet with the parents to resolve this issue. Parents had been informed and agreed to pay school fees but they did not fulfil their promises. The school was static financially, with photocopiers dysfunctional and irreparable because of financial constraints.

Ms Motsepe mentioned an intervention form from the department that was used in her school to classify learners with barriers to learning. She indicated that when a learner failed a grade, it was recommended that the parents together with the teacher fill in this form. The teacher filled in details of non-achievement of learning outcomes as well as other areas in which the learners had challenges. She was worried that teachers in her school rushed to fill in these forms without exploring other means of helping learners achieve learning outcomes. She believed that teachers could still give learners extra opportunity in reading, speed tests and other projects. She expressed the opinion that she was not in favour of the *intervention form*:

*During my schooling years, there was no intervention form. Teachers gave us memory lessons, times tables, recitations, songs and rhymes that we practiced every day. When you could not read you were given a list of words to practise at home as well as storybooks. Nowadays teachers are quick to declare that a child has learning barriers without getting to the bottom of the problem. Teachers are learning barriers themselves and they do not see that, they only complain about learners.*

She had a few learners who had reading barriers in her class. They could not read even when she tried hard to support them. She discussed the matter with the parents and together they developed strategies for intervention. Ms Motsepe gave the parents some extra reading activities so that they could assist their children, and as time went on she noticed that those learners' reading had improved.

#### **5.4.5 Summary**

A number of pertinent challenges emerged from the narrative case of Ms Motsepe. First, it was evident that she had gained much assessment knowledge through experience. Her experiences of previously working at a well-resourced school contributed to her assessment practices at her present school. Second, she found it hard to adjust to her current school due to challenges such as unavailability of resources, lack of support from learning area specialists, lack of parental involvement, absenteeism of learners and lack of teacher commitment, and these impeded her assessment practices. Third, she preferred to use tests, class activities, and projects to assess learner performance. She appeared not to have any knowledge of informal assessment, hence her lack of knowledge about rubrics and checklists.

Ms Motsepe's challenges regarding classroom assessment could be summarized as follows: lack of preparation and planning, inability to use various forms of assessment, lack of resources, overcrowding, lack of commitment from learners and teachers, lack of proper communication strategies between all key role players and support from colleagues and departmental officials, lack of parental involvement and provision of expanded opportunities.

The next section looks into Ms Smith's challenges with regard to classroom assessment and the way she proceeds to implement this in her actual classroom practice.

### **5.5 Case Study Four: Mrs Smith**

#### **5.5.1 Background**

Mrs Smith (pseudonym) was a 50 year old female teacher at Crownhill Primary school (not the real name), situated in a township called Crownhill in Brits, South Africa. Her home language was Afrikaans but she spoke English most of the time. Her highest qualification was a three-year teachers' diploma completed in 1985. In her training Mrs Smith specialized in Physical Education and Sports, and completed the other basics of learning to become a teacher, but did not receive any specific training on assessment. The assessment during her studies was through end-of-term tests and going out to schools for teaching practice to be assessed by lecturers on a day-to day basis. Even though assessment was based on strengths and weaknesses of

students, it was conducted in a very strict manner. They were assessed on how to teach large classes as well as to approach difficult class situations. Their assessments were also based on assignments which consisted mostly of topics to discuss and include in written reports to be sent in. As such they were compelled to visit libraries to access extra reading material. Assessments were also in the form of examinations.

At the commencement of this research, Mrs Smith was in her 29<sup>th</sup> year of teaching, but had been in this school since 2006. She had taught Grades 5, 6 and 7 and was currently teaching Grade 6. She had received in-service training from the Department of Education for the learning areas that she taught. During the training, she was motivated to do projects and assignments related to Arts and to Culture and Technology, and to relate these to the developmental level of the learners. When they dealt with assessments it was learning area specific and not applicable to all learning areas. At some point she attended a workshop conducted by *Classmart*, an educational publisher and Curriculum Implementation and Teacher Training Company. She had since discovered that their resource packs were easy to use. Mrs Smith had not attended any CAPS workshop. She learnt about assessment through discussions with other teachers in her school and in district and cluster meetings. She felt that her training needs were on the assessment policy as she did not understand it well. She also felt she needed training in Inclusive Education as she had experienced learners with learning barriers in her class. These learners could not read or spell correctly, and some could not listen attentively in class. She needed training on how to improve learners' skills in research, reading and writing.

Mrs Smith had discovered that learners in her class did not have a idea about what constituted research. She liked research because she felt that it taught learners independence as well as the skills of discovery and investigation. She liked to give learners instructions and allow them to conduct research on a particular topic.

### **5.5.2 The school**

Crownhill is a relatively large informal settlement situated in the Brits area. African learners from the informal settlement constituted close to 80 percent of the school population at Crownhill. The school first opened its doors to 358 learners and 16 teachers in May 2006. Since

then it has grown to a staff complement of 44 teachers and a learner population of 1,460. The school also serves children of parents who work in the nearby Crownhill mines. Like most primary schools in South Africa, it accepts learners from the reception class commonly known as Grade 0, which is the first year of primary schooling, and provides for instructional development up to and including Grade 7, the exit point of primary schooling in the country. The majority of learners have English as their second or third home language.

Of the 44 teachers, ten had been teaching at the school since its inception. Classrooms at Crownhill Primary school were relatively large, each with 35 desks and chairs. The school was surrounded by a high wire fence, with a lockable gate as the main access to the school for visitors, parents, learners and staff. There was a caretaker who watched the gate for any visitor coming in throughout the day. The foyer area inside the administrative building proclaimed the school's history, with photographs of highly achieving academic scholars, sporting teams and the representative council of learners whose records and results were written on the wooden board mounted on the wall. These records reflected achievements from 2006 to the present.

Academic time began at 7.50 a.m. every day and ended at 1.50 p.m. However, teachers stayed at the school until 2.30 p.m. every day. Most weekday afternoons were filled with sporting activities, which included practices and matches for the different sporting codes. The school was a double-storey building that was both well maintained and developed. It boasted attractive and spacious sporting facilities, an auditorium, as well as an expansive administration block. A tidy paved path led up to the administration block, which was central to the design of the school and housed the principal, the two deputy principals and the administrative staff.

Mrs Smith stated during one informal conversation with me that the school was often vandalized and valuable assets had been stolen in the past, including television sets and other resources intended to assist in teaching and learning.

### **5.5.3 Mrs Smith's classroom context**

Mrs Smith taught in a standard classroom in one of the school blocks consisting of five classrooms each. The classroom was equipped with a large green chalkboard and two steel cupboards, 38 loose single learner tables and 44 red plastic chairs. For most of the observed

lessons the learners' tables were arranged in groups facing the front of the class. There were posters neatly hanging on the four walls, all arranged according to the different subjects. There were also learner-designed charts, mostly of previous projects. There was a shelf at the back of the class that displayed learners' Technology projects and designs. The learners' Technology and Arts and Culture books and portfolios were also neatly packed on the shelves at the back of the class. The entire west wall of the classroom was fitted with windows, which cross-ventilated with a narrow strip of opening windows situated on the upper side of the east wall.

During the research period, Mrs Smith taught Grades 6 and 7 Arts and Culture and Technology. She did not want to prescribe to me which class and learning area to use as a base for my classroom observation, declaring that it made no real difference to her which class I observed, as she essentially did the same work with all four. I decided to observe her teaching of the Grade 6B Arts and Culture, and Technology, because their time-slots fitted best into my own schedule and that of the classroom observations of the other participant in the study.

There were 42 learners in Mrs Smith's Grade 6B class. The home language of the learners was varied, and included Setswana, Sesotho, Sepedi and IsiZulu. Mrs Smith was also a register teacher for this class and as such responsible for any administrative work in this class.

#### **5.5.4 Mrs Smith: research findings**

Having provided a background to school and teacher, I now highlight the challenges that affected Mrs Smith's classroom assessment practices.

##### **5.5.4.1 Understanding and interpreting assessment**

In explaining assessment, Mrs Smith referred to the importance of assessment for the teacher:

*It is a way of understanding how you cope with the work assigned to you as a teacher. It is a way of seeing whether you are following the correct way of assessing the child and how such assessments benefit the child. It is also a way of checking whether you as a teacher are fair to the children, the question papers that you set, are they reasonable for a particular grade and relevant to the learning area. Through assessment I am able to reflect on my teaching, how did I present the work, do the children understand and whether I need to change my teaching style.*

It is apparent from her definition that she perceived the main purpose of assessment as improving teaching, even though her definition focused more on the aspect of teacher reflection. This meant that Mrs Smith saw assessment as the foundation for effective teaching. She assessed the quality of her teaching by using the assessment information gathered during each lesson presentation or activity that she conducted. Through assessment she could adjust or modify her teaching appropriately, thereby improving on her teaching efforts.

Mrs Smith was convinced that the assessment policy would make a difference to the way learners were taught at her school if the teachers understood and interpreted it well. She said that the policy was important as it specified guidelines to be followed in assessing learners. Mrs Smith mentioned that she tried very hard to keep her assessments in line with the policy.

#### **5.5.4.2 Planning assessment**

Mrs Smith was aware of the existence of the CAPS and she had to use it for planning. She had copies of the policy document. She also referred to textbooks for activities to compile assessment tasks. The content and teaching plan specified the subject, grade, duration, skills, core knowledge, integration, resources, activities and assessment. Mrs Smith mentioned that it was important for planning and preparation of assessment. She had lesson plans for Arts and Culture and for Technology for the whole year. Each lesson plan clearly explained the skills and the activities that learners were expected to do in order to achieve the skills. The lesson plans also incorporated the knowledge, attitudes and values that learners were required to attain.

I had noticed during my lesson observations that Mrs Smith did not refer to the teaching plans outlined in the CAPS document or the lesson plans in any of her lessons, even though she had mentioned them in the interview. When I asked her about this in one of the interviews she indicated that these were prescribed by the department and not “user-friendly”. She mentioned that she preferred to use the resource pack from *Classmart*, which provided Learner Teacher Support Material containing teacher and learner guides used by over 350 schools in the province. I went through the teacher’s guides and my initial impression was that the *Classmart* resource packs generally appeared to be CAPS-compliant in-service training guides for primary



school teachers. The teachers' guide provided combined structure, content and teaching plans, lesson plans, resources, teaching techniques and memoranda.

In the learners' guides the skills and knowledge components for the learners were well structured and presented in a constructive and practical way. Comprehensive rubrics were used and it was clear that attention was given to the language correctness, clear presentation and good graphics of the product.

I chose to focus on one lesson plan in order to understand the challenges that affected Mrs Smith's classroom assessment practices. The lesson plan reflected what she had claimed during the interviews. However, I noticed that during the lesson presentation she did not refer to this lesson plan to check what needed to be done. The actual activities that she did in class were not reflected in this lesson plan. What appeared to be similar between her lesson presentation and lesson plan were the forms and tools of assessment. This suggested that Mrs Smith did not clearly understand planning in assessment and so could not relate planning to implementation.

#### **5.5.4.3 Using various methods, tools and techniques in assessment**

There was an internal assessment policy at her school which clearly described what was expected from each teacher. Each learning area had its own assessment policy, which outlined how many assessment tasks had to be written and how many had to be recorded. The Heads of Department in the school were responsible for ensuring that the policy was implemented.

Mrs Smith preferred to use an examination for the formal assessment as well as projects for her Arts and Culture and Technology learning areas. Before giving learners a project she first explained what the project was about and how learners were expected to carry it out. Learners were required to research a particular project before doing it. She highlighted that in these subjects, learners learned by research through exploring, investigating and discovering. Learners were also engaged in designing projects as well as in writing out projects. In writing out projects, learners' writing and presentation skills were assessed. This assessment catered for diverse learners, namely those who were good at writing and those who were good at designing. She also gave learners class work and assignments, but clarified these beforehand.

She believed it was important to explain thoroughly how to investigate, as well as how to write reports.

Mrs Smith gave learners four assessment tasks and one test per term. The test was regarded as summative evaluation. She used rubrics for the assessment tasks, a memorandum for the test, and continuous assessment in projects and assignments. When she gave an assignment or a project she checked the learners' progress with the task from time to time to identify the challenges that they experienced as well as the progress they made. In this way she was able to see if the learners had interpreted the task correctly and to assist where necessary.

In one Technology lesson that I observed, Mrs Smith asked learners to take out their books and she began to check whether they had all done their work. She then introduced the concept of "safety", which she explained by giving an example of locked gates at schools, booms at shopping malls and other security measures in houses and in companies. Mrs Smith then introduced the "boom". She told the learners that the principal wanted this class to design a boom for the school. To be able to do this, they had to know and understand the measurements. The learners had to work around a budget of R10 000,00. The boom had to be strong and made of durable materials. This meant that proper planning had to be put in place, and the boom had to stay there for years to come. The unit price of material had to be known. As Mrs Smith was explaining, she continuously asked questions, for instance stopping to ask what "unit price" meant. She introduced her class to research and investigation in this manner. She also wanted her learners to do cross-calculation. The key questions that guided this investigation ranged from *"What materials would be used? Why are learners doing this? For whom are they doing this? Where will they do this?"* Mrs Smith gave learners examples of booms at tollgates and in shopping malls. She asked learners to indicate the places where they had seen the booms and why they thought those booms were at those specific areas. She indicated to learners that in designing, drawings were very important because this was where they put their ideas on paper. The learners were expected to bring their drawings down to scale in their books because it was impossible to draw the correct size of the boom. Learners were asked to look for the exact measurements for the boom but reduce them to fit on an A4 sheet.

They were required to think of important aspects affecting material in their designs. Mrs Smith challenged them to be creative.

This was an interesting lesson in the sense that it was based on research and investigation, and learners had to be creative and innovative in order to get good marks. However, it was also challenging because, as Mrs Smith mentioned in the interview, most learners in her class experienced challenges of exposure. Some had never been to a mall or tollgate to see what a boom looked like. She gave them a month to conduct the research project and every day she reminded them about the due date. I did not finally see what different learners had put together on this project because by the time the project was handed in I had already completed my lesson observations at the school.

During one Arts and Culture lesson observation Mrs Smith began by reminding learners that their submission for the project was due in two days' time. She had apparently given them this project some time ago. She also wrote the date of the final examination on the chalkboard and continued to remind them that they needed to study and prepare for the examination. She then wrote the date on the chalkboard, as well as the theme "music", and started dictating the topic to the learners. In her dictations she spelled out each word so that the learners could write the correct phrase. She had earlier in the interview indicated that most of the learners in her class had problems with spelling correctly, so she had decided she would spell out words for them in class. The lesson topic was "Ludwig Van Beethoven: the musician". She asked learners to pay attention as she read them a story about the musician. As she was reading she stopped to explain unfamiliar words and also asked questions. She did this to ascertain whether learners were paying attention. She asked learners at one point to name the different musical instruments and also a few questions about the orchestra. As homework, learners were asked to bring pictures of musicians, musical instruments and of the orchestra.

It was apparent from the foregoing lesson that Mrs Smith related content taught to real life examples. Learners seemed to enjoy this lesson because they knew about local music and musicians.

In a follow-up lesson the next day Mrs Smith informed learners that they were going to write notes about “Ludwig Van Beethoven”. She wrote the date and the topic on the chalkboard. She indicated that she was going to dictate the notes to learners. She started dictating words and sentences but ended up spelling every word. I noticed that most of the learners were lost in this activity because every time she mentioned an unfamiliar word they would take time to write it down. She did not go far with this activity because as she moved around the class she realized that a number of learners did not spell words correctly. This exercise had already taken 25 minutes of the period when she realized the best practice would be to write the notes on the chalkboard, a practice that she did not want to engage in right from the beginning. It was clear that Mrs Smith wanted to assess spelling in this activity, to see how well learners could spell words, but realized that they could not and that it just wasted much of her time.

In another Arts and Culture project Mrs Smith asked learners to design anything using beads. She gave them examples of dolls, necklaces, rings, bracelets and requested them to be creative in those designs. She gave them a weekend to work on this project. The last lesson I observed was a revision one, still on “Ludwig Van Beethoven, the composer”. She began by relating his biography and gave practical examples of current musicians. Coincidentally, this was a time during which an international pop star had died so the contents of this lesson were appropriate. Mrs Smith also used examples of songs that the learners liked. When one mentioned a song she was asked to sing it, which made the lesson lively. She sang one Afrikaans wedding song and indicated that the music had been composed by Beethoven. At the end of the lesson she gave learners homework: to compose a song about any theme of their choice. She asked learners to be creative and innovative and stipulated that the song should be their own composition.

I had an opportunity to look at the learners’ books and portfolios, and what I saw confirmed what Mrs Smith had indicated in the interview. Learners’ books revealed the class work and written assignments that she had given them and the portfolios contained all assessment tasks.

Mrs Smith also used peer assessment because she believed it to be beneficial for the learners. She had realized that some learners in her class had language barriers. They could not express

themselves clearly in English, and so felt more comfortable during peer assessment as in most cases they were too shy to open up to her as a teacher but could talk to their peers:

*I like it because it provides an opportunity to teach them to be objective, to develop trust in each other and to engage in discussions. In this way I teach them to be honest, to give credit to good work. I usually group them, I take the brighter learners to be the group leaders and in most cases they rotate. It teaches them leadership skills as well.*

Mrs Smith emphasized that peer assessment created a more relaxed atmosphere in her class. She had observed that learners were free to interact with each other, and that the results of peer assessments were positive. She communicated assessment criteria to learners and believed it was important that learners were clear as to what was expected from them. To this end she explained the rubrics well in advance.

#### **5.5.4.4 Language as a barrier to effective teaching and learning**

Mrs Smith indicated that the language barrier was the greatest challenge in her class, and that she had realized through discussions with other teachers that this was the case in all the classes. She highlighted that about 80 percent of the learners in the school came from different racial backgrounds, which created confusion because the home language was different from the LOLT, which was English.

#### **5.5.4.5 Lack of resources**

Another challenge she had encountered related to the Technology projects, with some learners not having television sets at home and so not being familiar with machines for road construction, booms or large trucks. She was also concerned that learners knew more about musicians and comedians and less about what was happening around them. She always encouraged them to watch news and documentaries so as to understand current events. Mrs Smith wished that parents had been supportive so as to help her in bringing the world to the classroom. Parents should play a role in teaching their children about these things.

Mrs Smith felt that not all assessments went well. In one case she had requested the learners to calculate measurements in a project, but some brought back incomplete projects. In this case she handed back the projects, explaining again what they were required to do, and gave them

more time to work on the project. Some reworked their projects while others brought them back without making an effort to change them. In this project, she asked learners to design a truck, giving them measurements and asking them to be as creative as they could in designing the vehicle. Mrs Smith believed in giving learners a second chance every time. She wished that she could help her class to learn to work independently. During one of the observation sessions she gave them work and was called to the principal's office urgently, but they could not focus on the activity and when she returned no work had been done, indicating that her class could only work under supervision.

#### **5.5.4.6 Communicating assessment and providing feedback**

Mrs Smith indicated that she recorded all assessment tasks as well as the test. After marking the learners' books she gave feedback, which gave her an idea of whether the learners understood the assessment task. Through these discussions learners saw their mistakes and made corrections, which she regarded as a form of reflection on her part. She also made learners aware of their strengths and weaknesses, giving them rubrics and explaining these clearly. For the children who did not do well in an assessment task Mrs Smith organised individual discussions with them.

Parents were informed about their children's work through report cards which the school sent out at the end of each term, enabling parents to see how their children had performed throughout the term. On the report cards parents were requested to comment about their children's work, and were invited to the school throughout the year to discuss their children's work with teachers.

#### **5.5.4.7 Support from departmental officials**

Mrs Smith expressed concern that the district officials did not seem to be sure of what they were doing. They had shifted their responsibilities for supporting schools to cluster leaders. The learning area specialists addressed teachers at cluster meetings and not in schools. Mrs Smith was concerned that the information from the cluster leader and the department was contradictory. Most of the time she was confused and frustrated because of the information she received from the cluster:

*I wish we could have a clear directive from the department and that the district departmental officials become responsible for support to schools, not the cluster leaders. By the way cluster leaders are teachers like us, how can they become experts or specialists and do the work that has to be done by the experts?*

#### **5.5.4.8 Lack of parental involvement**

Lack of parental involvement was a cause of great concern at her school, and Mrs Smith indicated that parents were not generally supportive. She regarded learning as an important aspect of children's lives with partnership of utmost importance. However, she struggled most of the time to get parents to come to school, even when asked to. Mrs Smith was concerned that she saw parents when they had problems with their children but not when they were called to school. She was convinced that parents did not even check their children's books because, if they did, the books would be tidier and learners would be performing better than they did.

#### **5.5.4.9 Lack of enough monitoring procedures**

Mrs Smith was pleased that at her school there was a monitoring mechanism. The Head of Department (HoD) regularly checked her work and gave prompt feedback, checking her entire file and then compiling reports to the principal about each aspect of her work with suggestions for improvement. She provided me with a copy of the internal moderation report from her HoD. After the HoD had checked her file it was sent to the cluster leaders and finally to the learning area specialist, a process that took place only once a term. It was only when the learning area specialist detected problems with the work that they would visit the school. The district officials had encouraged teachers to attend the cluster meetings because they saw it as an opportunity for teachers to engage with the policy and its requirements. The teachers were also able to share good practices from their schools with their counterparts.

Mrs Smith emphasized that as staff they regularly held meetings to discuss challenges in assessment and suggest possible ways of dealing with these. This also happened within the different subjects. All teachers benefited from the discussions because they shared ideas and good practices.

### **5.5.5 Summary**

A number of pertinent challenges emerged from the case of Mrs Smith. First, she admitted having the CAPS document but showed no understanding of the content and teaching plans as set out in it. Her other challenge was that she did not have an understanding of the principles of Inclusive Education and how to accommodate and support learners with learning barriers. She expressed concern that most teachers did not care about the quality of education, hence their lack of commitment to teaching. Mrs Smith raised concerns that the department was not doing enough in terms of teacher in-service training, but rather outsourced such training to NGOs and training institutes outside the department. The issue of language in assessment was a point of concern since learners were assessed in English and not in their mother tongue. Mrs Smith regarded the content and teaching plans in the CAPS document as not being easily accessible to the learners, hence she preferred the materials from a training company. Monitoring mechanisms at her school were implemented infrequently and she felt that teachers then did as they wished. She also identified lack of support from learning area specialists and preferred to use summative as opposed to formative assessment.

## **5.6 Assessment narrative: teachers' challenges with assessment**

My constructed story of the teachers in their teaching contexts focuses on the challenges they experience with classroom assessment, planning assessment, implementing assessment, recording and reporting assessment and support in assessment. Challenges and changes in assessment after the introduction of OBE have not been easy for most teachers. The CAPS places emphasis on assessment as a major instrument that teachers have to use as a means of improving quality teaching and learning in different classroom contexts. Such an emphasis, according to the literature, calls for a paradigm shift in teachers' perceptions of assessment and of the overall relationship between teaching, learning and assessment (Mbelani; 2008). It is clear that there are similarities as well as differences in how individual teachers experience, understand and practice classroom assessment. I believe that the previous narratives will shed light on teachers' conceptions of assessment.



All four teachers in this study had been teaching for more than ten years and spent most of their teaching years teaching under the North West Department of Education. I noticed that all four educators were experienced, even though Ms Motsepe and Mrs Smith seemed to be struggling to adapt their assessment practices to the demands of the CAPS, a finding similar to the one of Vandeyar and Killen (2007). All four teachers had at one point improved their professional qualifications through further studies, and Mrs Naidoo and Mrs Bloom were in management positions at their respective schools, Mrs Naidoo as a deputy principal and Mrs Bloom as HoD.

It is evident from the data gathered that all four teachers had a great deal of love for, and commitment to their learners, as well as a passion for teaching. These teachers also believed that their experiences in teaching assisted them to cope with the challenges and changes introduced after 1997. They all had firmly established classroom rules, regulations, and routines, and their learners knew what was expected of them.

Mrs Smith and Mrs Bloom were trained in the traditional methods of teaching and learner assessment. In the past these two teachers used traditional methods of teaching in their classrooms, such as question and answer, drill work and rote learning, and they were happy and comfortable with these because they felt that they went well. However, Mrs Bloom at some point felt that the new assessment system was working very well because it was learner-centred. These teachers were of the opinion that in the old system the environment in which they worked had been well structured, in that even though at the time they perceived the system to be strict and prescriptive there were clear directives from their seniors. The support they received from their superiors and immediate seniors may have been authoritative, but they appreciated it because it came with guidance, clear directives and prescriptions, and the teachers knew what was expected of them. They felt that there was more pressure on them than in the past, when they were able to cope with their workloads because there was not so much paperwork in assessment. They had enough time available to complete their teaching tasks and as such felt that the teaching then had been less stressful. Their superiors were very strict and commanded a great deal of respect and authority.

Both Mrs Bloom and Mrs Smith agreed that the traditional method of assessment was not inclusive since it did not make provision for catering for the diverse needs of learners nor address the different assessment methods. However, they also agreed that whilst it was good that diversity and inclusivity were provided for in the CAPS, there was not much time for the teachers or learners to complete the assessments in line with the policy requirements. All participants in this study found learner assessments overwhelming, both for them as teachers and also for their learners. Mrs Smith and Mrs Bloom further indicated that in the past there had not been much recording of marks, while assessments were done once a month in the form of a test, not as often as is the case now.

On the other hand, Ms Motsepe and Mrs Naidoo only started teaching after the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) had been introduced and as such could not compare their experiences with any previous system. However, they also experienced challenges such as the excessive time spent on paperwork, on recording and reporting of assessment results, feedback to learners, compilation of assessment tasks and on the planning of assessment.

All participants in this study identified assessment training as their training need, with special emphasis on planning, implementation, interpretation and recording and reporting. Mrs Smith and Mrs Bloom stated that assessment during their training years was judgemental and evaluative. As students they were evaluated based on their lecturers' personal judgement. Their evaluation was in the form of teaching practice, a type of evaluation still practised in teacher education programmes, where lecturers visit students at school to see how they relate theory to practice.

Ms Motsepe and Mrs Naidoo had taken it upon themselves to register for and complete an Assessor Course provided by non-governmental training institutions in order to acquire more knowledge and skills in assessment. Although they said that this training was a generic one, not only based on education aspects, they were able to relate the information to the classroom situation. This training was open to educators, skills development facilitators, trainers and those who wanted to become trainers, human resource practitioners and anyone who wanted to qualify as an assessor. The assessor training opened up opportunities for teachers to work as

qualified assessors. The generic assessor unit standard was for those who assessed people for their achievement of learning outcomes in terms of specified criteria using pre-designed outcomes and criteria as defined in a range of documents.

All four participants in this study were teaching in large schools, with a total learner enrolment of over twelve hundred. All the four schools, although situated in different areas, were under the same district office. Ms Motsepe felt that her school was neglected because it was in the township.

Teachers in this study experienced assessment as a means of improving teaching and learning. They also understood that they had to use the correct means of assessment in order to improve learning and teaching. The challenges that they experienced in assessment referred to the different assessment methods that they used, the achievement of learning outcomes, the progression of learners, provision of expanded opportunities, continuous assessment and assessment competencies. Mrs Smith mentioned an interesting aspect, namely that assessment was important in order for the teacher to reflect on and to adapt his/her teaching style. Only Mrs Naidoo and Mrs Smith made reference to the CAPS and said that it was prescriptive and also a guideline to inform teachers of what needed to be done. Mrs Smith was aware of the policy and understood its stipulations, but Ms Motsepe did not even have a copy from her school. Ms Motsepe had mentioned earlier that not one of the educators in her school was knowledgeable about the policy stipulations.

All participants understood that they had to refer to the CAPS as well as the NPA, even though they were at different levels of such understanding. Mrs Bloom and Mrs Naidoo showed an impressive understanding of the policy and their assessment practices were in line with the policy prescriptions.

All participants regarded feedback as an important aspect in teaching, learning and assessment. After marking the learners' books they indicated that they gave immediate feedback, which I witnessed during observation. They recorded learners' marks in the worksheets and made parents aware of their children's strengths and weaknesses. Communication to parents was mostly in the form of letters and progress reports handed out at the end of each term. The

teachers in this study all experienced challenges in terms of excessive paperwork and administrative work that consumed most of their teaching time. The teachers were aware of the Inclusive Education policy as propagated by the National Department of Education, but did not have the necessary training and skills to support learners with barriers to learning. They felt that at their schools teachers did not have sufficient education regarding diversity and inclusivity.

The participants believed in continuous assessment and indicated that they used it throughout. In the observed lessons questioning was frequently used, and they reported that they used both formative and summative assessment. Their assessment confirmed that it was diagnostic because they were able to provide expanded opportunities to learners even though they had a surface understanding of the Inclusive Education policy.

Teachers in this study used tests, class work, projects, rubrics, memoranda, checklists and assignments in their assessments. Mrs Smith further used investigations, exploring, discovering and designing in her Arts and Culture and Technology lessons, while Mrs Naidoo only used investigation for her research projects. Of the four teachers, only Mrs Bloom mentioned that she was not in support of peer assessment, but the others highlighted that it created a relaxed atmosphere. Mrs Naidoo, however, used it but only under strict supervision. None of the teachers used homework for assessment. Ms Motsepe had discovered that parents did the actual homework for the learners, even writing it for them. Teachers shared the sentiment that, overall, parents were not as involved as they should be in their children's work.

As members of the school management team, Mrs Bloom and Mrs Naidoo conducted phase meetings in their schools to share good practices and guide teachers in their phases. Mrs Smith also confirmed that meetings were held at her school to discuss assessment and other curricula-related issues. Ms Motsepe, on the other hand, was de-motivated, indicating that the principal always reminded HoDs to facilitate phase meetings, but this had not been a success.

All four teachers agreed that the overall support they received from departmental officials, particularly the learning area specialists, was minimal. According to the four teachers, in the North West Department of Education the learning area specialists had shifted their roles and

responsibilities of supporting teachers to the clusters. At the beginning of each year teachers were called to a learning area cluster meeting and cluster leaders were chosen. These cluster leaders were given a once-off training session on a particular learning area after which they were responsible for conducting follow-up meetings with teachers. Mrs Smith said that she had learned much from interacting with other teachers in the cluster meetings, while Mrs Bloom and Mrs Naidoo mentioned that they did not acquire much knowledge from these meetings, regarding them as meant for sharing good and bad practices. Mrs Naidoo and Mrs Smith felt that these meetings were a complete waste of their time because they felt that no new or enriching information was gained from them. There was no monitoring by the district officials, no regular supervision of teachers and no inputs with regard to the learners' overall performance. The teachers acknowledged that the introduction of OBE had increased their administrative work and they had serious challenges in coping with the demands. They also agreed that there was absolutely no consultation or involvement of teachers in the processes leading up to the changes that had been implemented in the CAPS and its NPA.

Ms Motsepe felt that her school was totally neglected by the provincial department of education because they struggled to get hold of policy documents. The only time district officials visited her school was when they were conducting Integrated Quality Management Systems (IQMS) sessions, a performance monitoring system by the national DoE. These officials only visited the schools for that purpose and the visits emphasised expected performance measures. There was minimal guidance provided on the system itself.

In terms of parental involvement, the participants felt that this was a challenge: most parents were not involved in their children's school activities, except for a few who were on the schools' governing bodies. The teachers mentioned that attendance at general parent meetings was poor. Most parents did not assist their children with schoolwork and were uncooperative. The teachers had the impression that they felt it was solely the responsibility of the teacher to educate their children and they felt burdened by the additional work that they had to do at home with their children. However, contrary to what the participants stated, there was evidence to suggest that parents did assist teachers. Mrs Naidoo stated that the majority of

parents in her class were very responsive and that they kept good contact with her. Some had even hired private tutors to help their children at home.

Much work is still needed to address the challenges that teachers experience with regard to classroom assessment. It would appear that teachers who taught before the introduction of the NCS were far happier than they presently are. Recollections of their past experiences were pleasant and very vivid. They were fond of the support that they received from the DoE. They regarded their present teaching experiences as stressful, with challenges ranging from interpretation of a multitude of new policies to classroom-related administration.

## **5.7 Synthesis**

In this chapter I represented the four narrative case studies with the objective of exploring and investigating the challenges teachers face with regard to classroom assessment. I provided a biographical description of the teachers, the institutional contexts in which their teaching and assessment unfolded, the challenges that they experienced with assessment, how they coped with the challenges, as well as how the challenges influenced effective teaching and learning. I concluded with a synthesis that draws on the major themes that characterise teachers' challenges and practices in classroom assessment.

The product of data collection and analysis procedures has resulted in the creation of the stories of the four teachers that have been constructed through the data gathered by means of conversations and interviews with and observations of these participants.

***In the next chapter I reflect critically on the challenges and assessment practices that emerged from this study and situate them within the literature and the conceptual framework.***

# CHAPTER SIX

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

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### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter outlined the findings of this study by presenting the themes that emerged through a process of analysis within a constructivist approach. A synthesis of narratives was also provided by discussing the findings of my study, which related to the challenges facing teachers in classroom assessment, their understanding and interpretation of assessment, their planning of assessment, implementation of assessment, recording and reporting assessment information and their understanding of support in assessment.

In the current chapter, I reflect on the themes in terms of my conceptual framework and the literature review to present a series of findings aligned with my research purpose. In the process of making meaning, I expound congruent as well as conflicting findings between my study and the existing literature.

### **6.2 Findings about teachers' classroom assessment challenges**

In this section, I relate my results to the existing literature situated within the chosen conceptual framework. As explained in Chapter Three, the framework incorporates four major perspectives that inform teachers' assessment practices and beliefs. I have thus structured this section according to the outline of the conceptual framework and discuss and relate the teachers' conceptions revealed in my study to existing literature and to the conceptual framework. I highlight the similarities between my findings and the literature and provide insights generated from the study.

#### **6.2.1 Understanding assessment for improvement of teaching and learning**

It has been widely acknowledged that assessment is an extremely important part of the teaching and learning cycle (Brown, 2003; Brown and Hirschfeld, 2008; Harris and Brown, 2008). The premise of the concept of improvement is that assessment should improve learners' own learning and the quality of teaching (Black et al., 2003; Brown, 2008; Rahim, Venville and

Chapman, 2009). At the schools where I conducted my study the teachers seemed to have similar interpretations and understanding of classroom assessment. I also found that they viewed improvement of learning in the light of a number of important caveats which I discuss in the following paragraphs.

It emerged from my study that teachers used assessment to identify the strengths and weaknesses of learners, thereby diagnosing their barriers to learning. This finding is supported by the work of Carles (2005), who found that assessment for learning requires a focus on feedback to inform students of their strengths and weaknesses. Overall, the teachers regarded assessment as important for tracking learners' performance, as mentioned by Mrs Bloom:

*Assessment is my most important focus because it guides me and the learners as well; it tells us where we are and where we aren't, where we are ok and where we have problems.*

Mrs Naidoo's view suggested a holistic approach to assessment:

*I assess learners' abilities holistically, to determine their competencies and achievement of learning outcomes.*

After lesson presentations, teachers preferred to give assessment activities to identify any problems that the learners might have had with the content. These teachers provided learners with guidance as to what went wrong and how they could improve. These findings are in agreement with diagnostic assessment as explained in the CAPS and in the NPA. This type of assessment is similar to formative assessment, which emphasises development and informs teachers about learners' progress with a view to improving teaching and learning. Findings from this study concur with those of Swearingen (2002), namely that diagnostic assessment is used to ascertain, prior to instruction, each learner's strengths and weaknesses, knowledge and skills. In addition, I argue that in establishing all of these aspects, the teacher will be able to remedy learners and adjust the curriculum to meet each learner's needs. I gathered from my study that the teachers' understanding of assessment is linked to the improvement of teaching and learning; teachers saw it as a powerful diagnostic tool that enabled learners to understand areas in which they were having difficulty and to concentrate on those areas. Assessment allowed teachers to monitor the influence of their lessons on learners' understanding.



In the context of my study, teachers understood assessment as an important component of the teaching and learning process: it provided them with essential information for decision-making in their classrooms. This concurs with the findings of Rahim et al. (2009) that teachers constantly make decisions concerning learners' learning and development, as well as the suitability and effectiveness of classroom instruction. Information generated from assessment provides teachers with insight into the meanings constructed or assigned by the learners to ideas or concepts taught in the classroom. Nitko and Brookhart (2005) explain that this aspect of assessment allows teachers to gauge whether the idea or concept taught was conveyed successfully to the learners.

The findings from this study reveal that teachers communicated assessment criteria and learning outcomes in their lessons. In the assessment tasks that Mrs Bloom and Mrs Naidoo conducted, learning outcomes and assessment standards were clearly outlined. Similarly, William et al. (2005) revealed in the findings of their study that teachers mentioned sharing objectives of lessons or topics with learners through a variety of techniques: using questions that learners were able to answer at the end of the lesson; stating the objectives clearly at the beginning of the lesson; and getting the learners to round off the lesson with an account of what they had learned.

### **6.2.2 Challenges with assessment strategies used by teachers**

It emerged from my study that assessment methods within the four classrooms provided one of the major topics discussed during the interview. The teachers in this study cited continuous assessment and peer assessment most often. Continuous assessment was highlighted as the approach most used, and peer assessment was mentioned overwhelmingly in a negative light. Of the four teachers, two were critical about aspects of peer assessment, identifying it as demotivating, dishonest, subjective and unfair, and also as promoting favouritism. Peer assessment raised strong objections from those who were opposed to it. One impression created during the interviews was that education officials, particularly the learning area specialists, were in favour of this assessment method, and often encouraged teachers through circulars to use it, but the teachers as users were not convinced about the complementing role of self-assessment within the context of improving teaching and learning.

Self-assessment was unfortunately not included as an identifiable topic in the interviews. In the literature review I noted the importance of self- and peer assessment as indicated by Adams (2001), Brookhart (2001) and Akyeampong, Pryor and Ampiah (2006), and noticed that teachers in my study had a completely different understanding of peer and self-assessment. These teachers dismissed the concept and indicated that it was subjective and unfair to use it to determine learners' performance. I conjecture that it is because these teachers still held traditional beliefs regarding assessment, where learners were seen as passive receivers of information in the classroom who were expected to provide their knowledge in teacher-made tests to be evaluated as dropouts or successful learners. However, the benefits of self- and peer assessment are clearly outlined in the literature: these methods save time, provide quicker feedback, and have pedagogical, meta-cognitive as well as attitude benefits. The teacher's time is saved because an entire classroom can be graded simultaneously. Instead of having learners wait for feedback on their work, peer and self-assessment allow assignments to be graded soon after completion. Self- and peer assessment allows teachers to help learners identify what mistakes they have made. By grading papers, learners are better able to understand the grading process and recognize their own strengths and weaknesses.

Over and above peer assessment and continuous assessment, the other assessment methods that teachers in this study identified were dominated by teacher-made tests, coming from a history of traditional summative assessment practices. This suggests that these teachers were still thinking in terms of teachers being both the source of information and the judges who evaluated student success. Other assessment methods came mostly from the traditional learning areas of Mathematics and English, namely speed tests, spelling and reading. Only two teachers reported the use of portfolios, and these were the teachers from well-resourced schools. Another observation was that these teachers were in management positions at their respective schools, suggesting that they endeavoured to perform better in order to be role models to others, and they also tried hard to comply with policy requirements. It is clear from the evidence provided that teachers did not view portfolio assessment as an important assessment method. Literature highlights the importance of portfolio as a collection of learners' work that can exhibit learners' efforts, progress and achievements in various areas of the

curriculum. Much of the literature on portfolio assessment defines portfolios as a way of integrating assessment and instruction to promote meaningful classroom learning (Hewitt, 2001).

In the portfolios that some teachers kept they were expected to provide evidence of class work, tests and other class activities. These teachers viewed informal assessment as a single event. I assert that it is an ongoing series of opportunities for a teacher to create and use well thought-out questions to gather information about learners' learning. These opportunities need to centre on teacher observation of learners interacting with others, participating in lessons and completing assignments. These observations are accumulated on a day-to-day basis. They reflect the authenticity of classroom activities and examining them gives teachers information about the effectiveness of their planning, their teaching and the students' learning.

In my study, teachers seemed to conduct assessment on a daily basis. After every lesson they followed up on what was taught through worksheets and assessed the work. The significance of this practice relates to the findings of Raveaud (2004) that every-day evaluation practices are arguably more relevant to children's school experiences than evaluation at the end of the year, and that routine assessment in the classroom constitutes a prism through which one can examine teachers' beliefs and values. The teachers in my study gave learners homework frequently, despite being aware of the parents' lack of involvement in assisting their children with homework. The teachers' frustrations with homework were that older siblings and some parents actually did the homework for their child. These teachers perceived this as a total waste of their time and did not use homework to assess their learners.

The daily assessments that teachers used included question-and-answer and class work. All teachers assessed orally through question-and-answer, written class work and tasks on worksheets. Teachers in my study seemed to regard tests as much more important than the use of worksheets for assessment, a finding that correlates with those of Erickson and Gustafsson (2005). Teachers reported that the learners wrote tests in their books, which allowed them to develop good writing skills, unlike worksheets, where they wrote in the spaces provided. The procedure followed when developing tests and examinations differed from one learning area to

the next. In English Home Language, for example, teachers set questions based on the class work and included some general questions from storytelling. The examinations were conducted through a formal timetable and questions were set with other teachers teaching the same learning area. Thereafter, the examination papers were moderated by the HoD, deputy principal or principal.

The finding that the teachers used a variety of assessment methods, tools and techniques links to the claim of Adams (1998) that an accurate assessment is only obtained by the use of a variety of techniques. McAlpine (2002) supports this in arguing that the wide range of targets and skills that can be addressed in the classroom requires the use of a variety of assessment formats. The use of one or two techniques exclusively will not give an accurate picture of learners' growth and development in any learning area. Adams (1998) argues that an important component of any academic or professional preparation related to classroom assessment for teachers should include a variety of assessment techniques and discussions about teachers' perceptions about these techniques. Since leaders in education (e.g. supervisors, workshop facilitators, and head teachers) conduct professional development opportunities related to classroom assessment, it is important to present a wide range of assessment techniques and to present these techniques relative to the teachers' grade levels. The teachers' perceptions indicate their beliefs about which techniques are more important than others and which techniques will be used more than others. As emphasized by Angelo and Cross (2002), having a variety of techniques to explore and choose from may provide teachers with better opportunities for decision-making about classroom assessment.

Angelo and Cross (2002) describe classroom assessment techniques as quick, simple formative assessments that teachers can use to collect feedback on how well learners are learning. Classroom assessment techniques serve the dual purpose of enhancing teaching effectiveness while improving learners' understanding. Ideally both teachers and learners use the feedback from classroom assessment techniques to improve their performance. Teachers can adjust their teaching in the light of learner feedback and performance, while learners can use it to measure and modify their understanding of important concepts (Brookhart, 2001). This was reflected

when the teachers revealed that assessment was important for self-reflection; to see how well the tasks went so as to adapt their teaching methods if needed.

A conspicuous difference in the teachers' observed practice was that only Mrs Bloom and Mrs Naidoo mentioned the use of rubrics and checklists in assessing some tasks. Their records indicated all the various types of assessed activities for each learner, differentiated according to the terms of the year, and the marks corresponded with the learners' records. Ms Motsepe and Mrs Smith, on the other hand, did not use any rubrics or checklists but had record sheets for each term that displayed only a few assessment activities. I argue here that these teachers' understanding and interpretation about assessment could account for the weak link between the policy and their assessment practices.

According to the DoE (2007), continuous assessment refers to ongoing assessment that includes assessment for learning throughout the year. This requires learners to work consistently, with teachers required to include a variety of suitable assessment methods, tools and forms of assessment. It should be used to develop learners' knowledge, skills and attitudes, assess their strengths and weaknesses, provide additional support to and motivate and encourage them.

Although continuous assessment featured prominently and was the most cited approach to assessment within classrooms, it appeared not to have taken on the broader meaning associated with it elsewhere. One participant viewed it as a relatively formal process, including the recording of marks and other summative indicators of achievement. The broader Assessment for Learning (AfL) significance of continuous assessment was missing. In the same way, those who reported using portfolios seemed to direct attention towards the collection of marks or formal outcomes, rather than to examples of the range of class work that may be completed during the course of the year.

Teachers in this study asked questions during the lessons, an important feature of continuous assessment. However, a critical observation made during the lessons was that teachers used lower-order questions more frequently than higher-order ones. Most of the teachers' questions required "yes or no" responses; hence Mrs Naidoo's complaint about teachers in her phase who lacked knowledge of questioning skills and of Bloom's taxonomy. This was in contrast with

what Gilmore (2002) suggested in his study, that teachers needed to use rich questioning skills in order to make assessment effective.

As part of the school management teams, Mrs Naidoo and Mrs Bloom conducted phase meetings at their respective schools, the objective being to discuss assessment and related issues. Mrs Smith also highlighted that the HoD in her phase often called such meetings, a practice that Ms Motsepe did not experience in her school. Ms Motsepe had serious challenges at her school, with too many distractions, meetings and extracurricular activities to perform after school hours. Overcrowded classes made it difficult to assess learners on a continuous basis. Little consideration was given to the time that teachers had available to fulfil the requirements and the demands of the assessment policy.

### **6.2.3 Policy interpretation**

It emerged that for some teachers the purpose of using specific assessment types was to comply with government policy. Teachers articulated that there were some assessments that they were required to use with their learners because it was mandated by the DoE in the assessment policy. Mrs Naidoo indicated that the assessment policy was streamlined and prescriptive and as teachers they were expected to comply with it. While teachers in my study reported that certain types of assessment, especially peer assessment and portfolios, were irrelevant, inaccurate, subjective and negative, they said that they used them to comply with DoE or school requirements. Mrs Bloom and Mrs Naidoo admitted to minimal usage of this data, implying that for these teachers such practices represented assessment for the sake of assessment. These teachers reported that they were caught between requirements to report this kind of data and their professional judgement that the results were inaccurate and subjective and would negatively affect and disadvantage their learners. However, none cited resisting these required practices, despite their personal objections, which implies that in general teachers do comply with assessment demands irrespective of their beliefs.

The major concern for these teachers was that while the assessment policy requires them to complete all assessment standards and also stipulates that assessment be based on these standards, only formal assessment has to be recorded. Mrs Naidoo stated that the policy

restricts teachers to compiling assessment tasks comprising four activities, while recording only two of the assessment tasks in a term. She felt that informal assessments should also be taken into consideration, arguing that there were a number of assessment tasks she gave to her learners but very few were being recorded. Alternatively, teachers opted to record more tasks than the policy required because they believed that this would give learners the best opportunity to show progress. Mrs Naidoo's practices suggest that she lacks a clear understanding of the assessment policy because the policy explains that not everything that is taught should be assessed formally and not everything that is assessed has to be recorded (DoE, 2007).

The findings indicate that teachers' understanding of the assessment policy is that it requires them to assess daily. They articulated that the policy provides guidance on how to do the work and indicates how learners are expected to demonstrate the understanding of learning outcomes. These thoughts align with the NPA (DoE, 2011), which states that assessment should be conducted continuously, and learners should be given more assessment. The teachers' understanding was in agreement with the policy which states that a learner's progress should be monitored through learning activities and that informal daily monitoring of progress can be done during question-and-answer and short assessment tasks (DoE, 2011).

#### **6.2.4 Challenges related to planning for assessment**

Teachers in this study used the policy documents of the DoE. Only Ms Motsepe did not have these and relied on her experiences and on textbooks for her preparations for lessons. Her practices were not at all in agreement with the NPA, which outlines that planning for assessment is an integral part of the planning for teaching and learning. The teacher needs to plan the assessment programme to meet the diverse needs of learners in the classroom and to facilitate teaching and learning. In her assessment practice Ms Motsepe used a Mathematics textbook to set her assessment tasks. These were slightly more aligned to the curriculum intentions as they were mostly taken "word for word" from the textbook. The intense engagement of context that materialised here was not indicative of her understanding of the policy document but rather of that of the textbook authors. This suggests that to conclude that the assessment somehow reflected an appreciation of what was required by the curriculum

would be a misinterpretation; in fact it only indicated that Ms Motsepe chose to use material that was readily available rather than to set her own assessment tasks. This suggested to me that she did not clearly understand the procedures for setting an assessment task. A lack of proper understanding of the assessment policy and the curriculum could be a major reason for the manner in which teachers conducted classroom assessment.

I established that teachers used preparation books to identify the themes for developing tests and examinations. The tests were given weekly, fortnightly or monthly, and this depended on the school's assessment policy. The tests were developed through teamwork of teachers in the same grade and sent to HoDs to moderate. However, a weakness that I observed in all four schools was that they did not have a clear assessment policy that included strategies for assessing culturally diverse learners.

#### **6.2.5 Challenges with parental involvement and communication in assessment**

Feedback and reporting appeared to be conducted in the same way in all four schools: through parent meetings, learners' workbooks and learners' reports. A common challenge was that most parents seemed unenthusiastic about actively participating in these activities. It emerged during the interviews that very few parents attended meetings or complied with the teachers' requests to work together in implementing intervention strategies to assist learners with barriers to learning. I conjecture that a possible explanation for the lack of parental involvement was that some of the parents were illiterate and as such felt incompetent to be involved in their children's performance. The teachers in my study emphasised the importance of recording and feedback, regarding the latter as a means of improving assessment results and the overall process of learning. Feedback was mostly perceived as making parents and learners aware of their strength and weaknesses.

Teachers viewed parents and external authorities as distinctly different stakeholders with differing claims on assessment information. Although the teachers expressed qualms about the kinds of information they thought that parents needed, overall they mentioned reporting to parents as a useful element of assessment. Teachers described reporting assessment information to parents in a variety of ways, which included parent evenings, meetings, formal



reports, telephonic conversations, informal discussions, and intervention meetings. They also reported pressure from parents in connection with learners' schoolwork. Mrs Bloom said that parents at her school were generally not supportive of their children's schoolwork but they always queried the marks. She received negative comments from the parents as if they were evaluating her and not their children's work. However, teachers consistently highlighted that parents were important educational stakeholders and indicated that reporting to them was a necessary part of the assessment cycle. Teachers always spoke of purposely trying to contact parents and encouraging them to be involved in their children's learning. In as much as teachers were willing and prepared to report to parents, Mrs Smith also had concerns about the kind of criticism she received from them, feeling that they were much more concerned with the way a teacher did her work than the ways their children were learning. These findings relate to those of Harris and Brown (2008), who regarded parental involvement and reporting to parents as key to assessment. According to the assessment policy, a partnership ought to exist among the different role players in assessment, i.e., parents, teachers, learners and department officials (DoE, 2008). The findings highlight that such a partnership is virtually non-existent because of lack of parental involvement in school activities.

It emerged that teachers recorded marks for every worksheet, test and assessment task that learners completed. They awarded marks for spelling, comprehension, reading, class work, tests, assignments and speed tests. This is not in accordance with what the policy requires; in contrast, the policy spells out the number and type of assessment activities to be recorded. One possible reason for the teachers' comprehensive recording was to provide learners with expanded opportunities to perform better. In simpler terms, if a learner performs badly in a particular test, the teacher can consider the performance of that learner in other activities throughout the term.

After marking the learners' work, the teachers recorded the marks on a recording sheet. Mrs Naidoo, a Grade 6 English teacher and deputy principal in her school, highlighted the importance for teachers to meet collectively as grade or phase teachers to discuss common aspects of recording and reporting. She perceived this to be important for colleagues to share

good practices, as envisaged by the policy document. My findings corroborate those of Smith and Gorard (2005), who established that teachers used assessment to reflect on their way of teaching, to check whether the objectives of the lesson had been accomplished and also to improve on learner performance.

#### **6.2.6 Challenges regarding assessment support to teachers**

I observed a clear lack of monitoring or evaluation mechanisms at Ms Motsepe's school. She had pointed out in the interview that the SMT was not doing enough to monitor the work done by teachers in assessment. This lack of an accountability system could account for her not having a clear understanding of the assessment policy and her weak implementation of it. The manifestation of this absence of monitoring was observed when she did not have her own teaching and lesson plans. If monitoring had taken place she would have had and implemented the teaching and lesson plans in her planning for assessment. In addition, the fact that Ms Motsepe did not know about the CAPS document for the learning area that she was teaching revealed that the HoD was not doing her work properly. This confirms Fullan's claim that "[t]he profession must have a clear and effective arrangement for accountability and for measuring performance and outcome" (2003:10).

This monitoring and evaluation or accountability could be viewed as pressure that is both positive and negative, and essential for opposing the forces that maintain the status quo. The lack of monitoring and evaluation was also observed at Mrs Naidoo's school. Throughout my observation period at her school, she continually promised me her preparation file, her excuse being that she had only spent six months at the school and as a deputy principal was struggling to cope with the demands of her administrative work and her class teaching. The observed conspicuous absence of school-based support from the HoD, the principal and educational administrators, I argue, could have contributed to Mrs Naidoo's lack of understanding and weak or non-implementation of the assessment policy. This is supported by Hariparsad (2004), who emphasises that school-based support could provide for steady engagement at school level.

Monitoring is critical to achieving the goals of the assessment policy. Mrs Bloom revealed that as HoD she conducted monitoring in her department at school level. She raised concerns that at district level the learning area specialists provided confusing information. She was convinced that they did not know what they were supposed to do because they provided conflicting information compared to that provided by national authorities, and as a result teachers at her school decided to do what they felt was right. The lack of a monitoring system shows an over-reliance on individual conduct, and leaves spaces or loopholes for actions that could conflict with the goals of the policy. From these discussions I assert that an effective monitoring system could prevent deliberate inaction, so that the desired assessment practices are achieved. Hall and Hord (2001:112) make a similar assertion that monitoring is important because data gathered during implementation could be analyzed, interpreted carefully, and used to guide subsequent interventions.

Overall, the four teachers were not happy that the district officials had shifted their role of supporting schools to cluster leaders. Some teachers stopped attending cluster meetings because they did not gain any new information. Mrs Smith attended cluster meetings because she learnt good practices from other teachers. Ms Motsepe felt that her school was neglected, that they did not even know about cluster meetings, even though her school belonged to the same district as the other three teachers.

### **6.2.7 Teacher training as a challenge**

It emerged from my study that teachers attended training on the general aspects of the curriculum, where classroom assessment became part of the discussions. The training that teachers in this study received was in the form of workshops that were general in nature and related to OBE. These were one-day sessions conducted in the cluster and the teachers were not provided with the opportunity to engage and interact with the ideas in the assessment policy in a manner that enabled them to develop a strong conceptual understanding of assessment. My findings coincide with those of Hariparsad (2004), who maintains that productive learning necessary to make fundamental changes in practice is enhanced when teachers interact with the policy. Lack of interaction with policy ideas encourages learning that is superficial, narrow and prescriptive (Hariparsad, 2004). The importance of training is also

emphasised by Vandeyar and Killen (2007) in highlighting that a concerted effort needs to be made to engage teachers in thorough training in assessment practices, since educators cannot use assessment strategies that they do not understand or for which they lack the skills.

All participants complained that they did not have sufficient in-service training. Their major challenge was the Inclusive Education policy which they had to understand in order to know how to deal with learners with barriers to learning. Mrs Naidoo was fortunate to have attended training on aspects of assessment. At the training she learned about preparation of an assessment file, planning for assessment, learning outcomes and compilation of assessment tasks.

Mrs Smith and Ms Motsepe received no specific training on assessment, but they estimated that they received about three days of training on assessment incorporated with other training related to the curriculum in the course of the year. Based on these findings I argue that three days' training to understand the contents and learn how to implement the ideas of a complex assessment policy is clearly inadequate. Mrs Smith confirmed in the interview that it was insufficient. My findings concur with those of Khulisa (2000) that teachers were concerned that the type of training they received was too abstract and insufficiently focused on what theory meant in practice. According to Evans (2002:65), it is important for training to be continuous because it provides opportunities for teachers to consider, discuss, argue about, and work through the changes in their assumptions. Without this, the technical changes they are exposed to during the training are unlikely to make a deep and lasting impact on their practice.

### **6.2.8 Assessment is time-consuming**

Teachers in my study highlighted that much time is spent on paperwork. These teachers spoke about the increased administrative workload in terms of departmental and policy directives on continuous assessment; the number and types of portfolio tasks; ways of recording performance; reporting to parents; and end-of year common tasks of assessment. This situation confirms Pryor and Lubisi's (2002) claim that a great deal of effort goes into ensuring that teachers are on course with these external accountability indicators, but leaves them with little time for proper planning or consultation with a variety of sources. On the other hand, Singaram

(2007) points out that the key to successful assessment was not in finding time but in redeploying time, mindful of the goal of working more effectively rather than just harder. Central to this redeployment of time is for teachers to understand non-contact time when they are not obligated to learners. This is essential time that needs adequate planning. Using half of those hours of non-contact time toward learner assessment would make a profound difference. I support these views: during my observation I noticed that teachers often idled and were seen chatting after school, waiting for their official knock-off time. Rather than utilize their non-contact time for administrative duties, they saw it as their free time.

Mrs Bloom and Mrs Smith compared the current assessment system with the one in the previous dispensation and said that it had been much better then. They saw the present assessment as much more demanding in terms of administration, planning, implementing, recording and reporting. Based on these findings I posit that they were still cast in the traditional, teacher-centred manner of assessing learners, and had not made the Outcomes-Based Assessment shift to learner-centred, needs-based and diversified assessment. Though this might still be true for many other teachers in South Africa, there is compelling research evidence that there are indeed some teachers who have successfully made the required transition (Wilmot, 2006). An overwhelming consensus from all the teachers was that the new assessment approach increases the teachers' workload. Having to assess a number of learning areas at the same time posed serious challenges. The teachers in this study said that they were responsible for teaching more than one learning area in different classes within the same grade, and some in a different grade, and that this was cumbersome. An observation was that indeed much time in the classroom was spent on assessment-related activities.

#### **6.2.9 Lack of resources and overcrowding**

Mrs Naidoo, Mrs Smith and Mrs Bloom were teaching in well-resourced schools, compared to Ms Motsepe who complained about inadequate teaching and learning resources at her school. During one interview, when I asked her why she wrote an activity on the chalkboard, she mentioned that the photocopier had been out of order for some time. Once she even made copies of the summative assessment task outside the school at her own expense.

Ms Motsepe and Mrs Smith were faced with overcrowding in their classes and they stated that it was practically impossible for them to provide learners with individual attention. These teachers felt that overcrowding had a negative impact on their teaching and assessment practices. This is in line with the findings of Kolo (2005) that overcrowding allows almost no opportunity for a genuine exchange of arguments and opinions amongst learners. Kolo reported in his study that in large classes the provision of an opportunity for discussion or for any kind of oral input to the written work was difficult.

The teachers who were faced with overcrowded classes revealed that constructing assessment tasks, marking and recording marks entailed detailed work. They pointed out that the amount of marking dissuaded them from setting the amount of written work that they felt would have benefited the learners. Mrs Smith indicated that checking all the learners' exercises in her class was very time-consuming and marking class work, projects, examination scripts, comprehension tests and class tests was cumbersome. Due to the burdensome nature of marking and managing their large classes, Ms Motsepe and Mrs Smith designed alternative ways of reducing the amount of time spent on marking. Some of the methods adopted included learners exchanging books, correcting or marking their own books while the teacher gave the answers, writing answers on the board and being corrected by others, and checking work in pairs before the teacher gave the answers. Kolo (2005) warns, however, that all these strategies may jeopardize the quality of marking.

### **6.3 New insights into teachers' challenges on classroom assessment**

Despite the discussion, often negative, of peer assessment, the assessment methods reported by these four teachers seemed to be dominated by other approaches, such as reading aloud, spelling and dictation, speed tests, teacher-made tests and examination. This implies that teachers were still bent on the old traditional way of testing. I argue that a lack of in-service training in assessment-related issues could be the cause. Assessments were most often in Mathematics and English reading and spelling, and accompanied by weekly or other regular

recording of marks. Recognition or acknowledgement of the potential of assessment for learning appeared to be limited within these classroom assessments.

As illustrated in my study, teachers preferred to use formal assessment all the time. Informal assessment was not mentioned at all. It appears that teachers emphasised formal assessment because they wanted to record and document learners' achievements. Teachers did not realise that through observation of learners in the process of learning, the collection of feedback, learners' learning, and the design of modest classroom experiments, teachers can learn much about how learners learn and more especially, how they respond to particular teaching approaches (Angelo and Cross, 2002). Informal assessment is defined in literature (Weaver, 2007) as a procedure for obtaining information that can be used to make judgements about children's learning behaviour and characteristics or programmes using means other than standardised instruments. Observations, checklists and portfolios are just some methods of assessment available to primary school teachers.

The types of assessment that teachers preferred to use were class tests, class work, projects, oral presentations, speed tests, spelling tests, comprehension tests and paper-and-pencil tests. My analysis suggest that they no longer saw test practices as objects of learning but rather as a familiar part of their everyday schoolwork. On the contrary, Rahim et al. (2008) suggest that using outcomes-based assessment tools and methods allow the teacher to determine which instructional strategies are effective and which need to be modified. Teachers in this study preferred not to use homework for assessment because of lack of objectivity and parental involvement. These perceptions are contrary to the assertion of Good and Brophy (2003:393) that homework is an important extension of in-school opportunities to learn.

As noted in the findings, teachers had reservations about the use of portfolios. Mrs Naidoo and Mrs Smith kept them, although they complained about the amount of time they had to put into their arrangement and administration. I noted that these teachers only kept portfolios for moderation purposes, in some instances preferring to keep portfolio work in exercise books rather than in the files required by policy.

Teachers believed that reflection was an important source of assessment. They were of the understanding that continuous assessment was inextricably bound with evaluation, because it enabled them to know how well their teaching was going and to adapt it to the needs of learners. Similarly, Mrs Smith saw assessment as a way of reflection, a way of retracing one's steps, without which assessment could not exist.

The data suggests that for this group of South African teachers, continuous assessment was seen as a relatively formal process of recording marks or percentages for class work, or some other summative indicator of daily or frequent performance in the classroom. The broader meaning of continuous assessment appeared not to have been adopted by those who stated that they used it in the classroom.

Teachers reported taking a high level of personal ownership for their students' successes and failures when it came to assessment, frequently using inclusive personal pronouns like "we", as Mrs Bloom had indicated when she explained the importance of continuous assessment:

*Assessment is my most important focus because it guides me and the children as well; it tells us where we are and where we aren't, where we are okay ... and where we have problems.*

Teachers used summative assessment to allow learners to take responsibility for their own learning. In all lesson observations, teachers reminded learners to study for the term test that was to follow. During my first lesson observation with Mrs Bloom, she wrote a date on the chalkboard and informed learners that this was the date for the term test. She reminded learners every day to prepare for the term test and indicated what needed to be studied. Towards the end of the term, she conducted the term test like an examination. Learners were only allowed to have a pen in their possession. She began by explaining instructions, told learners to write legibly, keep quiet, and write answers in the spaces provided.

Teachers stated that reporting was important, even if at times unpleasant, because they had to concentrate on the paperwork for the purpose of accountability to parents, students and the community of learning. The support with which teachers were provided for assessment came mostly from the HoDs during their visits to the classrooms, providing guidance to teachers,



offering suggestions for improvement and giving feedback. However, teachers regarded such support from principals as minimal. Support to the teachers was also provided through phase meetings, grade meetings and collegial assistance from within the school. In contrast, support from outside the school was fragmented, irregular or non-existent. The learning area specialists were perceived as inactive in providing support from outside the school. It appears that in the province where this study was conducted, cluster meetings were regarded as the most important place for teachers to interact and discuss challenges experienced in assessment and in the curriculum. The support from outside was less frequent than from inside and generally seen as being of poorer quality.

Teachers also highlighted their experiences of how they were supported in their assessment practices and raised concerns that this support differed from phase to phase in their schools. They were concerned that the support they received from the learning area specialists in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4, 5 and 6) was not the same as that which was provided in the Foundation Phase (Grades 1, 2 and 3). Learning area specialists in the Intermediate Phase had shifted their roles and responsibilities of supporting schools to the cluster leaders. This practice was common in schools in the province. Teachers were also concerned about the authenticity of the information that they received from the cluster meetings. The two teachers who were in management positions at their schools preferred not to attend the cluster meetings because they perceived it as a waste of their time.

Considering that these teachers needed training, I posit that a training priority was assessment. I surmise that teachers' assessment practices could be improved if they received rigorous training on the whole process of assessment, the NPA and the CAPS document. Overall, I found that the training teachers received was too brief and that there was insufficient hands-on training. The training had provided increased levels of understanding of OBE, but there were real difficulties with what it meant in practice for the designing of assessment tasks, integration and continuous assessment. Even though Mrs Naidoo and Ms Motsepe had received assessor training as part of their development, it had focused on generic aspects of assessment at

institutional level; they still needed training specifically related to classroom assessment. Lack of in-service teacher training made teachers feel incompetent in their assessment practices.

To address these factors I posit that training should be holistic, with all role players involved and having a clear framework that guides them when implementing an assessment approach.

There is clearly a contextual gap among the teachers in this study. Mrs Bloom was teaching at an attractive, well-resourced school situated in an urban area that is middle class. Her school had textbooks and a wide variety of teaching and learning aids. Mrs Smith's and Mrs Naidoo's schools were also well resourced, even though not in the same manner as Mrs Bloom's. Mrs Smith, Mrs Bloom and Mrs Naidoo were exposed to workshops in their cluster, whereas Ms Motsepe, in her school, was often neglected and received information at the last minute. She taught in an under-resourced school characterised by low socio-economic status, where learners were regularly absent from school. She had a large class and struggled to maintain discipline, with a lack of support from parents. She believed that the non-availability of resources and facilities played a significant role in her classroom assessment practices. The contrasting contextual advantages among these teachers were obvious and could therefore account for the differences in their assessment practices. Hariparsad (2004) identifies such discrepancies as a combination of professional, personal and contextual gaps, where one teacher, in this case Ms Motsepe, is at a disadvantage, thus being unable to make shifts in her assessment practices in line with the policy requirement.

#### **6.4 Relating teachers' challenges to existing literature**

Findings from this study confirm what several researchers have argued: that a variety of factors hinder teachers' classroom assessment practices (Rakometsi 2000; Kotze, 2002; Chisholm, 2005; Webb, 2005). The most significant contributions of research in education suggest that these factors impact on effective teaching and learning. According to Webb (2005), a school's organisation, traditions, routine needs, length of class periods, learner enrolment and the system's expectations all influence educational effectiveness. As outlined in the literature review chapter, there are possible ways of addressing these factors. Based on the evidence

gleaned from the study, I posit that to understand assessment challenges from the teachers' perspectives it is necessary to understand the beliefs with which they define their work. The beliefs the participants held influenced their perceptions and judgements, which in turn affected their behaviour in the classroom. The interaction of beliefs and practices therefore had strong implications for teaching and learning. Furthermore, I posit that this type of interaction is critical for any in-service programme.

The literature review also highlights the important role that experiences and personal history play in shaping teachers' understanding and classroom assessment practices. It is evident from the findings that teachers constructed their own understanding of assessment, based on their experiences. Some teachers had developed a wealth of knowledge and experience, gathered from a lifelong exposure to cluster meetings, training, workshops and the requirements of the curriculum. Others, who were not exposed to meetings, training and supervision by departmental officials, struggled to adapt their practices to the changing demands of assessment.

The focus of this investigation, as mentioned in the conceptual framework, was to shed light on the factors which influence teachers' assessment practices. This study reveals that the factors emerge from the teachers' local context, from their pedagogical belief systems, and that they are affected by forces and considerations external to the school setting (Neesom 2000; Davison, 2004).

The findings also reveal that assessment caters chiefly for the needs of individual learners; the participants used assessment as a diagnostic tool to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses and their barriers to learning and development. Teachers also referred to expanded opportunities and to the use of a variety of assessment strategies to assess learners. It is evident from the data presented in Chapter Five that teachers understood assessment as blocking their own initiatives. They felt they had to assess according to policy prescriptions; for example, the policy prescribed how many assessment tasks had to be conducted and recorded. They assessed because they had to comply with policy requirements, even when they felt this was against their beliefs. Teachers in this study practised and preferred traditional summative

examination, arguing that this reflected the overall learner performance. I suggest that this is because they had as students been exposed to this type of assessment, which implies that their background and personal experiences played a significant role in their assessment practices.

## 6.5 Synthesis

All participants were found to value teaching, and even though Ms Motsepe conceded that this was not her first career choice her responses were often indicative of a teacher who valued the work that she did. Statements such as: *“I love children”* and *“I enjoy teaching Mathematics”* show that her teaching was driven by passion to assist learners in the teaching and learning of Mathematics. Likewise, Mrs Bloom expressed feeling rewarded that most of the learners she taught when she had started at her school had become doctors, lawyers and other professionals. Mrs Bloom expressed passion and was very proud that she related to children very well and that, most of the time, she *“seemed to get a reasonably good response from them”*. Mrs Smith was also passionate about teaching, admitting that even though she wanted to do *“designing”* at one point in her life, she always wanted to be like her high school teacher, who seemed to *“know the world”*.

I argue that the evidence gleaned from this study suggests that teachers experience various challenges that affect their classroom assessment practices and that these could be mapped onto the four major perspectives as outlined by Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt (2002) and discussed in Chapter Three. All teachers mentioned that some assessments were completed to comply with requirements, and they included practices that went against their personal beliefs. Also, they viewed reporting to external authorities and to parents more positively, even though they articulated challenges concerning parental involvement and support from the district officials. A relatively narrow range of assessment types was described as used for reporting purposes, including heavy use of testing. Teachers in this study understood assessment as focusing on individual teaching and learning rather than catering for the needs of the whole group. They discussed a range of strategies, but there was no emphasis on informal methods of assessment.

What this study shows is that teachers' understanding of assessment is affected by multiple pressures. These include pressures such as overcrowding, compliance, time management, policy interpretation and implementation, parental involvement, extra administrative workload and paperwork, support (or lack thereof) from the departmental officials, training and resources. As Harris and Brown (2008) discovered, these multiple tensions create a much more complex teaching thinking space than the simple dichotomy.

Data gleaned from this study also reveals that teachers used a variety of assessment types for a range of purposes, some of which were more aligned with their personal opinions about best assessment practice than with policy requirements. Teachers indicated that their students were their first priority, which led them to reject or ignore mandated assessment practices that they deemed inaccurate (based on their personal knowledge of the learners' abilities) or negative for students. This is consistent with the child-centred pedagogy imbued in teacher practice in New Zealand (Fraser, 2001).

Notwithstanding the data from a small sample of four teachers from four culturally diverse environments, the pattern of challenges revealed is consistent with previous studies with teachers in different phases and levels of schooling, and in different learning areas.

This study has shown that teachers see assessment as having a range of diverse purposes, and different assessment practices are seen as being aligned with these purposes. While assessment clearly has a range of purposes, it is important that teachers are enabled to move beyond compliance, so that they can actually make educational use of data they have collected, which is the valid role of assessment.

# **CHAPTER SEVEN**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

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### **7.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I presented the results of my study by situating and relating my results within the existing literature base and the conceptual framework. In Chapter Seven I offer recommendations and draw conclusions in relation to my research questions as outlined in Chapter One. I begin this chapter by restating the research questions, thereafter providing the significance of the findings where I show my contribution towards the body of knowledge and make suggestions for further research.

The main focus of my inquiry was on challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices. I wanted to explore the ways in which teachers experience, narrate and attach different meanings to classroom assessment, and to establish which assessment strategies were used by teachers. More specifically, my exploration of their challenges was aimed at understanding how the challenges influenced their classroom assessment practices.

### **7.2 Summary of key findings**

#### **7.2.1 Challenges with understanding classroom assessment and policy interpretation**

Teachers understood assessment as an essential educational tool, reflecting that assessment helped them towards a better understanding of what their learners were learning. They gathered evidence on what learners knew and could do, and were therefore able to identify their strengths and weaknesses, suggesting that they looked at assessment from a diagnostic perspective. Assessments were used to monitor learners' learning and progress. The teachers' understanding as described in Chapter Six reflected more formal assessment than informal assessments. Assessment was perceived as a bond that holds teaching and learning together.

Assessment allowed teachers to monitor teaching effectiveness and learners' learning, even though they saw it as important for compliance. Assessment was also seen as important for the

teachers' self-reflection. Teachers indicated that they were able to adapt their teaching methods, based on learners' performance on assessment tasks and activities. They were able to shape learning and instruction through assessments. After assessment tasks and activities, teachers were able to gauge the learners' mastery of the required skills and learning outcomes.

Teachers planned for assessment through the teaching plans and content as outlined in the CAPS. The provincial department of education made such planning documents available for teachers, but some did not use them as they felt them to be prescriptive and not adaptable. Homework activities were regarded as a waste of their time because of a lack of parental guidance and support. They preferred not to use homework as an assessment strategy.

The findings further suggest that teachers largely perceived assessment criteria to be useful in preparing their work. The assessment criteria appeared to assist them in predicting learners' performance and marking their work with some degree of accuracy that might otherwise not have been expected.

Teachers did not consider peer assessment to be a key technique to get learners to take more responsibility for their learning. They were evidently unaware of the benefits of peer assessment, one of which could be highlighted as helping learners to critically examine their own learning in progress. Through peer assessment, learners better understand their own learning and it also assists them to foster collaboration skills and improve autonomy.

All teachers perceived assessment mainly for improvement of learning, as mentioned in the previous chapter. They also understood assessment as showing progress and abilities of learners to parents and other stakeholders.

### **7.2.2 Challenges with assessment strategies used by teachers**

Using multiple sources of evidence helped the teachers to accurately interpret what each learner knew and could do. However, the teachers used mostly paper-and-pencil tests, speed tests, class work, term tests, monthly tests and questioning strategies. They did not use informal methods of assessment such as observations, portfolios and self-assessments, as they believed that these were not objective. Their practices were mostly characterised by traditional

methods that displayed a teacher-centred approach to assessment. Only two teachers referred to the use of projects, investigations and research activities, but these were to a larger extent influenced by the availability of resources. The more abstract, creative and innovative methods, such as speeches, demonstrations and problem-solving activities, were rarely used.

The teachers were aware of the unique nature of learners. According to Berry (2006), including a variety of assessments would ensure that learners are provided with ample opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and that teachers have the information they need to construct and complete balanced assessment of each learner. The participants used continuous assessment, a notion that has been one of the main clichés of assessment reform in Sub-Saharan Africa in the past few years (Pryor and Lubisi, 2002), and one that is emphasised by the CAPS in South Africa (DoE, 2011). However, the findings revealed a serious lack of capacity among the teachers, who raised concerns about the lack of adequate training from departmental officials. All teachers reported that many learning area specialists were not confident about advising schools on continuous assessment methods. The policy on assessment lists a variety of assessment methods that teachers can use, but does not necessarily prescribe how classroom-based assessment has to be conducted or structured. I posit that this silence is the reason teachers continuously used the same assessment tasks and activities.

Feedback was also highlighted as the most important method in classroom assessment; however, in some cases it was not detailed enough. Teachers used ticks and crosses but these did not provide extensive information on what learners were able to do or not do. Dixon and Haigh (2008) argue that feedback is perceived as the crucial interaction that occurs between teacher and learner during the process of teaching and learning which will aid the improvement process through the identification of a learning gap and the actions necessary to close it.

Two out of the four teachers mentioned using assessment criteria to assist them in making decisions about assessment tasks. These two teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of assessment criteria, which they described as providing a basic outline which they could follow in conducting valid assessment.



### **7.2.3 How teachers' challenges influence their classroom assessment practices**

Teachers looked at assessment mostly in relation to the improvement of learning, and consequently took responsibility for what happened in their classrooms (Harris and Brown, 2008). They used diagnostic assessment and were able to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses. They were aware of the policy on inclusion, which expected them to identify and support learners with barriers to learning, even though they had not received any training on related policy.

In this study, teachers identified a number of challenges that hindered their assessment practices. Although they perceived assessment-related paperwork as tiring and challenging, this did not mean that they perceived the process of assessment as irrelevant. They appreciated that assessment helped them to monitor the learners' progress and as such improved teaching and learning in the classroom. While it is evident that teachers may hold a predominant view of assessment, it is also evident that they can hold multiple, interacting perceptions and understanding of assessment (Harris, 2008).

One of the strongest influences on teachers' perception of assessment was the understanding of the learning area that they were teaching and their involvement in different learning areas. All participating teachers taught more than one learning area, except for Mrs Bloom, who taught English Home Language to three different grades. According to the assessment policy (DoE, 2011) each learning area is assessed differently. This I posit affects teachers' interpretation of classroom assessment. These issues need to be addressed in professional development and training of teachers. Teachers have not been trained in specific assessment-related issues but such training was included when they dealt with curriculum-related matters.

As mentioned above, the teachers had strong reservations about the use of homework, self-assessment, group assessment and other forms of informal assessment in their classes. They felt these were unfair and subjective and could not be used to grade or rank learner performance. The use of portfolio work was also minimal. Based on these findings I posit that the teachers were not able to examine a wide array of complex thinking and problem solving

skills evident through the use of portfolios, because they opted to use traditional methods of summative assessment.

The teachers' assessment practices were also influenced by their backgrounds, school context and availability or lack of resources. In Ms Motsepe's case, for example, she was not provided with policy documents necessary to assist her in planning for lessons. She also felt that school management team members at her school did not know what needed to be done. The absence of monitoring and support by departmental officials also played a role in teachers assessment practices in the sense that teachers were not provided with the relevant information required to understand policy requirements.

This study on the challenges facing teachers in their classroom assessment revealed that they were not well prepared to meet its demands due to inadequate training. Challenges were particularly prominent in planning for assessment, using multiple assessment strategies, involving parents in assessment, dealing with overcrowded classes and interpreting assessment results. Despite the aforementioned challenges, most teachers believed that they had adequate knowledge of assessment, which they attributed to experience and tertiary coursework.

### **7.3 Significance of the findings and contribution of new knowledge**

This study contributes to the literature base of classroom assessment and highlights teachers' challenges with classroom assessment, which assessment strategies they used, and also how the challenges influenced their classroom assessment practices. This study has provided an intimate perspective on classroom assessment as experienced by primary school teachers in South Africa. The findings are pertinent for assessment policymakers and departmental officials who ought to address the tensions that exist because of policies that are not sufficiently accommodative of the needs of teachers. The tension arising between policy and practice results in challenges that hinder effective classroom assessment practices. The teachers faced challenges similar to those highlighted in previous studies: overcrowding, lack of parental

support, lack of support from education officials, lack of training and lack of understanding of policies (Black et al., 2003; Brown, 2008; Rahim et al., 2009).

The new knowledge generated from this study confirms the following: firstly, that teachers are social beings. They do not construct perceptions and understanding in isolation. Their understanding and practices of classroom assessment are influenced by the social and educational context within which they find themselves.

Secondly, teachers' interpretations and meaning making on the subject of assessment are influenced by their personal history, experiences, frame of mind and their feelings of being in a comfort zone. Teachers are human capital and as such a change in policy implies a change in practice. The notion of human capital suggests that for schools to be most effective, teachers must be able to respond to changes in the characteristics, conditions, and learning needs of students. The participants' personal experiences of assessment influenced the way they practised assessment. It seems that a constellation of circumstances within the teachers' backgrounds, including social, political and school cultures, shaped their understanding of assessment. This may suggest that assessment is situated within larger socio-cultural and socio-political spheres and resounds beyond the classroom. Teachers require collaboration, mentoring and engagement in critical and meaningful dialogue within assessment policies in order to reflect on practices contributing towards effective teaching and learning. The teachers' narratives reflected the complexities of classroom assessment.

Thirdly, teachers in this study perceived assessment as compliance. They argued that they had to follow a national system requirement even if it went against their beliefs and values. They gave learners a particular number of assessment tasks because this is what policy required. They only wished to fulfil the recording requirement at the end of the day, perceiving the process of assessment as keeping up with policy requirements. The policy on assessment outlines how many tasks a teacher has to record, and teachers articulated that most of the time they gave learners work for the sake of record keeping, even when they were aware that the learners had not mastered the content to be able to carry out an assessment task.

## **7.4 Suggestions for further research**

In the paragraphs that follow, I suggest possible areas for further research that could provide deeper insight into issues that were not explored in my study:

- (1) What are the perceived challenges related to changing the culture of teaching, learning and assessment?
- (2) How do political structures influence effective classroom assessment practices?
- (3) How does school culture affect teachers' classroom assessment practices?
- (4) How do learner characteristics influence classroom assessment?
- (5) What effective strategies can be used to involve parents in classroom assessment?

I also make a methodological suggestion that, by utilizing a methodology similar to the one utilized in my study, research could be conducted into teachers' understanding and perceptions of informal assessment, summative and formative assessment, as well as assessment in the different learning areas and at different grade levels.

Further sampling with a larger sample, other than the one used in this study, is also recommended. The influence of qualifications and ethnicity on teachers' perceptions of assessment has not been examined and it may be that such contexts would require a different approach to understanding how teachers' challenges of classroom assessment are related to their assessment practices.

Investigations across multiple school subjects would also identify whether there is a subject- or discipline-related effect on how assessment is conceived and influences learner achievement. Studies are also needed to determine the relationship of teacher conceptions to their practices.

## **7.5 Recommendations**

Informed by the outcomes of this inquiry, I offer a few suggestions on the management of future implementation of policy efforts in the North West Department of Education in particular and perhaps South Africa in general:

Teachers should be provided with more opportunities to receive professional development. Training of teachers should be a process that has to take place over an extended time. The in-service professional development of teachers needs to be encouraged and spearheaded by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Ministry of Education. The DHET needs to have a particularly clear policy for both pre-service and in-service training of teachers regarding their professional development. This is important to note because teachers need to keep abreast of change and learners are constantly evolving. In addition, pedagogical resources and even techniques can quickly become outdated. As new methods and campaigns of teaching are introduced, for example Inclusive Education, it is also required that teachers become involved in intensive training so as to be able to practice new strategies. Of significance is that teachers are normally expected to engage in a variety of assessment-related activities whilst simultaneously engaged in teaching activities. For example, they need to know how to deal with the diverse needs of learners, use different assessment strategies, report to different stakeholders, and plan for assessment, and support each other at cluster meetings.

The professional development of teachers needs to connect teachers' existing knowledge with the current approach by reflecting on their perceptions, assessment practices, and the relationship between their perceptions and their practices. In their professional development, teachers should be treated as important stakeholders and not as passive consumers of pre-packed knowledge. Their expertise and craft knowledge need to be recognised, while learning area specialists and other departmental officials should be able to offer expert advice and support to teachers in order to conduct assessment and implement the policy on assessment more effectively. The DoE should mount in-service workshops on assessment for both the learning area specialists and their teachers, so that all the three parties work from a common ground of understanding regarding assessment-related aspects, as a measure against accusations amongst different parties.

Teachers require professional training in relation to how they can use various assessment methods, tools and techniques in order to plan and design future lessons. Teachers should make learners aware of their own accountability in learning, and that as they progress through

their learning they accumulate more knowledge than when they first entered the class. In addition, teachers should provide adequate feedback to learners, indicating their strengths and weaknesses as a measure to improve learning.

Teachers need to collaborate under the proper guidance and support of departmental officials in order to shape their professional development and training. This is necessary because teamwork may provide learning opportunities for teachers to take responsibility for their own learning as well as their professional development through sharing assessment practices, knowledge and experiences. Working in collaboration is a way of developing a professional community that responds to and explores common issues in teaching, learning and assessment. Furthermore, such collaboration can assist teachers in continually reflecting on their practices to ensure that they are in tune with innovations and current policy requirements.

There is a need to develop a sustainable partnership between teachers and policymakers. It is only in partnership that the expertise of policymakers can be appreciated, and where classroom teachers can view themselves as invaluable contributors to the education system. There is also a need for constant contact, monitoring and exchange of views between departmental officials and teachers. Furthermore, this research recommends that there be coordination, collaboration, and clear lines of communication between teachers and learning area specialists.

It is important that teachers be constantly focused; hence the need for them to have teaching plans, so that their classroom assessment activities are well coordinated. However, this does not mean that they have to be dogmatic in their use of these teaching plans, because they can still be flexible.

Pre-service and in-service training programmes should be designed to ensure that new teachers have the conceptual knowledge, skills and understanding of assessment as a body of knowledge. Teachers in the system should be assisted to develop strong planning skills to enable them to arrange and align appropriate assessment methods, tools and techniques in their plans. There is a need to equip teachers with skills in finding the best approach to challenges related to classroom assessment, for example, how they can use limited resources

to support their learners' learning, how they can involve parents effectively in learners' learning, and how they can deal with overcrowded classes.

## **7.6 Synthesis**

This study has investigated the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices, explored how the teachers cope with the challenges, and highlighted how the challenges influence effective teaching and learning in their respective settings.

The findings indicate that teachers' understanding of assessment encompasses a variety of assessment techniques, strategies and tasks. In general, the teachers accepted various assessment techniques as valid and important representations of classroom assessment. Also, they expressed a need for adequate in-service training on classroom assessment. Teachers in this study were despondent about inadequate in-service training. They also required good support structures and systems when implementing a new assessment policy as some schools did not have clear assessment policies in place. A policy that addresses all aspects of assessment in a school, including a policy regarding cultural diversity, is a prerequisite for effective classroom assessment. Learners learn in different ways, as confirmed by their experiences in the classroom. Each learner brings his or her own individual approach, talents and interests to the learning situation and this influences their learning as well as the assessment of that learning.

Finally, I believe that the implementation of suitable assessment practices can not only further teachers' understanding, but also assist them in realising the vision set forth in the ideals and outcomes of the curriculum. Assessment is therefore neither neutral nor an end in itself, but functions as an instrument for learning and an effective mechanism in the creation of competence.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Request for permission to conduct research

293 Galtonia Street  
Sinoville  
0182  
2 January 2012

The Area Project Office Manager

Brits

Dear Sir/Madam

#### **REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR AREA PROJECT OFFICE**

I am a doctoral student at the University of South Africa, interested in conducting research entitled **“AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CHALLENGES AFFECTING TEACHERS’ CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICES”** in primary schools in your area project office.

The aim of this research is to understand the challenges facing teachers in classroom assessment, how they deal with these challenges and also how these challenges influence effective teaching and learning.

I intend to conduct this study in four schools; a township school, a school in town, a school situated in an informal settlement and an independent school. I will work with one teacher from each school in the Intermediate Phase (preferably Grade Six). I will conduct interviews which will be tape-recorded. Classroom observations will also be conducted and these will be videotaped. Data collected will be confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the study. I will also need to look at records/documents of the teachers and learners with regard to assessment.

I promise to abide by the principles of anonymity and confidentiality.

Yours truly

Sethusha MJ (Mrs)

## Appendix 2: Permission letter from North West Department of Education



### education and training

Lefapha la Thuto le Katiso  
Departement van Onderwys en Opleiding  
Department of Education and Training  
NORTH WEST PROVINCE

6 Pendering Street,  
Brits, 0250  
Private Bag X5082  
Brits, 0250  
Tel.: (012) 250-1910  
Fax.: (012) 250-1904  
e-mail: zboikhutso@nwpg.gov.za

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#### OFFICE OF THE AREA MANAGER: MADIBENG AREA OFFICE

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Enquiries: Lillian Mphuthi


TO : Sethusha Mantsoe  
FROM : ZT Boikhutso  
Area Manager  
DATE : 24 May 2012  
SUBJECT : Letter of acknowledgement

You are hereby granted a permission to conduct research in Madibeng Area Office Primary school. Kindly indicate to the Principals of the affected schools our agreement that their participation in your research is voluntary, that you will not interfere with the running of the school and that you will share with us your findings.

Regards

ZT Boikhutso  
Area Manager

**Appendix 3: Permission letter from the first school**

|                             |   |                                 |
|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Enquiries: <u>PRINCIPAL</u> |  | P. O. Box 2092<br>BRITS<br>0250 |
| Tel no:                     | Date:   |                                 |

Dear Mrs MJ Sethusha

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN OUR SCHOOL

This serves as confirmation that you have been granted permission and actually conducted research at the above mentioned institution .

We wish you well in your studies.

Yours sincerely

*J. S. (Principal)*

PO BOX 2092. BRITS 0250

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION,  
ARTS & CULTURE  
NORTH WEST PROVINCE

## Appendix 4: Permission letter from the second school



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Dear Mrs MJ Sethusha

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN OUR SCHOOL

This serves as confirmation that you have been granted permission and actually conducted research at the above mentioned institution.

We wish you well in your studies.

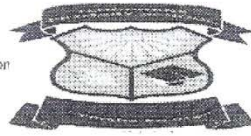
Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Sethusha'.



## Appendix 5: Permission letter from the third school

North West Department of Education  
Bojanala Region  
Madibeng Area project office



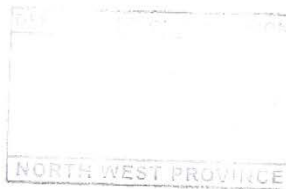
Dear Mrs Sethusha M.J.

This is to inform you that your request for conducting your Doctoral Research project in our school has been granted.

Yours sincerely

School Manager

SGB



**Appendix 6: Permission letter from the fourth school**



To Whom it may concern,

This letter serves to inform you that Mrs Sethusha Manisose has been conducting her research at  
Primary School,

She has been observing grade 5 English lessons conducted by the Deputy Principal, \_\_\_\_\_ and  
documenting her observations regarding assessment practices at school within the grade.

We would like to thank her for her valuable input and for selecting our school to participate in her research.

Kind regards

Yours in education

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Manisose', written over a horizontal line.

Deputy Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Manisose', written over a horizontal line.

Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix 7: Interview schedule (pre-classroom observations)**

### ***Life history questions***

1. How many years have you been a teacher?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your home language?
4. What is your highest school level, your academic qualification and what were the major subjects in your qualification?
5. How were you assessed in your teacher training?
6. How many years have you been teaching at this particular school/grade)?
7. What kind of general in-service training have you received?
8. Did you get any assessment training? When? For how long? What was it like? Who conducted that training?
9. What are your training needs with regard to assessment?
10. What support do you need in improving your assessment techniques?
11. How do parents respond to assessment?
12. Are monitoring mechanisms available in your school, district, at province and national levels? Explain.
13. How often do departmental officials visit your school? What is it that they do?
14. How does the Learning Area Specialist assist you to implement assessment?
15. Which assessment plans does your school use to ensure adherence to specific time frames when completing assessment tasks, tests and examinations?
16. How often does your Head of Department check your assessment records?
17. Does your school have regular meetings to discuss assessment?

### ***Assessment-related questions***

1. What do you understand by assessment?
2. How, when and why do you conduct assessment?
3. What do you understand by continuous assessment and how do you conduct it?
4. What is peer assessment? How effective do you think it is?
5. How do you give assessment criteria to learners?
6. How often do you give learners a chance to assess each other?
7. How do you plan for assessment?

8. What factors hinder your assessment practices in your school?
9. What would you improve in assessment?
10. Which assessment methods, tools and techniques do you use?
11. Do you think the current way of assessing learners is making a difference in the way learners are taught? Why?
12. How do you use assessment to improve teaching and learning?
13. How do you record the results of assessment of learners' performance?
14. What is your understanding of the assessment policy?
15. How does the policy serve as a vital instrument in shaping your educational practice?
16. Do you see any inconsistencies between the assessment policy and your classroom assessment practices?
17. Which assessment documents do you use?
18. How important is the policy when planning and implementing assessment?
19. How do you make learners (and parents) aware of their (learners') weaknesses and strengths?
20. How often do you discuss learners work with other teachers?

***Post-observation interview***

1. Do you feel that the assessment task went well? Why?
2. Which task/s or activities did you do in your class?
3. What was the purpose of your assessment tasks/activities?
4. Which Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards were assessed by the assessment tasks/activities?
5. What was the focus of the assessment task/activity?
6. What are you hoping to learn from your learners' responses to the assessment task?
7. What other challenges do you experience with assessment and how do you deal with such challenges?

## Appendix 8: Consent letter to participants

293 Galtonia Street

Sinoville

0182

26 January 2012

Dear participant

You are invited to participate in a research project aimed at investigating the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices. The aim of this study is to explore the various challenges that teachers face on a day-to-day basis and how they deal with these challenges for the improvement of teaching and learning. Your input and feedback are therefore crucial to the study.

Your participation in this research endeavour entails audio-taped interviews and video-taped classroom observations. Your participation is voluntary. You will not be asked to reveal any information that will allow your identity to be established, unless you are willing to be contacted for individual follow-up interviews. Should you declare yourself willing to participate in an individual interview, confidentiality will be guaranteed and you may withdraw at any stage should you wish not to continue with the interviews.

If you are willing to participate in the research, please sign this letter as declaration of your consent; that is, that you participate in this study willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw at any time. Any information obtained from the conversations will be used solely for the purpose of this research.

Yours truly,

Sethusha MJ

## CONSENT

I agree to participate in the research entitled **“AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CHALLENGES AFFECTING TEACHERS’ CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICES”** as outlined in the consent letter.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

## Appendix 8.1: Consent letter from the first teacher

293 Galtonia Street  
Sinoville  
0182  
26 January 2012

Dear participant

You are invited to participate in a research project aimed at investigating the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices. The aim of this study is to explore the various challenges that teachers face on a day to day basis and how they deal with these challenges for the improvement of teaching and learning. Your input and feedback are therefore crucial to the study.

Your participation in this research endeavour entails audio-taped interviews and video-taped classroom observations. Your participation is voluntary. You will not be asked to reveal any information that will allow your identity to be established, unless you are willing to be contacted for individual follow up interviews. Should you declare yourself willing to participate in an individual interview, confidentiality will be guaranteed and you may withdraw at any stage should you wish not to continue with the interviews.

If you are willing to participate in the research, please sign this letter as declaration of your consent, that is, you participate in this study willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw at any time. Any information obtained from the conversations will solely be used for the purpose of this research.

Yours truly,  
Sethusha MJ

**CONSENT**

I agree to participate in the research entitled "AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CHALLENGES AFFECTING TEACHERS' CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICES" as outlined in the consent letter.

Name Motsepe M.M  
Signature [Signature]  
Date 29/02/2012



## Appendix 8.2: Consent letter from the second teacher

293 Galtonia Street

Sinoville

0182

26 January 2012

Dear participant

You are invited to participate in a research project aimed at investigating the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices. The aim of this study is to explore the various challenges that teachers face on a day to day basis and how they deal with these challenges for the improvement of teaching and learning. Your input and feedback are therefore crucial to the study.

Your participation in this research endeavour entails audio-taped interviews and video-taped classroom observations. Your participation is voluntary. You will not be asked to reveal any information that will allow your identity to be established, unless you are willing to be contacted for individual follow up interviews. Should you declare yourself willing to participate in an individual interview, confidentiality will be guaranteed and you may withdraw at any stage should you wish not to continue with the interviews.

If you are willing to participate in the research, please sign this letter as declaration of your consent, that is, you participate in this study willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw at any time. Any information obtained from the conversations will solely be used for the purpose of this research.

Yours truly,  
Sethusha MJ

**CONSENT**

I agree to participate in the research entitled "AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CHALLENGES AFFECTING TEACHERS' CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICES" as outlined in the consent letter.

Name ..... *Haidoo R.R*  
Signature ..... *[Handwritten Signature]*  
Date ..... *7 March 2012*

### Appendix 8.3: Consent letter from the third teacher

293 Galtonia Street  
Sinoville  
0182  
26 January 2012

Dear participant

You are invited to participate in a research project aimed at investigating the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices. The aim of this study is to explore the various challenges that teachers face on a day to day basis and how they deal with these challenges for the improvement of teaching and learning. Your input and feedback are therefore crucial to the study.

Your participation in this research endeavour entails audio-taped interviews and video-taped classroom observations. Your participation is voluntary. You will not be asked to reveal any information that will allow your identity to be established, unless you are willing to be contacted for individual follow up interviews. Should you declare yourself willing to participate in an individual interview, confidentiality will be guaranteed and you may withdraw at any stage should you wish not to continue with the interviews.

If you are willing to participate in the research, please sign this letter as declaration of your consent, that is, you participate in this study willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw at any time. Any information obtained from the conversations will solely be used for the purpose of this research.

Yours truly,  
Sethusha MJ

**CONSENT**

I agree to participate in the research entitled "AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CHALLENGES AFFECTING TEACHERS' CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICES" as outlined in the consent letter.

Name ..... BLOOM A.A .....  
Signature ..... *Bloom* .....  
Date ..... 15-03-2012 .....

## Appendix 8.4: Consent letter from the fourth teacher

293 Galtonia Street

Sinoville

0182

26 January 2012

Dear participant

You are invited to participate in a research project aimed at investigating the challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices. The aim of this study is to explore the various challenges that teachers face on a day to day basis and how they deal with these challenges for the improvement of teaching and learning. Your input and feedback are therefore crucial to the study.

Your participation in this research endeavour entails audio-taped interviews and video-taped classroom observations. Your participation is voluntary. You will not be asked to reveal any information that will allow your identity to be established, unless you are willing to be contacted for individual follow up interviews. Should you declare yourself willing to participate in an individual interview, confidentiality will be guaranteed and you may withdraw at any stage should you wish not to continue with the interviews.

If you are willing to participate in the research, please sign this letter as declaration of your consent, that is, you participate in this study willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw at any time. Any information obtained from the conversations will solely be used for the purpose of this research.

Yours truly,  
Sethusha MJ

**CONSENT**

I agree to participate in the research entitled "AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CHALLENGES AFFECTING TEACHERS' CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICES" as outlined in the consent letter.

Name Smith PP  
Signature [Signature]  
Date 14/03/2012

## Appendix 9: Classroom observation schedule

| CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SCHEDULE  |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Teacher:</b>   |          |
| <b>School:</b>  |          |
| <b>Date:</b>  |          |
|   | Comments |
| Purpose of assessment made clear to learners  |          |
| Learners involved in the assessment   |          |
| Clearly defined outcomes assessed   |          |
| Who assesses? Teacher, self, peer   |          |
| What is assessed?<br>Facts<br>Application of knowledge,<br>High order thinking skills<br>Attitudes and Values |          |
| Informal monitoring by observation  |          |
| Oral questions and answers  |          |
| Formal use of tests set by teacher  |          |
| Formal use of standardized external test  |          |
| Examination   |          |
| Interviewing  |          |
| Self-assessment   |          |
| Peer-assessment   |          |
| Self-reporting  |          |
| Conferencing  |          |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Portfolios   |  |
| Journals   |  |
| Project work   |  |
| Assignments  |  |
| Observation sheets   |  |
| Assessment data recorded orally                                |  |
| Assessment data recorded in writing                            |  |
| Assessment data communicated to pupils verbally and in writing |  |
| Assessment data communicated to pupils clearly                 |  |
| Assessment data communicated to pupils accurately              |  |
| Assessment data communicated to pupils timeously               |  |
| Assessment data communicated to pupils meaningfully            |  |
| Assessment data used to praise learners                        |  |
| Assessment data used to identify strengths and weaknesses      |  |
| Assessment data used to support learners requiring help        |  |
| Assessment data used to plan teaching                          |  |
| Assessment data used to improve teaching and learning          |  |